

CASTE, CITIZENSHIP AND IDENTITY: A STUDY OF DALIT LAND MOVEMENTS IN KERALA

*A thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

HUMAN RIGHTS

BY

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DECLARATION

I, **Joby Mathew**, hereby declare that this thesis entitled “**Caste, Citizenship and Identity: A Study of Dalit Land Movements in Kerala**” submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of **Dr. K.Y. Ratnam**, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science is a bonafide research work which is also free from plagiarism. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodganga/INFLIBNET.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADMS	:	Adivasi Dalit Munnetta Samithi.
CPI	:	Communist Party of India.
CPI (M)	:	Communist Party of India (Marxist).
OBC	:	Other Backward Castes.
KLR	:	Kerala Land Reforms Act.
KILA	:	Kerala Institute for Local Administration.
KSSP	:	Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad.
LDF	:	Left Democratic Front.
NSS	:	Nair Service Society.
SVSV	:	Sadhujana Vimochana Samyuktha Vedhi.
SC	:	Scheduled Caste.
ST	:	Scheduled Tribe.
UDF	:	United Democratic Front.

INTRODUCTION

The proposed study is an attempt to understand how the caste, citizenship, and identity questions were raised by the Dalit land movements in Kerala. The Dalit communities are contesting the socio-economic and political marginalization and the denial of equal participation in various social spheres. Their unbending attempt for social transformation through constant political affirmations aimed at not only for internal autonomy but also inter-subjectivity. The Chengara and Aripa land movements fundamentally address the particularities of caste by problematizing citizenship and identity to receive a universal position. Therefore, it poses the claims for the egalitarian redistribution of resources and recognition.

It is perceived that these political affirmations constantly engage with social institutions to transgress the stigmatized caste identity and the normative, deficient categorizations of social actors. Thus it repairs their reduced subjectivity and subordinate social status. These identity movements fundamentally addressed the question of social justice by challenging the institutional cultural values of the caste. That critical intervention has given visibility to their universalistic aspirations for an egalitarian society. Moreover, it is grounded in radical political assertions in order to transform their non-privileged social status into a dignified identity. Therefore, it challenges the political establishments for equal participation and full citizenship.

The Dalits as a community were not only excluded from the land ownership but their habitus also became the new spaces of caste discrimination. Hence the civil society refuses to consider them as equal members and full citizens. Besides, the denial of liberal ideals threatened the social fabric which degraded certain communities as lesser citizens

on the basis of cultural values. Therefore, the land movements fundamentally organized various disenfranchised social groups to transform the society profoundly. “These movements often used their identity consciously for social justice since they knew it as resources of knowledge for social change further they place marginalized groups in the forefront of their liberation by which they attempt to transform the society for better.”¹

Broadly, the identity-based liberation movements were often branded as special interest groups and their leaders were portrayed as opportunist because their politics deviate from the common public good. The right-centric thinking considered these movements threaten individual freedom whereas the left-thinking identified it against the progressive coalition and it wallowing in victimization. The present land struggles brought the marginalized communities’ struggles into the public sphere through different political perspectives. Hence, it radically transgressed the categorization of special interest groups by problematizing the relationship between caste and land and it has given visibility to the hierarchical social order particularly to the matter of caste.

In this context, the aim of the present study is to problematize Dalit citizenship, recognition, identity, resource distribution and the question of Caste and Class through the study of Chengara and Arippa Land Struggles in modern Kerala.

Significance of the Study

Dalits in Kerala, historically, have been excluded from resource ownership due to their social status in the graded caste system. The Dalit subjective experience is often outlined in knowledge discourses with constructed bias. In other words the deliberate silence on

¹ Linda Martan Alcoff, Michael Hames-Garcia, Satya Mohanty, and Paula M.L Moya, eds. *Identity politics Reconsidered* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.2.

certain issues corners subjective matter as an emotional argument because it is emerging from an individuated position that challenges the existing epistemology.

For any socially deprived community, history remains blank, due to the absence of the historiography. Accordingly, they have been often placed in a defensive position in the mainstream historiography. So they have been struggling constantly to convert their experience into written knowledge. Contrary, it is often quite obvious that the communities who have written knowledge hold an autocratic control over the past that extends even to the present. Hence, the objective perception and modes of historiography are always considered a privileged analytical method to understand social facts.

However, the ordinary people's unwritten knowledge has to be traced out from non-historic sources since they are rooted in memory and struggles. Such discussion disrupts at the beginning itself even before one brings experience into the knowledge engagement discourse. Consequently, deliberate cultural silences corner the less privileged subjective experience through the knowledge-power exercising communities. Lived experience is often considered as subjugated knowledge since it is based on experience. Therefore, it discards certain groups from the theory-building process. The ground rules of knowledge production reject the experience/subjugated knowledge as irrational, further maintaining the hegemonic genealogies of the social system. It is argued that theorizing memory is an epistemological alternative to get a new perception that would certainly validate subjugated knowledge as authentic sources in the knowledge realm.

In this context, the present study problematizes the land question by giving focuses to the caste, citizenship, and identity since the present land movements expose the parental consciousness of the privileged social groups and political parties towards the

marginalized community. Contemporary social philosopher and epistemologist, Gopal Guru observes, “in India, the writing of history and intellectual practice have failed to interrogate the persistence of hierarchical practices that endow the world of Bahiskrut Bharat. Mainstream scholars of history direct their acrimony toward colonial racism but refuse to contribute any criticism on the question of caste outside of rhetorical accommodations in the nationalist agenda.”²

Nature and Scope of the Study

The current study looks at the history of property relations in order to better understand the role of caste in property issues, particularly the lack of resources among the ex-untouchable castes in Kerala, the southern state of India. To comprehend the social situation of slave castes and how they were barred from land rights, this study critically analyses the theoretical and philosophical components of property. The current research focuses on the numerous tenancy rights that existed in Kerala, as tenancy is one of the factors that led to the formation of the caste system in pre-modern Kerala. The purpose of this study is to critically assess the Dalit land movements in Kerala, as well as to address the issue of citizenship and land ownership, as the land movements are primarily concerned with civil rights and full citizenship. Finally, the current study explores how Dalit groups asserted their autonomous identity in the Arippa and Chengara movements led by the Dalits and the Adivasis.

² Gopal Guru, “The Indian Nation in Its Egalitarian Conception,” in *Dalit Studies*, ed. Ramnarayan S Rawat and K. Satyanarayana (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2016), p.39.

Review of Literature

There is no dearth of literature available on the Dalit land movements in Kerala. Many studies have been produced on the movements, but this study looks at these movements from a human rights point of view. History says that the agrestic slave position within the caste hierarchical society discarded the untouchable community from the resource ownership. Moreover it reduced their privileges in the social hierarchy.

T.C. Varghese (1970) explains that, in Kerala, the Brahmins seem to have acquired the land for themselves in the name of temples, with the help of Nayar chieftains and the administrators. While acquiring the land for the Brahmins, the Nayar chieftains also acquired land for themselves, which they mainly took from the actual cultivators and that land was converted into *demense land*. Thus, the new land owners neither cultivate nor supervise the cultivation. The people who had been dispossessed from the land were forced to cultivate land.

Varghese says that, the new land owners did not mix with other social class due to their ownership of land and their caste hierarchical rigidity imposed by the Brahmins which created new land relations and new groups of masters the society. Through coercive method, the land had been transferred to the Brahmins, however, the chieftains and the cultivators remarkably accepted this process as a token of respect to the higher authority. According to Varghese, this process led to the emergence of *kanom* tenure which is considered as one of the important tenures in Kerala. The new owners conferred *kanom* rights over the transferred land and anyone they liked. Besides the Nayars were the main beneficiaries for this tenure however the direct cultivation considered as disgraceful for the owners the whole land taken on *kanom* basis leased on *pattaom* to the other

communities belonged to the lower strata particularly Christians, Ezhavas and Muslims. Varghese thus concludes that the lower caste communities pushed down to the position of agricultural laborers further the whole structure of land relationship determined and governed by the caste hierarchy.³

E. M. S. Namboodiripad (2010) argues that the, landlordism is not only an economic category; it is also social, cultural, and political. For instance, in terms of caste, in the old system of landlordism, the dominant castes were the caste Hindus and Syrian Christians, the caste Hindus in particular, and, among caste Hindus, Namboodiris in particular. According to E M S Namboodiripad, this was the caste form of landlordism and this has changed now in contemporary Kerala.⁴

Thomas Isaac (2008) claims that the land reform was one of the most important events in the independent Kerala. Issac says that the twenty-eight lakh tenants received ownership rights and 5.3 lakhs hutment dwellers were got *Kudikidappu* right. The bargaining power of agricultural laborers were increased which paved the way for social reforms since it destroyed the feudal dominance. However the land reforms policy had an important weakness that it could not abolish landlordism completely. Moreover, Varghese reiterates that compare to other states, Kerala has less number of landless people and the inequality in the land distribution is comparatively low. This is the situation even if the large scale plantations exist there.⁵

³ T.C.Varghese, *Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences: Land Tenures in Kerala 1850-1960* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1970), p.15.

⁴ E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *History, Society, and Land Relations: Selected Essays* (New Delhi: Left Word Books, 2010), p.232.

⁵ T .M. Thomas Isaac, *Land Reforms what's Next* (Trivandrum: Chintha Publication, 2008), p.54.

Ashwini Deshpande (2000) using NSS data for 1993-1994, Deshpande, reveal that, even in a relatively egalitarian state like Kerala, inter-caste disparity continues to underpin overall disparity for rural and urban areas nearly 50 years after India's independence in 1947. According to her, there is a significant inter-caste difference between the SC/ST populations and the other population in terms of food consumption, clothing expenditure, land ownership, and education levels of heads of the family. As a result, in the others category, the elite group, or upper class, is much more apparent than in the SC or ST categories.⁶

Laha Gopalan (2009) strongly argues that “the *Kudikidappu* Act led the Dalits toward a miserable condition which caused them to live in two-room houses having many members for several years. The land reform does not provide the equal justice proposed by the constitution therefore these movements try to change the material conditions of the Dalits through the constant demand for ownership in agricultural land.”⁷

Chantal Mouffe (2005) formulates that the identity movements often recognizes as coherent identity in order to find the other possibilities for a new political movements therefore they try to unite with a particular aims.⁸

Harriet Bradley (2015) notes that, there are three forms of social identity that may function like active, passive, and politicized. An individual or a social group with such a passive identity is unconcerned with their identity. Individuals, who are generally aware of belonging to a particular identifiable group, whether by class, gender, ethnicity, or any

⁶ Ashwini Deshpande, “Does Caste Still Define Disparity? A Look at Inequality in Kerala, India,” *American Economic Review*, Vol. 90, no. 2 (2000), pp.322-325.

⁷ Laha Gopalan, Interviewed by Anu Warrior. *The Sunday Indian*, 27July- 9August, 2009, vol.2, Issue 42, p.34.

⁸ Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 2005), p.82.

other association, have developed active identification. He says that when someone is discriminated against, active identities are fostered, and when identity is used as a basis for collective action, it becomes politicized.⁹

Thomas Issac and Richard Franke (2002) argue that, the Kerala state carried out most successful land reforms compare to other parts of India by transferring agricultural land to the tenants and houses were provided to the agricultural labors. Moreover, it raised the income of the farmers and the bargaining power of the laborers. In addition to that it undermined the hold of upper caste in the villages, hence caste continues as a powerful influence but class associations overcome it to a large extent.¹⁰

Richard Franke and Barbara Chasin (1992) study analyses that the Kerala's land reforms are considered as the most radical and successful reforms in south Asia. According to them, it has four major components: a rice levy on the largest owners, to be collected by the government and redistributed to the poor through the fair price shops; a ceiling on absolute size of land-holdings, with excess land to be redistributed to the landless; the abolition of tenancy, and thus the abolition of rent from the operators to non-cultivating landlords; and the abolition of tenancy in house-compound land, and thus the abolition of rents to the landlords who held title to them.¹¹

Franke and Chasin opined that the widely accepted massive redistribution of land rights was taken place through the abolition of tenancy and the income of the farmers has been increased from the land. Moreover, the situation of 'inferior tenants' the

⁹ Harriet Bradley, *Fractured Identities: Changing Patterns of Inequality* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), p.122.

¹⁰ T.M .Thomas Issac and Richard W. Franke, *Local Democracy and Development: The Kerala People's Campaign for Decentralized Planning* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), p.22.

¹¹ Richard W Franke and Barbara H Chasin, *Kerala: Development through Radical Reform* (New Delhi: Promilla&Co.Publisheres, 1992), p.54.

Verumpattamdar were in a difficult position since their lease often terminated by the superior tenants and landlords. They argued that, *the Verumpattamdars* were the actual cultivators of the soil who belonged to lowest-caste untouchables hence they were forced to pay exorbitant rent due to the insecurity of their tenure.

While quoting data from the 1971 survey, Franke and Chasin elucidates that, fifty percent of agricultural land controlled by Brahmin landlords as a result the wealth and power has been concentrated in the hand of these landlords.¹² They reiterated that, the same Brahmin landlords controlled the garden sites where the agricultural labors constructed their houses hence the landlords collected rents for the house compound land as well. Thus Kerala land reforms abolished tenancy and fifteen lakhs tenants became mere land owners that made them free from the rent and forceful eviction further it helped them to produce basic foods for their needs.¹³

Sanal Mohan (2011) pioneering authority on the contemporary Kerala argues, that ‘In the instance of Kerala’s Dalits, despite their importance in agrarian productivity, they were barred from owning land under the ancient caste system. With the introduction of land reforms in the late 1960s and early 1970s, this situation did not significantly improve. Former tenants became landowners as a result of these reforms, as they could prove their status as tenants by showing rent receipts. As laborers, Dalits were unable to lay such claims on the property. As a result, Dalits were allocated small parcels of land on which to build their huts. The total amount of land they could own under land reform legislation ranged from 0.04 hectares in rural to 0.02 hectares in cities. Despite their continuous function in an agrarian culture, Dalits will never transform into land-owning

¹² Franke and Chasin, *Kerala: Development through Radical Reform*, p.56.

¹³ Ibid.

peasants due to the legal prohibition of ownership and access to land.’¹⁴ The prime objective for the land reforms was the elimination of landlord system hence it was succeeded through the tenant reforms and *Kudikidappu* law. This process helped the middle caste tenants to become the land owners where the untouchables have been excluded due to their slave position in the agrarian society.

Ronald J Herring (1980) explains that, among the tenants majority of the land went to relatively privileged and well-off tenants and the tenants who had very small holdings received little land.¹⁵

K. T. Rammohan (2008) in his article expresses that, there is a need for land policy which must address the deficiencies of earlier land reforms. According to him, the present movements indicate the importance of caste and community aspect since the earlier land policies have given priority to the class aspects. He argues that apart from the imaginations in the academic and policy making circles the question of land has been unresolved in Kerala.¹⁶

J. Devika (2010) notes that, the rise of Kerala’s heavily laden communist egalitarian developmentalism were primarily comprised of two major political triumphs: the communist extension of anti-caste campaigns and the harmonization of the Malayalam-speaking areas’ language unification movements. Devika says that the, recent land protests by Tribal and Dalit people show that caste inequities still exist at Kerala. She observes that, in a protest event supporting the Dalit land fight at Chengara in March

¹⁴ Sanal Mohan, "Land Struggles in Contemporary Kerala," *The Hindu Business Line*, December 19, 2011.

¹⁵ Ronald J Herring, "Abolition of Landlordism in Kerala: A Redistribution of Privilege," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.15, no.26 (1980), p.67.

¹⁶ K.T Rammohan, "Caste and Landlessness in Kerala: Signals from Chengara," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 43, no.47 (2008), p.16.

2008, where the members of the left party's women's wing conducted the traditional *aditcchutali* an upper caste 'pollution cleansing-ritual' against alleged sexual indiscipline. As a result, the public absence of old caste customs cannot be interpreted as evidence of the caste culture's extinction.¹⁷

M. S. Sreerekha (2010) questions that, the present land struggles in Kerala shows that the flaunted history of land reforms is questionable since majority of Dalits and Adivasis remain fully landless in the state of Kerala. She says that there are failures in the in the implementation of land reform which had been discussed for years but their voice neither heard or well-documented.¹⁸

Prakash Louis (2008) examines that, the Chengara land struggles indicates the relevance to address the Kerala land reforms where the caste and community aspect have to be considered. According to Louis, the left/Communist parties demoralized the interest of Dalits and other marginalized groups therefore the dominant castes and other exploiters appropriating the land and other resources. Louis argues that the repressive nature of the state and biased nature of the media has to be exposed.¹⁹

C. R. Yadu and C. K. Vijayasuryan (2016) explains that the social inequality, the land ownership continuing in Kerala. According them, in the pyramid of land ownership, the Hindu dominant castes and Christians are largely land owners whereas; the Dalits are at the bottom level. Hence the dominance of land-caste nexus even today has erased the presence of the Dalits from the mainstream. They opined that in order to guarantee the

¹⁷ J. Devika, "Egalitarian Developmentalism, Communist Mobilization and the Question of Caste in Kerala State, India," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 69, no. 3 (2010), pp.799-820.

¹⁸ M. S. Sreerekha, "Challenges before Kerala's Landless: The Story of Aralam Farm," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.14, no.21 (2010), p.55.

¹⁹ Prakash Louis, "Land Struggles of Dalits in Kerala," *Integral Liberation*, Vol.12, No.4 (2008), p.263.

full participation within the development process the land ownership becomes a necessary condition to the marginalized social groups and the land ownership rights were fully denied to Dalits under the land-based caste system. Yadu and Vijayasuryan study shows that during the pre- and post-land reform periods, all land reform measures excluded Dalits from their scope, Dalits were not recognized as soil tillers during the 1970 land reforms and Dalits are currently excluded from land ownership due to their incapacity to participate in the land market.²⁰

Libina K Sebastian (2019) explains that the passive citizens, the Dalits, who were treated as consumers of the national welfare program, become active citizens, and aware of oppressive social conditions through active civil society movements. According Sebastian, land was treated not only as an important value product for Dalits, but also as a status symbol, it was also seen as related to culture, identity, and livelihood.²¹

Deepa Kylasam Iyer (2019) says that there are two master frames of rights that given by opposing interest groups as a result of the Chengara struggle. First argument, asserts against the large farms' land concentration, calls for property rights redistribution with the state playing a key role. Second, the agricultural laborers and small growers are included in the global plantation value chain by seeking contractual rights in agriculture. In addition, to land-use rights in plantation areas, claimants, in this frame, sought restructuring of land-use rights within plantations, extension facilities, and working

²⁰ C. R. Yadu and C. K. Vijayasuryan. "Triple Exclusion of Dalits in Land Ownership in Kerala," *Social Change*, Vol.46, no.3 (2016), p.407.

²¹ Libina K Sebastian, "Chengara struggle: Critique of Land Alienation in a Caste Endowed Epoch of Kerala, South India," *Journal of Sociology*, Vol.7, no.1 (2019), pp.52-55.

capital from the state.²²

M. Manosmita C. Aruna and K. Libina (2012) argues that the Chengara struggle is more than a land dispute, it is a political struggle for identity and citizenship that ushers in Kerala's democratic struggle. Further, they say that Chengara struggle is a self-initiated campaign led exclusively by landless people from the Dalit groups, who have suffered greatly as landless and ostracized for decades. They argued that, it may appear unusual, but it picks up a struggle that the traditional Left in Kerala has left undone, since land reforms have done nothing for the landless Dalits, except just residential land to pursue agriculture, nothing has changed.²³

Sunny M Kapikkadu (2017) claims that the Chengara is one of Kerala's more significant social movements, such an uphill battle could not have been imagined ten years ago. He says that, earlier Adivasi land fights revealed that there is land available for distribution that is also suitable for agriculture. According to him, ninety percent of Chengara's occupants are Dalits, Dalit Christians, or Adivasis; they are, without a doubt, a typical example of landless people in Kerala. He laments that the Dalit community accounts for eighty-five percent of landless individuals, whenever land question arises, the ex-untouchable caste take up the fight, at Chengara, the same thing has happened.²⁴

K. M. Salimkumar (2008) observes that the Congress and the Communist governments, since both embraces philosophy of Brahmanism, pushed for ownership for aristocratic castes, as a result, these political parties reject the Dalits' eligibility for ownership rights.

²² Deepa Kylasam Iyer, "Property Rights through Social Movements: The Case of Plantations in Kerala, India," *Journal of Land and Rural Studies*, Vol.7, no. 2 (2019), pp.152-168.

²³ M. Manosmita, C. Aruna, and K. Libina. "Beyond Resource Mobilization Theory: Dynamic Paradigm of Chengara Struggle," *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology*, Vol.3, no.1 (2012), pp.29-35.

²⁴ Sunny M Kapikkadu, *Janathayum Janadhipathyavum (People and Democracy)*, (Kozhikode: Vidhyarthi, 2017), p.47.

Salimkumar says that these land battles are more than just an issue of landless people; they constitute a critical protest by social groups that were denied the right to ownership during land reforms. Hence, the power and ethics of the land movements are reflected in the content of these communities, these land movements expose the hidden nature of land-caste relations to the public.²⁵

C. S. Chandrika (2009) argues that the Dalits' current independent struggle in Kerala is mostly over land which put the mainstream political parties, particularly the left, to the test. Chandrika says that, as a result of Dalits exclusion from land and resources, the Dalits have found themselves on the periphery of socio-economic and political power systems. Since the Dalits have been deprived from agricultural land and agriculture, these movements might be classified as resistance. According to her, these movements raised new concerns about class, caste, and gender that challenge the left's dogmatic paradigms.²⁶

K. Sunilkumar (2008) explains that historically, peasant movements led by the Congress and left parties, in united Kerala, were largely concerned with tenant rights. The Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill of 1959, introduced by the Communist government of 1957 led by E.M.S. Namboodiripad, proposed rights for agricultural land to the tenants, which declared landlordism ended in Kerala, overcame legal obstacles and became law in 1970. According to Sunilkumar, twenty-eight lakhs of tenants gained six lakhs acres of land, with five lakhs of *Kudikidappukar* (hutment dwellers) receiving rights of habitation primarily untouchable agricultural labors. However large-scale

²⁵ K.M.Salimkumar, ed. *Bhoomiyude Jathiyum Rashtreeyavum(The Caste and the Politics of Land)* (Kottayam: Pavithran Smaraka Dalit Padana Kendram, 2008), p.14.

²⁶ C. S. Chandrika, "Samaratthile Sthreesahanangal," in *Chengara Solidarity Book*, ed. Muhammed Velam, (Kozhikode: Solidarity, 2009), p.137.

plantations, on the other hand, were exempt, that benefited large corporates such as Tata and Harrison. Sunilkumar's study interestingly points out that several Kerala legislative assembly committees discovered these corporates illegally acquiring land and selling it by terminating the lease agreement, but no action has been initiated yet.²⁷

Anu Varrier (2009) study says that the most critical question that the Chengara land dispute raises, in Kerala, is who owns the agricultural land. Varrier opined that the Chengara will be regarded as a battle that enabled the Dalits to establish themselves as a key vote bank in Kerala. Chengara is a wider society in which life becomes a struggle, and the strength of this movement reflects this.²⁸

Sreeraman Koyyon (2009) the leader of Arippa land movements voiced that, despite their rebel status, the families are still regarded as second-class citizens and offered inferior pay after seven years of battle. Koyyon argues that in the years 2017 and 2018, revenue officials performed surveys in the region and discovered a total of 479 families. He questions that the government officials arrived unannounced for field verification, and the list they compiled eliminated many families who had left the colony in search of job. The government, according to Koyyon, now claims that only a few people live here permanently, and that the majority of us have relocated. Koyyon claims that the officials are not; however, prepared to double-check information, however, this never-ending negligence will not dampen our spirits, as we want to fight until the last end.²⁹

²⁷ K.Sunilkumar, "Owners of the Land," *The Sunday Indian*, Vol.2, Issue 15, (2008), p.26.

²⁸ Anu Varrier, "Kanalalayathe Chengara," *The Sunday Indian*, Vol.2, Issue 42 (2009), p.28.

²⁹ Navamy Sudhish quoted Sreeraman Koyyon in "Arippa Bhoosamaram," *The Hindu*, January 20, 2020. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/arippa-bhoosamaram-keralas-seven-year-old-land-struggle/article30604791.ece>

Although there is an enormous literature that is available on the modern Kerala, the present confined to survey only on the land struggles of Chengara and Arippa. Most of the literature that reviewed above very rich in their understanding and analysis of the land struggles. However, despite their rich contribution to the subject, the present study, taking the clue from these studies and makes a modest attempt to understand critically the various concepts which produced by the Chengara and Arippa land struggles during their course of struggle.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the present study is to study the land struggles of Chengara and Arippa which, were led by the Dalits and Adivasis in modern Kerala. The way they articulated various important concepts or the problems, in the course of the movement: the caste and class, the problems of ownership, recourses, citizenship, recognition, redistribution and identity from the movement point of view. The secondary objectives of the study that are raised in the present study are:

- To study the different property discourses and different tenants, land ownership based on the caste interlinked in the property relations in India.
- To study the various land rights and tenants in Kerala and to analyses the role of caste in the social formation.
- To study the nature of Dalit land struggles in Kerala and it examines how the land movements re-imagining the resources and ownership.
- To analyses the question of citizenship and how the citizenship of marginalized castes has been addressed in the Dalit land movements.

- To assess how the identity question has been debated in the land struggles and it also examines how the question of recognition and redistribution discussed in the movements.

The Methodology of the Study

The proposed research is based on both primary and secondary sources of information. Interviews are the primary data, whereas existing theoretical works, such as books, journals, and web sources, provide the secondary data. This research was conducted using an ethnographic approach. According to Karen O'reilly the "ethnographic research is a means of learning about people's lives from their own point of view and within the context of their own lived experiences. This entails not only talking to them and asking questions, but also observing them, participating in their life, and asking questions based on what we've seen and experienced. Participant observation is the most common approach in ethnography, and it is a very distinct method. Participant observation entails observing and questioning people in their regular lives over a period of time, taking notes and gathering various forms of data. Participation and observation roles and goals might change depending on an ethnographer's philosophical position, relationship to the group, routes of access and roles are taken and practical concerns."³⁰

Thus the ethnography is a descriptive account of social life and culture in a specific social system based on comprehensive observations of what people actually does. The scholar was a participant-observer in both the Chengara and Arippa land struggles, attempting to comprehend the nature of their protests, living experiences, and various

³⁰ Karen O'reilly, *Ethnographic Methods* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp.84-110.

marginalizations. The scholar had interviewed activists and leaders of land movements as part of fieldwork. Secondly, open-ended questions were asked in order to trace the origins of landlessness among Kerala's oppressed caste groups. Gathered leaflets, newspapers, and watched press conferences about the demonstration, which assisted in analyzing the Dalit land movements in Kerala.

Chapterisation

The present thesis is divided into five major chapters along with introduction and conclusion separately. ***Introduction*** deals with the problem, scope and significance, methodology of the study. Further, review of literature was critically presented and the objectives of the thesis were also explained.

First chapter deals with the theoretical understandings of property, since the Dalits were the properties of *Jenmis*. Attempt has been made to understand various property discourses in relation to ownership rights. Therefore, this chapter critically analyses how certain groups have been excluded from the property relations. Moreover it is an attempt to understand the philosophical foundations of property discourses.

Second chapter deals with the caste and social formations in Kerala and it's a description of various tenant rights. It is argued that the tenure rights have been concentrated in the hand of few elite caste and the tenurial rights of the Dalits often terminated in the landlords who made their situation more vulnerable. The temple economy in Kerala has been controlled various property relations has been analyzed.

Third chapter is an attempt to understand how the present land movements reimagining resources. Further this chapter provides a detailed analysis of Chengara and Arippa

movements and it tries to describe how these protests problematize the social dynamics of caste and power relations in Kerala.

Fourth chapter explores how the land movements try to redefine the citizenship question of the Dalits in Kerala. It is argued the Dalits could not enjoy the full benefits of modern state as a citizen due to the closed nature of caste system which resisted individual mobility and modern citizenship. Further, the caste capital helped the dominant castes to enter into the modern institutions such entries denied to the untouchable castes since they were identified as lesser citizens have been analyzed.

Fifth chapter discusses how the land movements dialog about identity, redistribution and recognition. The marginalized caste groups exposed their sufferings raising the question of identity; recognition and redistribution the movement deinstitutionalize the cultural values of caste. Further it convinced the relevance of redistribution of resources to the public. Moreover, the Dalits have been misrecognized due to their social position. Therefore, they affirm their identity for recognition and demand redistribution for social transformation was analyzed.

Conclusion is a summary of all chapters. Through their constant fight, the Arippa and Chengara exacerbated the issue of caste, citizenship and identity. They've sparked new debates about Kerala's social development from a subaltern viewpoint, questioning the privileges and social capital that disproportionately benefit some communities.

CHAPTER-I

LAND AND CASTE: A THEORETICAL DISCOURSE.

In Indian context, the land and caste are interrelated themes and caste has to be analysed within the inquiry of ‘property’. The land and caste are the arrangement of resources for the dominant castes communities through which they directly exercise the mechanisms of economic, social, cultural and political power. “In the social science, the concept of property or property rights refers to social mechanisms that control the use of valuable resources and create opportunities and incentives for private and public actors. Those mechanisms have profound consequences for social outcomes and overtime are shaped by social outcomes.”³¹ The land as the property, in Indian caste-ridden society, has been considered as ‘social capital’, which gives dignity and identity. The aim of this chapter is to understand the philosophical and theoretical base of the term ‘property’ and the historical interconnection of categories like caste and identity with the property of land.

The Concept of Property: Western Context

Various dimensions of property such as land, capital along with its connection to ownership rights has been extensively examined in Western as well as Eastern philosophical thought. The history of property begins with the early history of mankind which was divided into savagery and barbarianism, while the golden age is considered the classical period of mankind within which everything was common. Plato says man’s original form as idyllic pastoral life and all the properties were shared equally and

³¹ *International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, Vol.2, by William. A. Darity jr., (USA: Macmillan References, 2008), p.549, accessed April 24, 2020.
http://philosophy.com/UPLOADS/PHILOSOCIOLOGY.ir_INTERNATIONAL%20ENCYCLOPEDIA%20OF%20THE%20SOCIAL%20SCIENCES_Second%20Edition_%20Darity_5760%20pgs.pdf

believes that the utopian primitive communism as the best possible picture of the ideal state. He explains when a group of people collects and settles in one location, each with their own set of needs, this is referred to as a state. This understanding of what society should be, and ultimately is, serves as the foundation for all of Plato's ideal state theories.

According to Plato, everyone in the society needs different things and requirements are to work together with gatherings having a mutual exchange system. Food and shelter are the necessary things for the society and each individual works to satisfy his needs in early society. He further argues that, the collective ownership must be continued for the better condition in the society, otherwise the people divided into various categories and it may destroy the commonness in the society. Plato says that, "In the first place, none of them should have any property of his own beyond what is absolutely necessary; neither should they have a private house or store closed against anyone who has a mind to enter; their provisions should be only such as are required by trained warriors, who are men of temperance and courage; they should agree to receive from the citizens a fixed rate of pay, enough to meet the expenses of the year and no more; and they will go and live together like soldiers in a camp."³²

The entire idea of Plato on property is reliant on common feeling instead of individuality, believed that the common interest of the community would disappear with the emergence of private property. For Aristotle, ownership over property produces the free man in society which is good for citizenship. In fact, Aristotle rejects the idea of communal property originally proposed by Plato, argues that only private property can provide opportunity which would help the citizens to act morally in the society.

³² Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Robin Water Field (New York: Oxford, 1993), p.273.

Communal ownership of the property does not provide any opportunity in the society; therefore, it creates various inequalities in the society. He further says property is part of the individuals, human existence is not possible unless they get the sufficient necessities in the society, in the case of the worker she needs the proper instruments of her work. Property is an art of getting wealth in the society; therefore, having a slave itself is the part of owning a property.³³ Aristotle clearly argues for the individual right over the property in the societal functions.

Thomas Aquinas who developed a concept of property in medieval period followed the Aristotelian idea of property that there wouldn't be any values among people unless the people own the individual property. He believes that human beings have the right to procure the necessities for their human subsistence; property in earth is common to all by nature. Thomas Aquinas tries to understand property through the perspective of teleology.³⁴

John Locke is one of the illustrious modern political philosophers who expounded on property and its relationship with the state. Locke's theory of property is based on the canonical understandings, believes that the God has given this to land to all people; therefore, any individual possessions would be treated as moral problem. Locke explains, "Though the Earth and all inferior creatures are common to all Men, yet every Man has a Property in his own Person. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The Labour of his Body, and the Work of his Hands, we may say, is properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his

³³Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, rev.ed. (Ontario: Batoche Books, 1999), p.67. <https://socialsciences.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/aristotle/Politics.pdf>

³⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics: Norton Critical Edition*, Trans. Paul E Sigmund (New York: Norton and Co, 1988), p.82.

Labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property. It being by him removed from the common state Nature placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other Men.”³⁵ Here, he tries to combine the significance of labour with first occupancy theory and identifies the labour of his body and his work as something which belongs only to him. Thus if any individual does not own property in the community, he cannot claim that he belongs to that community.

Nevertheless, Locke believes that private property existed in nature itself in the beginning of time, and that therefore man has the right to preserve it as long as it exists. Gough observes that for Locke, “private property is an institution which owing its existence to civil society had existed in the state of nature itself and the prime task of government was to preserve it unharmed.”³⁶ For Locke, everything common in the society and his philosophy of property is connected to the theory of first occupant proposed by Rousseau. Locke says that, the state does not provide any property to the society, therefore, the state has to protect the ownership rights of the people, and also the state does not have any right to take it back. According to Locke, the idea of property is collective not individual but private occupation is needed for the subsistence of the society.

Immanuel Kant theorises property in a metaphysical way and discusses property along with the question of agency of the state and seriously concerned about the concept of rights, especially property rights. He believes that the individual in the society would

³⁵ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.116.

³⁶ John Wiedhofft Gough, *John Locke's Political Philosophy: Eight Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p.80.

argue for their possession to claim against other's assets. Kant says that, people try to negate others possessions by claiming their property in the society, advocates for the legality of property and its rightful acquisition as inherent right to all claims. He describes right to property in things begin with land, contract rights, and right to person similar to the right to things. For Kant property rights are essential for having freedom, thus he argued for private rights to an object which is physically related to a person. In his work "*Ground works of Metaphysic of Morals*", Kant talks about the innate rights of property and its legality. He says that, the state should act as an agency or authority to deal with property by maintaining an account or record of the property that belongs to it with survey reports. For Kant, land is not merely private property, explains the need of publically recognized land and a publically accessible record of the survey undertaken by the government. He further says that the property rights could be made determinate and enforceable by the state only.³⁷ It was against the viewpoint of Locke's argument of justifying private property.

Jean Jacques Rousseau famous work, *Discourse on Political Economy and the Social Contract* translated by Christopher Betts, reveals that the various dimensions of property discourses. Rousseau defines property as "that which is earned properly in order to assert a valid claim to one's assets." Right does not equal might, according to Rousseau, and a right can never be derived from the force. A right must be granted properly, which implies it must be bound the right by a moral and legal code, making it a contract in which one's rights is applied to the rights of everyone. Once a right has been established, it is useful and important for the individual to use that right efficiently in his and the

³⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Moral Law Ground Work of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H.J Paton (New York: Routledge, 2013), p.96.

community's best interests. This drive is aimed at forming a community and so forging a social compact between individuals who band together to behave as a unit. Rousseau says that, the right of the property is related to the right of the first occupant and this occupancy has three important forms: no priority for inhabitants, it is dependent upon their need for subsistence not their greed and lastly, the land should be for cultivation. Basically, the piece of land becomes combined to the public territory then the rights will have protection of the state, which is not practicable with a bad government.³⁸

Rousseau believed that private property is evil when it comes to monarchy or feudal relations, the state must be the supreme power on property and other goods through social contract. Rousseau, concludes that the right of all individuals has over their property is always subordinate to the right of the community and the community has the right over every people. Otherwise it will lead to a lack of true power and the weakness of the sovereign. Rousseau discusses about how primitive society does not have law and morality which was the first form of the state of nature, says that, the division of labour and private property was needed in the developed society. The inequality in society comes through possession and it is overcome the lack of natural rights. J. I. Macadam says that, "Rousseau goes deeper than Marx in holding that personal property is itself an effect of the furore to distinguish oneself. The possessions enable those who have to dominate those who have not, because being is having. Rousseau recognise that this

³⁸ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *A Discourse on Political Economy*, trans. Christopher Betts (Oxford: New York, 1994), p.60.

inequality is a species of dependence in the sense that your superiority over me, through your possessions.”³⁹

Rousseau believed that by the emergence of political societies the inequalities has increased in society; the establishment of private property rights was the reason for this inequality. The set of laws will remove all arbitrariness from one human being to another and the law of legitimacy would determine the interest of all the individuals in society and it may cause to the lack of arbitrariness, finally each individual have to depend others. Rousseau was trying to differentiate between primitive and modern understandings of property, based on general will through his political philosophy.

Philosophers like Ferguson also developed ideas on the concept of property. According to Ferguson, private property is the precondition of the man's higher development, believes that man has alienated from his original condition and in the process of development society came to know the difference of poor and rich. He divided the history of mankind into two phases that is savage and barbarian, finally the property is the matter of progress.⁴⁰ In the 19th century, this thought had encouraged scholars to enquire about the history of property. Anthropologists have done work with existing primitive people.

Lewis H Morgan also worked on the history of property says that, during the savage life crude weapons, fabrics, utensils, stone and bone, personal ornaments were the chief items of property, the land hardly a subject of property and no importance. Morgan says

³⁹ J. I. Macdam, “The Discourse on Inequality and the Social Contract,” *Philosophy*, Vol.47, No.182, (1972), p.312.

⁴⁰ Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (London. Cadell, 1782).
<https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/ferguson-an-essay-on-the-history-of-civil-society>

that after barbarianism the property transferred through inheritance, the ownership of all the arable land and other material goods primarily belonged to the clan, it eventually transferred to the family and finally to the individual.⁴¹ By the time towns and nations appeared, property had become divided between state property and individual property. Marxist scholars give more importance to Morgan's concepts on property. Basically Morgan studied about the three stages of man's nature - savagery, barbarianism, and civilization to analyse the history of property. Marx and Engels in fact welcomed Morgan's theory.

Karl Marx's materialist history is related to the history and origin of property and says that the property relations are a legal expression of the social relations of production both are referring the same phenomenon. Marx writes that there are two types of property: economical and legal. He describes private property as the antithesis between labour and capital, because private property is the result of alienated labour.⁴² Communism is the synthesis which means it is the negation of the alienation. According to Marx in the process of historic evolution private property arises within the higher development of the productive forces, the beginnings of the social division of labour and exchange of the products of labour. Production should be considered in its broadest sense and Marx describes it as the 'appropriation' of nature on the part of individual within a specific form of society.

Engels pointed out that forms of production in primitive societies were collective, similarly, consumption was also collective in the smaller communities, later, and

⁴¹ Lewis H Morgan, *Ancient Society*, rev.ed. (New York: University of Arizona Press, 2003), p.19.

⁴² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*," trans. Martin Milligan, (New York: Prometheus Books, 2009), p.83.

however, the masters controlled the process of production. Agricultural and artisan production increased as a consequence, giving rise to surplus production, for the maintenance of it the additional labour was required. This was provided by slavery.⁴³ Engels explains that the slaves were the part of process of production, thus they were considered as the property of the masters. He argues that personal and collective ownership existed in the primitive society.⁴⁴ Thus, the Marxist's materialist conception of history, property can be defined only within the context of production relations.

Land, Caste and Property: Indian Context

Property discourse, in Indian context, has necessarily to be explained along with two interrelated important concepts of land and caste. In fact, land is not only merely a spatial category but also a sociological phenomenon. The hierarchy in Indian society is the reflection of unequal land distribution among various caste groups. The caste person who owns land as a resource could easily dominate others. Thus landless caste suffers more due to the lack of property ownership in the society.

Domination of dominant social categories, it is argued, in India derives from them having ownership over land as well as the privilege of caste.⁴⁵ The concept of property in Indian case is relatively different from the universal perspective of historical social process. The specific character of this process in Indian society is that the untouchable castes were prohibited to hold property especially the land, because of the customs of entrenched caste structure. Therefore, present-day society also witnesses the awful

⁴³ Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of Family and Private Property and the State*, trans. Alice West, Vol.3, (Marx/Engels internet Archives, 2000), p.87.

https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/origin_family.pdf

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Rajendra Singh, *Land, Power and People: Rural Elite in Transition 1801-1970* (New Delhi: Sage, 1988), p.12.

landlessness among lower caste people, especially the Dalits. To hold ownership over property as a right has been denied to the Dalits by caste Hindus until the recent times. This graded inequality originated in Indian society by the laws of Manu, the Sudras, the fourth Varna had only to drudge in service and must remain *Adhana*, or without any property, were not allowed to hold or possess any property. Out of seventeen ways only one way the *Seva* (to serve) is recognised for Sudras.

The untouchables are barred from property like land, cows and gold so on due to the Varna system.⁴⁶ Presently the Dalit masses live in villages and more than eighty percentages of them work as landless agricultural labourers in landlords' fields. They depend on others' land holdings to get employment in their field, and consequently they are forced to do other menial jobs than their work. The question of land and its relation to caste begins with ancient history and land has played an important role in the temple-centred economy especially in south India. Some historians say that the land was considered as territory not property for various tribal units.

D. D. Kosambi says that, the Aryan people were not a race, their distinctive feature and language indicates that they are a pastoral-nomadic patriarchal tribal unit. There was fighting as well as coalitions between Aryans and primitive forest tribes existed in India and the primitive Indian tribe continued through Aryanization. He says that, "For this neo-tribal economy land is territory not property. Cattle have been common tribal brand, hence are held in common."⁴⁷ The king considered weapons and tools as his private property. Kosambi analysed that these tribes are not primitive, and have the rudiments at

⁴⁶*Encyclopedia of Dalits*, by Udai Veer and Bharat Sing (New Delhi: Reference Press, 2004), Vol. 4, p. 21.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

least of a class structure, there was no separate claim over surplus product, they themselves being as a tribal property.⁴⁸

Kosambi applies the Marxian analysis of relations of production to interpret the formation of early Indian history, and also believes that the Asiatic mode of production existed in India, hence there was no actual history or the historic development. India has a unique social division, the endogamous caste system, explains that the caste is a class at the primitive level of production, a religious method of social consciousness in such a manner that the primary producers are deprived of his surplus with the minimum coercion.⁴⁹

Kosambi's idea of caste and its relation to property can be contested at various levels. First of all, the reading of caste as class is problematic, though the Varna system had a class nature; each Varna is a mixture of caste groups which was really functional at every level as a long-standing institution. Kosambi says that the early Indian civilization especially the Indus valley culture as a pastoral nomadic tribal system and as a result two caste groups existed there, later it developed into four caste-classes by 800 B C and the primitive feudal culture existed in Satavahana period. According to him, "The emergence of private property, even in land began earlier than AD 400 before the prime of Gupta Empire. Pure feudalism begins in the later Gupta period but enormously stimulated by Muslim trade and military penetration after AD1200. Modern capitalism, culminating in the rule of new indigenous bourgeoisie that came into being less than hundred years ago through European trade, factory production, share capital, under

⁴⁸ D. D. Kosambi, *Combined Methods in Indology and Other Writings*, ed. Brajudulal Chattopadhyaya, (Oxford: New Delhi, 2005), p.62.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 59.

British colonial rule.”⁵⁰ The notion of property was a reality, at the same time people might have had distinct rights over their property in ancient India. R. S Sharma says that the laws on property began to be written in the middle of the first millennium B.C. One of the earliest law books, the *Dharmasastras*, gives some information on the subject of property, and this was the source through which property acquired by higher castes. There were three sources to acquire the property: inheritance, sale and gift. In fact, the Brahmins acquired property in different ways: gifts and sacrificial fee. Kshatriya acquired property through conquest. Vaishya acquired it through agriculture and cattle rearing. Sudra acquired it through service.⁵¹ He further says there is no mentioning of private property in land in law books. Cattle were considered as important property. Weapons and utensils were categorised under movable property. In Gupta period Brahaspati and Katyayana made a distinction of property between ‘*Sthavara*’ or immovable, and ‘*Jangama*’ or movable.⁵²

Historically, the structure of property relations, in India, begins with the classification done by Yanjavalkya who categorised three forms of properties, that land (*bhu*) *nibandha* (maintenance or source of subsistence) and gold jewellery (*dravya*), the term *nibandha* also mean as land. The early law books did not provide much attention to land or immovable property, but they were concerned with the problem of possession. The possession of property was legitimised by a certain period of time and it was not applicable to the Brahmanas and Kings. The early law books considered the property or possession in terms of ‘*bhukti*’ or enjoyment, but by the Gupta period it was ‘*agama*’: a

⁵⁰ Ibid., 58.

⁵¹ R. S. Sharma, *Early Medieval Indian Society: A Study in Indian Feudalism* (Kolkata: Orient Longman, 2003), p.177.

⁵² Ibid., 178.

title which was introduced by Manu.⁵³ The concepts *agama* and *bhukti*, indicates ‘title’ and ‘possession’, interestingly, the possession is backed by the titles and the title might have received more importance than simple possession; as a result, it was truly beneficial to Brahmins who gave land to the villagers for cultivation by lease. The Brahmins were able to take back their land through royal charter whenever disputes arose between villagers and themselves for the question of possession. In fact, the Brahmana lawgivers helped the landlords to continue their landlordism by these charters, whoever was on the top of the social structure enjoyed the position of power thorough the subjugation of others who were at the bottom.

Marxist historian Romila Thapar says that the traditional Indian economic structure can be understood as pyramidal, the king was at the top and the self-sufficient village communities were at the bottom, the village community was self-sufficient because agriculture and manufacture located among them and land was not considered as private property, the subjugation was needed to get maximum surplus to the king.⁵⁴ According to Thapar, “the land as a factor in historical evolution land being the continuous and basic economic unit. This relationship can be seen from many perspectives such as, the proliferation of agrarian village communities and settlements of new land, the question of new land ownership which involves ascertaining not only who owned the land but equally who worked the land and how was the agrarian surplus obtained.”⁵⁵

However, the question is, who worked on the land has to be enquired further because the higher castes like Brahmins do not cultivate the soil. The *Dharmasastras* and other texts

⁵³ Ibid., 179.

⁵⁴ Romila Thapar, *The Past and Prejudice* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India Publication, 1973), p.36.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 37.

give an idea that the Sudras were the cultivators, therefore the term Sudra needs more analysis. It is believed that the term Sudra includes cultivators, artisans, slaves and hired labourers. The land relations have been changed by the prevalence of post-Gupta period and the land grants were started by this time, thus the struggle has emerged to acquire the power in the society and it has been continued till the changes of land relations in the colonial period.⁵⁶

The relation between land and caste is allied to the production of surplus from the time when land was considered as private property in the post-Gupta period. Interestingly, the Brahminic literature do not provide much information about the cultivators who produced surplus, whereas the Buddhist texts give equal reference to slaves and hired labourers who worked on the land of wealthy landowners.

The division in society emerged through the accumulation of surplus concentrated in people those who are in the apex of the caste structure, but it may be more controversial towards the division among the labourers in this context. Specialised skilled labourer, permanent settlement, private ownership of land and trade were also needed for plough cultivation, thus, the change from tribal to peasant society happened through plough agriculture. Tribal identity decreased with the creation of social division. It is believed that the use of plough technology created a new techno centric agrarian foundation in the Mauryan Empire. By the spread of this technology in village economy the private ownership of land was also established. The possession of land had to be established to

⁵⁶ Ibid., 43.

preserve the family history of caste. The genealogical records of families along with property are considered the proof of arrangement in ownership.⁵⁷

Another argument placed by historians is that the earlier development in historical times is not done only with technology, of course, other developments also happened. Tribal identity paved the way to territorial identity, lineage, speech and customary law were the three criteria of identity and status in the earlier tribal society, but lineage was central to political control and land ownership. Ksatriya tribe possessed land in tribal society and they become the royal lineage in later centuries. The cultivated land was owned by the Ksatriya tribe, and the real tilling done by *Dasas* (slaves) and hired *Britakas* (hired labours and servants). The new formation of territorial identity is also called as *Janapadas*. Lineage rights include the land ownership keenly recorded, the terms *Jati* were used for the stress on kinship ties and this term appeared in the later texts (Katyayanas' *Srauta Sutra*) which were used in the sense of an extended family. After the appearance of term *Jati* the term *Jana* declined (tribe) and the term *Jati* became more widespread. The Buddhist texts defined the term *Jati* in the sense of caste, implying an endogamous kinship group ranked in a list of specialized occupations and service relationships reflecting an increase in social stratification.⁵⁸

The question of caste in relation to land is highly debatable and quite complex. It is argued that only the Ksatriya tribe were landowners and the Sudras were the tilling since the formation of territorial society. In fact, the cultivation taken up by slaves and hired labourers that includes the strata of Sudra Varna. However, it is difficult to categorise

⁵⁷ Ibid., 40-41.

⁵⁸ Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1978), pp.42-43.

which caste worked as hired labour or slave caste. The classification emerged after the formation of wealthy Kshatriya families in the later Vedic period.

Romila Thapar argues that, “The emergence of larger estates owned by individual Kshatriya families during the time of Buddha (sixth to fifth century AD) was a major change in the agrarian structure, and the criterion of wealth came to be associated more with land and money, rather than cattle, which had been the measure of wealth in earlier Vedic period literature. The land was primarily transferred within the same social group that had previously shared joint ownership. As a result of the rise of the landed class, the number of wage laborers, hired laborers, and slaves has increased noticeably.”⁵⁹ The ownership of land has continued as a debatable issue in Indian social history, therefore, truly relevant to any inquiry into the historical past to understand the social structure of ancient India. According to Bongard Levin, “the epigraphic data on land ownership appeared not earlier than the first centuries A.D and the Sastras setting forth the principles of the Brahminic schools vis-a vis land ownership rights are even more recent.”⁶⁰ There are various debates among scholars about the ownership of land in ancient India. The first view is that the land is owned by the state, for that they give examples from Arthashastra and the report by Megasthenes who said the land tiller paid this land tax to the king. Another group of scholars believe that the private ownership of land was practiced in ancient India. The third view is that the ownership of land was communal.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid., 43.

⁶⁰ Bongard Levin, *Mauryan India* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1986), p.139.

⁶¹ Ibid., 140.

The *Dharmasastras* described the possession of property in various ways. For Yanjavalkya possession (*bhoga*) is valid when it is accompanied by a class title, and the owner who has no legal right is treated as a thief. According to Narada, a person using land without a written document is to be punished for theft. Further, Yanjavalkya clarifies the possession of property for three generations and gives the owner the right to legal ownership. The *Visnu-Smruti* says that if somebody possesses something with a property title it can be never taken away from him.⁶² It is very clear that the importance of land become high when agriculture developed, and it is considered as important object for wealth. It is believed that the state considered the right to ownership only applicable to the cultivable land where the state did not make any claim over waste land.

The Buddhist texts (Mahavastu, Divyadana, Therigatha) give a lot of examples of private ownership of land in ancient India. The private estates which owned by Brahmins and Kshatriya Rajas were very common in Mauryan period. The *Suttanipata*, one of the earliest Buddhists canonical writings, mentions a household where 500 ploughs were used. Big estates belonged to the Brahmins and Kshatriya Rajas. The large agricultural fields were tilled by the slaves and hired labourers (Karma Karas).⁶³ One can conclude in this debate that the ownership of land in ancient India is both community-centric as well as state-centric. The property transactions also take place by the participation of the state.

According to the *Dharmasastras* the King was the supreme power called the lord of the soil which means the owner of cultivable land. The King has collected taxes for the sake of his subjects, and at the same time the king was the real owner of the royal lands. The

⁶² Ibid., 34.

⁶³ Ibid., 142.

royal lands were tilled by the slaves, hired labourers (Karma Karas) and people paying off their fines by personal labours, as well as by tenant farmers who received half of the produce and sharecroppers.⁶⁴ The historical works hardly give any information about the hired workers and slaves and it is believed that these people might have belonged to the lower sections of the society. Many historians say that it is difficult to identify their caste, but it is clear that the hired labourers were directly attached to the soil. The mortgage system also existed in ancient Indian society. The Sastras make one thing clear that the Brahmins were lived as priest groups who have got land from the King and it was exempted from land tax.

B. D. Chattopadhyaya quotes R. S. Sharma, “a good portion of the produce of the land went as tax to the rulers who were called Kshatriya. Another portion went to the Brahmanas and the other religious elements in the form of gifts. For supplying labour to the three higher varnas including the Vaishya peasants and merchants, the Sudras were considered to be the common source. But really Sudra labour seems to have been utilised more by landowning communities or individuals comprising Kshatriya and Brahmana who were exempted from taxes.”⁶⁵

The non-tax land system Brahmadeya existed in south India too. As a community the Brahmins could occupy land from the rulers, wherever they existed and the priesthood position of this community helped them hold power in land where they lived. Burton Stein observes “in the Brahminic locality power associated with the land control, south India appears quite unique. South Indians temples of the medieval period were unique in

⁶⁴ Ibid., 148-49.

⁶⁵ B. D. Chattopadhyaya, “State and Economy in North India,” in *Recent Perspective of Early Indian History*, ed. Romila Thapar (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1995), p.330.

the degree to which they provided the message for Brahman temple functionaries to exercise not only ritual primacy over all other castes and religious institutions, but also in that temples were headquarters of *bhakti* sects through which organizations the religious allegiances and the ritual activities of most Hindus were ordered.”⁶⁶ Thus, the ritual supremacy helped the Brahmins as a community get power over various properties like land, temples and so on. The Sanskritization process in *bhakti* tradition made them to build up a temple-centred economy, eventually they possessed the land near by the temples they lived in. It could easily be assumed that the ritual communities could possess property like land through their priesthood positions in India.

Thus land has played an important role in the Indian agrarian system too; hence it gets a more important place in the property analysis discourses. It could be proved with the case of Brahmadeya (Brahmin Property) villages in south India, in which the Brahmins were in the position of spiritual preceptors and they could make a peasant group to work in their fields. The land became the basis for a social relationship among various caste groups; as a result, the system could make certain castes the important part of an agrarian economy. Apart from Brahmins, the cultivating groups also possessed power over the economy. Stein argues that, an agrarian system being social arrangements involving in the uses of land and its products, it is to those persistent and normative relationships among social groups that one turn first. The core social relationships involving the land in medieval south India was that between Brahmanas and peasants.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (New York: Oxford, 1985), p.53.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Stein further says that the most important cultivating groups, such as Vellalars, Reddies, and Kammas along with Brahmanas. The peasantry in south India helped the Brahmin community to be the centre of devotional Hinduism. The essential cohesion in religion made several fundamental relationships in south Indian society; after all, the people who were in upper strata of the society only benefitted from the peasantry in south India.⁶⁸ In south India there were three groups who subsequently had the rights over land. The state in the top position collected surplus from land. The Brahminical intermediary groups held the second priority in land rights, and the tenant cultivators the bottom.⁶⁹

The land was owned by the rulers and local chiefs, the Brahminical groups held their own property (Brahmasvam) and the property of the temple (Devasvam). Subsequently the tenants (Karalars), occupants (Kutiyalars) and the labours (Adiyalars) were at the bottom. There were service tenure labourers too; it shows that the lower caste remains as labourers without any rights over property like land. The tradition of *Dharmasastras* gives the rights only to the higher caste to hold land in the society which was also exempted from tax.⁷⁰ It is believed that a variety of land rights existed in India. Hence how different caste groups enjoyed the rights over the land has to be clarified. The *Smruti* commentators say that individuals were the owners of property, therefore ancient India might have had individual land ownership. Hence there is no proper understanding of who owned the property like cultivable land on a broader level.⁷¹

In addition, land was considered as property in the Indian history therefore one can prove that the different caste groups occupied different ownership rights. According

⁶⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁶⁹ Kesavan Veluthat, *The Early Medieval South India* (New Delhi: Oxford, 2009), p.33.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Om Prakash, *Economy and Food in Ancient India* (Delhi: Vidya Prakashan, 1987), p.32.

Arthashastra there were two types of cultivable land. One belonged to the King and the income from this land was called '*Sita*'. Another category was the fields of individuals who had to pay land revenue to the King, which is called '*Bhaga*'.⁷² Moreover, in India the religious system and caste hierarchy paved the way for the practice of feudal property relations in land, otherwise the hierarchical relations of caste among various communities helped the unequal property relations over land easily. It can be assumed that the victims of caste did not benefit in land relations.

The unequal distribution of land started in ancient times where the land was considered property in the society. These divisional hierarchies over land become more prevalent at a large scale by the eighth century onwards. In fact, these hierarchies were almost the same both in the southern and the northern parts of India. There were five gradations of land ownership by the time of Colas of Tanjore. This gradation created a new landlord division as well as a tilling group in the society. Thus the gradation attached the tillers to the soil as wage labourers.⁷³ In a sense the actual tillers of the soil did not benefit by this various gradation. In reality the landlords and the intermediaries were the real beneficiaries of this system.

As property, land has reached the hands of various communities in different ways, in other sense, there were various strategies that might have been played by the different caste groups to occupy the land for their subsistence. "The Brahmins acquire it through sacrificial fee, Kshatriya through conquest, Vaishya through agriculture and cattle rearing and Sudra through service."⁷⁴ Obviously there is no mentioning the untouchable

⁷² Ibid., 34.

⁷³ Ibid., 86.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 177.

castes, and historians did not give any attention to the unwritten past of untouchables. It can be assumed that the relationship between the untouchable and property was that of a slave labourer.

The concept of property in the form of land becomes prevalent in the modern period, most possibly, pre-industrial period. The caste system helped the agrarian structure, importantly; the landlords benefitted by the means of production belonged to the higher castes in India. In this context, the untouchables even if they owned land it were really difficult to produce something on their field because public tanks and wells were not accessible to them and even if they possessed land, they could not have benefit from the production.⁷⁵

The caste system alienated Dalits from the production system; therefore, they were not able to possess any form of property. In other words, being in the Dalit status meant being forcibly shunned from the production system. The gap between the production systems was one of the reasons for the formation of the feudal system in India which further stratified the society on basis of class. R. S. Sharma observes that by the 4th-6th centuries AD ancient India had become feudal by large scale land grants. Apart from princes and warriors, no one had social and spatial mobility which favoured the growth of the caste system based on hereditary occupation.

The marriage within the caste, rusticated inter-dining so on in fact, disconnected the untouchables connections to the relations of production which might have been forced the Dalits into menial labour though they were kept away from the feudal production

⁷⁵ Ibid., 85.

system. Interestingly the people who moved away from physical labour as well as primary production were categorised as purer and noble. The lower caste in general and the Dalits in particular had to work as undignified labour which placed them in the graded caste system supported by feudalism.⁷⁶

Indian society has primarily been stratified on the basis of social category like caste, though the lower and higher gradations are categorised on the basis of caste it has connected with other property resources. Feudal formation, historically, was one of the reasons for the unequal distribution of property among various caste groups. Thus, the caste hierarchy has restricted ownership rights to certain communities; consequently the entire society had to accept the words of feudal lords. Historians say the citizenship right was only applicable to the twice born communities in India; the twice born could easily occupy the social surplus in the feudal society. Secondly citizenship made them achieve more surpluses in feudal production as well as other material benefits. The primary producers did not have any right over the product which they produced. Sharma says that the categorical differentiation on the basis of occupation in Varna system might have led to the formation of the untouchable community in India.

According to R. S. Sharma “the twice born were entitled to Vedic studies and investiture with sacred thread, and fourth Varna or Sudras excluded from it, the twice born called citizens and Sudras non-citizens, therefore the Brahmanas were not allowed to take to the plough and manual work. Gradually the contempt of the higher Varnas for manual work reached such limits that they developed hatred for the hands that practiced

⁷⁶ R. S. Sharma, *Perspective in Social and Economic History of Early India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1988), pp.24-32.

crafts and thus came to look upon certain manual labours untouchables.”⁷⁷ Moreover, according to *Dharmasastras* the untouchables do not have any rights over property in the society; this is one of the reasons for the lack of property like land even in the present day.

Property relations especially about landed property continued as a puzzle in history and it is very clear that there is a strong connection between the Varna system and the ownership of property in India. The feudal state itself originated to protect women and property and the Brahminical law endorsed it. Conceptualizing the property is more complex where human being treated as property in the society by the principles of *Dharmasastras*. In India, specifically the south India, the lower caste community was the property of feudal lords who had better position in the civil society, whereas the lower caste remained in a pathetic situation creating unequal divisions among the various caste groups. Historians hardly admit this fact about social order which created new servitude in the society.

In fact, the economic understanding of history may not enough to interpret certain Indian realities like caste. Ambedkar argues that, “religion, social status and property are all source of power and authority, which one man has to control the liberty of another, one is predominant at one stage that is the only difference.”⁷⁸ Thus it is clear that there were some other resources to help the *dvija* caste to occupy property like land in India. To put it differently, the dominant religion created an easy way to occupy a social status by

⁷⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁷⁸ B.R. Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* (Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, 1989), Vol.1, p.44.

accumulation of property. It can be argued that unequal property relations originated in the principles of Hindu social order.

According to Ambedkar, there were three social orders which created inequality in the society. The first and foremost is graded inequality, the second is the fixity of occupation, and the final one is the fixation of people within their respective classes.⁷⁹ This graded inequality paved the way to unequal distribution over people on the basis of religion, spirituality and morality. Nevertheless, the Hindu social order also discourages equal need, equal work and equal ability as the basis of reward for labour. This order reflects each sphere of social life and it worked as a protector against equal rights in the society, the graded inequality supported by fixity of occupation. Manu, the founder of the Hindu social order, assigned various occupations to each caste group; the Brahmins were assigned to teaching and studying the Veda, and to receive gifts from others.

In context of south Indian, the Brahmins have received most of the landed property in the name of Brahmadeya and Devadhana. In a way this social order prevented individual choice, therefore they could not achieve property like land. In fact, the European society achieved land and other resources on the basis of individual liberty, but Hindu *Dharmasastras* completely fixed the choices of the individual on the basis of their birth and this social order did not allow changing status from one class to another, therefore, graded inequality has been continued without any change. In fact, the fixity of occupation transferred an idea of unequal social status into the society, as a result the

⁷⁹ B.R. Ambedkar, *Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* (Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, 1987), Vol.3, pp.106-115.

livelihood occupations of the higher caste become more precious, and the people who do menial work came to be considered as lower caste or low grade status.

Thus, this graded order did not provide any free unity among different communities; also it could not admit the principle of equality. The fixation of people in respective classes emerged out of this social order by which there was isolation among the different caste groups. This isolation might have led to the formation of privileged and underprivileged classes as well as masters and servants.⁸⁰ In such social conditions people who belonged to the higher class had enough opportunity to acquire property like land by the help of this social order. Moreover, the same social order gives different rights to citizens on the basis of their birth.

By theorising property in Indian context, Ambedkar negates the Marxian understanding of property relations based on economic interpretation. He says that for socialists the property is only source of power, therefore they propose the equalisation of property to reform the social system. Hence the socialist gives more importance to economic reform by negating various social institutions like religion and caste. In India most of the kings and other feudal lords were governed by the Brahmins or the priestly class by the help of Hindu social order. Hence Ambedkar rejects the validity of the socialist economic interpretation of history.

Ambedkar, raises the question, is economic reform possible without bringing the reform into the social order first? In fact, the feeling of equality and fraternity is more important in Indian society, therefore achieving reforms by socialist revolution without fraternity is

⁸⁰ B. R. Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* (Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, 1989), Vol.7, p.26.

meaningless. Also he says that, people would not join in the revolution until and unless they are treated equally in the society. As long as discrimination continues on the basis of caste and creed the socialist idea may not be possible for economic reforms in India.⁸¹ Though the priestly classes are poorer than the rulers and landed aristocrats, they are treated as higher ranks in Indian society. It can be read that the caste has more dignity than any other property discourses in India. Therefore, having a higher caste status along with landed property creates a new social order which is prominent even today in India. It can be argued that, having any economic property does not promote the social status, but it is dependable to various other social institutions like caste and class.

The division of labour is another important matter to problematize property relations in India, the universal division of the labour system certain rights are given to labour to occupy property and other resources which is absent in India. The labour was further divided on basis of caste, which does not provide any rights to labour. The idea of labour and its division was one of the important debates in Indian political history. Gandhi and Ambedkar seriously debated the different dimensions of labour and its dignity. In fact, Gandhi has been defended for the caste occupation on the basis of division of labour which proposed by the *Dharmasastras*, whereas Ambedkar argued the caste system is not only the division labour also is the division of labours. For Ambedkar the caste system was not a domination of a certain community; it is also a complete denial of the acquisition of property and other economic resources.

⁸¹ B.R. Ambedkar, "Annihilation of Caste with a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi," in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* (Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, 1989), Vol.1, p.46.

Ownership of economic resources in the caste structure is more difficult for untouchables. Thus Ambedkar certainly was a supporter of the division of labour in the society, but he was seriously concerned about further divisions among the labouring castes. He says the “caste system was not merely a division of labours which is quite different from division of labourer. It is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labours are graded one above the other. In no other country is division of labour accompanied by the gradation of labourers.”⁸² Also in a system featuring a traditional division of labour one individual can easily shift from their occupation to another, but here one cannot leave their caste occupation created by the Hindu social order. Nevertheless, the property relations, occupation, dignity of labour and ownership rights are controlled by this social order.

Thus the idea of property and its implications in the society need to be problematized in different ways, the social condition of India is still static, which did not provide any rights to the lower caste citizen to hold the property like land. Moreover, the Hindu social order has classified the property rights in various ways. Any property of Brahmins cannot be taken back by the state or King, even in the absence of legal heirs. Interestingly the resources of other classes can be confiscated by the King if there are no legal heirs. These types of fixed laws are the basis of Indian social order. Even if a Brahmin commits an offence requiring punishment, his property must be secured, whereas the Sudra and slave groups do not have any right to property.

Thus, nowhere else in the world has such difficult and rigid property relations, European societies have given certain power positions to individuals on the basis of property, In

⁸² Ibid., 47.

India, having property does not give such type of individual power. Even though land has been continued as an important possession it did not give any significance without other resources. Ambedkar describes the situation of slaves in America where they had the right to possess property and other resources. By holding property, they could repay their masters' debt. Secondly slaves were considered as the property of masters, therefore, the master had to do work for the well-being of slaves, even if slavery is a disadvantaged system, the slaves had certain advantages; as a result, slaves were free to think about their shelter and clothes. In slavery a skilled labourer got more demand than an unskilled labourer, and for that reason the masters were giving training to them, a trained slave was an asset to the masters.

Ambedkar says that the "Slavery was never obligatory. But untouchability is obligatory. A person is permitted to hold another as his slave. There is no compulsion on him if he does not want to. But an Untouchable has no option. Once he is born an untouchable caste, he is subjected to all the disabilities of an Untouchable", he says that, "The law of slavery did not permit emancipation. Once a slave always a slave was not the fate of the slave. In untouchability there is no escape. Once an untouchable always an untouchable. The other difference is that untouchability is an indirect and therefore the worst form of slavery", further, "A deprivation of a man's freedom by an open and direct way is a preferable form of enslavement. It makes the slave conscious of his enslavement and to become conscious of slavery is the first and most important step in the battle for freedom. But if a man is deprived of his liberty indirectly he has no consciousness of his enslavement", and "Untouchability is an indirect form of slavery. To tell an untouchable 'you are free, you are a citizen, you have all the rights of a citizen', and to tighten the

rope in such a way as to leave him no opportunity to realise the ideal is a cruel deception. It is enslavement without making the untouchable's conscious of their enslavement. It is slavery though it is untouchability. It is real though it is indirect. It is enduring because it is unconscious. Of the two orders, untouchability is beyond doubt the worse.”⁸³

Thus, the untouchables did not gain anything from this social order and it prevented them from having any social status. Property relations in India are connected with various other social and economic institutions like land, agrestic servitude, and customs and so on. Indian form of property relations is deeply rooted in the caste system; hence, the question of citizenship is more important in relation to property. The untouchables in India had gone through various forms of disabilities and social stratification; therefore, holding property in any form was a difficult task for them. Untouchability is an inevitable part of Hindu social order, and that is the reason why their labour has been exploited. In India the theory of exploitation is deeply connected to the caste system, further, all property relations were controlled by the caste system. In fact, the past ownership rights reflect the present property relations in India. Thus, some of the social groups forced to work on the land to produce for the survival of the society. R. S. Sharma argues that the Varna society was based on the production activities of peasants called Vaishya and Sudra labours, Vaishya worked as tax collectors for the King who gave salaries to them. This social order continued till the fourth century AD without any drastic change. The third and fourth centuries witnessed a crisis in the social order.

⁸³ B.R. Ambedkar, “Slaves and Untouchables,” in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, (Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, 1989), Vol. 5, p.15.

It is believed that the Gupta period is the classical period in Indian history. This is the period when salaries were paid as land instead of cash. In this period cash salaries were restricted only to military purposes. In fact, there were two kinds of land grants, *Agrahara* grant was one type of land grant prevalent in Gupta period, and *agrahara* grant was exclusively for Brahmins exempted from tax. The other forms of land grant existed in lieu of salary to officers, the land was granted to officers as a reward for their services. These land grants were not common in comparison with *agrahara* grants in the beginning. In later centuries both land grants became common and the *agrahara* grant created a special privilege to the Brahmins in the society.

The *agrahara* grant made the Brahmins into a very privileged power position, whereby the domination of the king in the society became weakened. The central control of the state vanished because of such land grants. As a result of these land grants, the Brahmins became a dominant political opposition in the state.⁸⁴ It can be argued that caste domination as well as possession of land becomes prevalent first in the Gupta period. These situations made the Brahmins the unquestioned caste authority in the society. It is clear that they worked like a parallel state in Gupta times, where the producers of surplus degrade by caste or less privileged positions. Thus there were three types of land like waste land, crown land and private land. Generally it was the waste land granted in lieu of salary, and the crown land which was cultivable, which provided income to the state.⁸⁵ Hence it is believed that this crisis disordered the functions which assigned for each class. Also the lower order tried to occupy the status of higher order. The lower orders were forced to give heavy taxes to rulers, but it refused in that time, and also the refused the

⁸⁴ Romila Thapar, *A History of India* (London: Penguin, 1966), p.146.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 147.

protection of the King, this situation is known as Kaliyuga in puranic text. Manu somehow resolved this tension, and he did not allow the three classes to shirk their duties, this is the context wherein land grants started to the priest and officials instead of salaries and remuneration. Hence the new cultivable land comes into existence by this process but the tribal people were taught to obey the King wherever they exist.⁸⁶ The Manusmriti formed a new social division to rule the society by granting land to the lower class in the society. It may be reason that the Vaishyas and Sudras got landed property in comparison with the untouchable caste group in India. Sudra caste has to be analysed in relation to the producers of surplus in the production and the workforce of Dalits might have been included in the Sudra category.

D. D. Kosambi observes that, “the existence of the Sudra caste had a peculiar effect upon later Indian society. Chattel slavery in the sense of classical European (specifically Greco-Roman) antiquity was never to be of any size or importance in the means and relations of production in India. The expropriate surplus could always be produced by the Sudra; the development of caste foreshadowed a general class society beyond the exclusiveness of a tribe. Brahmins had begun to officiate for more than one clan or tribe, which implied some type of relationship between several groups and few Brahmins at the other end of the economic scale had begun to advance into the dense forest to the cast, in fairly small groups with their own cattle; sometimes even as individuals with no property and no arms for defence or hunting.”⁸⁷

The division of class society might have been created by the idea developed by Brahmins, but it is not enough to interpret how the Brahmins became the sole authority

⁸⁶ Sharma, *Early Medieval*, p.19.

⁸⁷ D. D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, rev. ed. (New Delhi: Vikas, 1994), p.77.

over property in ancient India. It can be argued that the *Smriti* literature has given more authority to the Brahmins to occupy property, by developing their priesthood Brahmins occupied land in terms of granting to their own as well as temples. Interestingly, all this land was tax exempt, in south India; the temples are surrounded with Brahmin settlements. By performing duties and customs in those temples they survived, the priestly Brahmins would not plough the land. The *Smriti* texts do not allow them to till the land, the Brahmins lands were cultivated by hired labour. In the absence of labour they give the land for lease, the Sudra and other lower castes worked on the Brahmin land and produced surplus to run the society.

Lallanji Gopal says that, “the traditional Indian point of view on the question of the ownership of land is best reflected in the legal texts and Indian legal system had no distinct notion of ownership. The pronoun *svam* and its derivatives are used to express ownership, while the derivatives of the root *bhuj* indicate mere possession or enjoyment. Later works basing their conclusions on earlier *smrtis* define ownership *svatva* as property capable of being disposed of as one likes. There is also a discussion about the nature of ownership, as to whether it is a separate category *padartha* or a capacity.”⁸⁸

Right to ownership is defined by the *sastras* in ancient times that gives privilege to the elite class groups. There is a general understanding that the post-Vedic era was the beginning of land ownership in India. During the Aryan pastoral era cattle were considered as the source of wealth and there was no individual ownership over land in ancient India. Most of the cultivable land was considered as common for everyone. According to *mimasa sutras*, the king does not have any right to take over the land.

⁸⁸Lallanji Gopal, “Ownership of Agriculture Land in Ancient India,” in *Land System and Rural Society in Early India*, ed. Bhairabi Prasad Sahu (New Delhi: Manohar, 2004), p.49.

During Mauryan period, ownership was placed in the hand of king and at the time of the post-Gupta period the king become the ultimate authority over the land. Hence idea of property in relation to land became more prevalent by medieval times.

The laws of *smriti* gave importance to the idea of property relations in India. Gokulesh Sharma observes that the idea of private property existed in earlier times; the concept of Gana is not based on individual possession. The *Santi Parva* gives reference to the attachment of man to wealth and property, being a powerful social group, the possession over landed property made the Brahmins wealthier. The Vedic principles tell us that the king enjoys all the property except Brahmin property.⁸⁹ Thus it can be seen that both individual and communal ownership existed in India, but *smriti* writers gave more authority to the king on property.

According to Lallanji, “king cannot give away the State territory. It may, however, be claimed that, according to the *Smrti* injunction, a king is the lord of (the property of) all excepting Brahmanas, and land is the property of the paramount ruler. But the purport of the *Smrti* text is that the king’s lordship is for the purpose of correcting the wicked and supporting the virtuous. Land is not the property of the king but is the common property of all beings enjoying the fruit of their labour on it. Therefore, although there can be a gift of private *asadhadrana* land, there can be no gift of the State land.”⁹⁰

Further, the “Kharndadeva also declares that even a paramount sovereign has no proprietary right over the land, for even conquest produces proprietary right only with regard to the personal property, houses, fields, etc. of the enemy, the conquest of land merely produces the title of sovereignty, which is limited to protecting the kingdom and

⁸⁹ Gokulesh Sharma, *Ancient Judicial System of India*, (New Delhi: Deep and Deep, 2008), p.116.

⁹⁰ Lallanji, *Ownership of Agriculture Land in Ancient India*, p.98.

eradicating evil, and for that purpose only the realization of taxes from cultivators and of fines from offenders is legitimate, but no proprietary right on the land arises therefrom. Houses, fields, etc., acquired by purchase and so forth, may, however, become objects of gift.”⁹¹ The idea of property right in *Dharmasastras* and later in Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* linked to the caste system. The *smriti* writers tried to exclude Brahmins from taxation and no one has the right to take over the property of Brahmins. It is clear evidence that unequal property distribution was very prevalent in ancient society and the present-day issues over land ownership are the result of caste system of property relations in India. Romila Thapar strongly argues that the idea of private ownership emerged in India by the emergence of village economy.⁹²

Mitakshara and *Dayabhaga* were the two important Hindu property systems prevalent in India to govern the property rights as a family law. It is believed that the *Dayabhaga* system existed only in Bengal and Assam, and the rest of India was under the *Mitakshara* system. In *Mitakshara* the right to property was bestowed to the son by birth whereas, the son is entitled to the father’s property only after the death of the father in *Dayabhaga* whereas in *Dayabhaga* system everyone’s share is fixed and there would be common tenancy. But in *Mitakshara* the ownership over property is not defined, and also there is joint tenancy, in *Dayabhaga* one person can transfer his property, but in *Mitakshara* this is not possible.

Property rights also created gender inequality in India and joint family property and ancestral property were the types of property system in India. The joint family property was inherited through a male in the joint family. The *Mitakshara* law permitted the son to

⁹¹ Ibid., 98.

⁹² Romila Thapar, *The Past and Prejudice* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2013), p.39.

have rights over property, but it is not permitted for a female member to hold property. The coparcenary is not applicable to the female member of the family. The *Mitakshara* School allowed women to own separately as an individual while in *Dayabhaga* both the daughter and son do not have the right to hold the property as long as his or her father is alive, however, they can inherit their father's property after his death. *Mitakshara* in which, the daughters also had equal share of their father's property, in *Dayabhaga* gives complete freedom to the father to sell his property as he wishes. Hence the Hindu law does not give any independent right to woman to hold the property rights.

Romila Thapar says that the *Mitakshara* and *Dayabhaga* were two basic family laws which existed till recent years with regional and caste differences, referred to the male members of the family in terms of property. The *Dayabhaga* system was prevalent in eastern India, which allowed the son to take over the property after his father's death and in *Mitakshara* the son could claim the right when his father was alive. In fact there were mentions of the inheritance of daughters at the time of cross cosine marriage and in the matrilineal system.⁹³ Thapar also argues that wealth was gifted specifically to woman. In Rajasthan some wives of the rulers had the right to own land and these rights were applicable to the ruling class. Therefore, rights over property by women were generally negated by the Hindu laws.⁹⁴

It is argued that the low status of Dalits and women is not a recent phenomenon, and one which can be traced back to the caste system, moreover, the *Dharmasastras* and Hindu lawgivers did not allow women and Dalits to possess property in ancient India. In fact, the present day violence against Dalits is also related to the question of the lack of land

⁹³ Romila Thapar, *The Penguin History of Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300* (New Delhi: Penguin), p.466.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

and other forms of property. Sukhadeo Thorat observes that, “The traditional Hindu social order continues to govern the thought process and behaviour of the large majority of Hindus in rural areas. The provisions in the Constitution and law are secular and equal but the customary rules of the caste system and the institution of untouchability are based on the principle of inequality in social, economic, cultural and religious sphere.”⁹⁵ He asserts that “this obviously brings a conflict between what is contained in the constitution and law, and what is contained in the traditional customary rules, norm, and values of the caste system and untouchability. People continued to follow the latter because it provides immense privilege and serves their social, political and economic interests. And when the Dalits try to get equal access and 'assert' their rights, it often invites the wrath of higher caste persons in the form of atrocities and physical violence.”⁹⁶

The *Dharmasastras* restricted certain sections to occupy the landed property, while paving for top of the caste structure benefitting property resources. The unequal distribution of land ownership is directly linked with the caste system and landed property is concentrated in the upper section of the society whereas the lower castes are totally excluded resulting the upper castes to enjoy the social position in the society. The landed aristocrats always wielded power over the landless class which leads lower caste into vulnerable situations; the lower castes in India have an inequitable distribution of land.⁹⁷ The linkage between land and caste is the reason for the social inequality in India. The lack of property and the caste system exploited the lower caste both economically and socially.

⁹⁵ Sukhadeo Thorat, *Hindu Social System and the Human Rights of Dalits* (New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2004), p.4.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Gummadu Nanchaiah, *Land and Caste* (Bombay: Himalaya, 1988), p.80.

Land and caste are the two important aspects to give enormous opportunities to people, the absence of property made the low castes untouchables subjected to terrible social deprivation. In India, the distribution of property created a social deadlock which obstructs all engagement of the individual with the society. The lawgivers have given the explanation for these unequal property rights, therefore those Hindu laws have to be analysed in a modern theoretical sense. Thus Hindu law books assigned duties to the four castes, the upper section of the society enjoyed rights whereas the lower castes were assigned to perform the duties to higher castes. Most of the Hindu law books admitted the supremacy of the Brahmin caste which made others to be dependent and ignorant to them, the system of caste created a complete degradation, and therefore no possibility to a person to be admitted into a higher caste status.⁹⁸

Orientalists believed that the Hindu *Dharmasastras* prescribed everything a person must do in life and tried to control the lower castes assigning more duties instead of rights. According to Manu “a Brahmin shall never beg from Shudra, property for performing a sacrifice i.e., for religious purpose,”⁹⁹ Further, the Shudra who have had unguarded or guarded intercourse with a woman of a higher caste will be punished as follows: If she was unguarded, he should be put to death and his property should be confiscated; if she was guarded, he should be put to death and his property confiscated.¹⁰⁰ Manu says that, “a wife, a son, or slaves should not possess property. The property of Brahmins must not be taken by the king but the property of other castes may be taken by the king.”¹⁰¹ Manu is clear that no other caste groups own property except Brahmins and justified

⁹⁸ Arthur Steele, *The Hindu Castes: Their Law Religion and Customs* (Delhi: Mittal, 1986), p.20.

⁹⁹ *The Manusmriti*, accessed 15 April 2018, <https://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/manu.htm>, X-24.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., VIII-374.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., VIII-416.

untouchability to maintain the gradation in the society and says “The slayer of a Brahmana, (A twice-born man) who drinks (the spirituous liquor called) *Sura*, he who steals (the gold of a Brahmana), and he who violates a Guru's bed, must each and all be considered as men who committed mortal sins (*Mahapataka*).”¹⁰²

The *Dharmasastras* divide the society on the basis of caste; therefore the people who are in the top of caste structure can enjoy the benefits in land and other forms of rights. Manu says “the dwellings of Kandalas and Svapakas shall be outside the village, they must be made Apapratras, and their wealth (shall be) dogs and donkeys.”¹⁰³ and “Their dress (shall be) the garments of the dead, (they shall eat) their food from broken dishes, black iron (shall be) their ornaments, and they must always wander from place to place.”¹⁰⁴ Thus, the *Smritis* and *Sastras* tried to keep certain sections from getting wealth and rights and the very idea of human rights has been restricted to a particular section of the society in terms of Varna system.

The *Dharmasastras* and *Srutis* treated the people unequally and created society based on the inequality, giving benefits only to the higher castes, different property rights and various punishments on the basis of Varna which prevented the mobility in the society. The extreme unequal situation originated because of the severe prejudices over untouchables thereby, equating them with of cattle and dogs. Since the animal does not need any property for existence, the same case with the untouchable too. The *Apastamba Dharma Sutra* declares that, if any person touches the Chandala he must plunge in to the water, if one sees him one should immediately look at luminous bodies in the heaven like sun, moon, stars etc. and severe punishment if anyone had a sexual relationship with a

¹⁰² Ibid., XI-55.

¹⁰³ Ibid., X-51.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., X-52.

Chandala woman.¹⁰⁵ There was no idea of social life, as a result large section of society could not possess any wealth and other property resources negating the basic rights of humans, the Dalits and women became extreme subjects of the laws proposed by *Dharmasastras*.

The *Dharmasastras* gave the rights of ownership of property to the higher caste through inheritance; particularly sons have enormous priority over other female heirs in that family. According to *Baudhayana Dharma Sutra* “the core group of inheritors of a man's property includes his siblings, son, grandson, and great-grandson from the same Varna's wife. The *Apastamba Dharmasutras* declare that if a son is unable to inherit the property, it should be given to the nearest sapinda, which includes the daughter but not the wife. According to Gautama, the riches of an heirless individual should belong to his sapindas, sagotras, or wife.”¹⁰⁶ There was preference for the wife over the daughter, later *Dharmasastras* completely excluded wives from inheriting the husband's property and any woman wants to claim the husband's property she has to undergo the chastity claims. Inheritance of property applicable to the higher caste whereas the lower castes have no option to hold property, consequently, the society structured on the basis of caste as well as patriarchal consciousness. Property relation in India is not just based on land or economy but also has the linkage between caste and gender.

Private property in land is related to the function and structure of the family, therefore inheritance becomes an important issue. The *Dharmasastras* proposed that inheritance should be patrilineal, whereas, the Buddhist texts suggested that both father's and

¹⁰⁵ Upinder Sing, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India, From the Stone age to the 12th Century* (Chennai: Pearson India Education, 2016), p.294.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 295.

mother's property should be generally divided among sons and in the absence of a son the property must go to the next kin or to the state. The Buddhist texts have given preference to transfer the property to a male child or a male relative in the family through inheritance. In general access to property and the inheritance of women was limited and has varied according to custom, caste and region. Another version of Buddhist teaching says that women had owned property. Gail Omvedt says that, many women from royal families become nuns after Buddha's death. In western India the Satavahana records shows women giving donations as their own. Arguably it is evidence that women had possessed property as their own.¹⁰⁷

The Hindu and Buddhist traditions give different views of ancient Indian society, thus the idea of property varied in Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The concept of property is associated with the ownership of land in Hindu tradition and maintained property on the basis of virtue, the king possessed the authority to take over the property of the wicked. The Buddhist tradition proposed the non-attachment to worldly possession, property was treated as an evil, the acquisition of property was a general activity, in its attitude toward women and lower caste people, and Buddhism is marked by a greater liberality in comparison with Hindu traditions.¹⁰⁸ Therefore the balance of rights and duties is fairly equal in Buddhist traditions. Ideas on property and laws are found in the Buddhist canons and *Vinaya-Pitaka*. The individual ownership, sense of human society was developed by the time of Buddha. The properties of peasant called *khettpati*, *khettsamika*, or *vatthupati* cultivable land, the boundaries of land were fixed for owners and land also was categorised with movable and immovable property like cattle. The Buddhist texts

¹⁰⁷ Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste* (New Delhi: Sage, 2003), p.85.

¹⁰⁸ Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History*, p.225.

have given references to the sale and mortgage of land. The term *Cullavagga* indicates a law suit over individual ownership of land. The Diganikaya gives reference to the stealing of another's plot.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Lallanji Gopal, *Ownership of Agriculture Land in Ancient India*, p.96.

CHAPTER-II

CASTE AND SOCIAL FORMATION: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF LAND RIGHTS IN KERALA

This chapter deals with the relationship between land and caste and to understand the various property discourses on land relations in caste based unequal and stratified social formation in Kerala society. Historically, the people privileged by caste have maintained the landed property and elite status. Geographically, the present Kerala divided into three parts: The Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. The Travancore and Cochin were the princely states, and Malabar was the part of the British-Indian province of Madras Presidency prior to independence. These three were integrated, after the States re-organization process to form the present state of Kerala in 1956.

However, the historians have divided the social history of Kerala into ancient, medieval and modern period. The current chapter primarily discusses the history of social formation and various land tenant relations in Kerala, which is more complex in nature, also how it segregated the society on the basis of property. The land history writings on Kerala have a problematic approach in discussing the land tenant relations over time. The available records on land consist of comprehensive description of landlords who were very predominant in caste hierarchy, and gives very few details about the lower section of the society, those directly attached with the soil and the land tenant relations in Kerala society were not comprehensive.

Kerala “has one of the most bewildering complex man-land relationships in India and probably in the whole world. There are no other places in India which practiced such a

variety of land tenure relations. It is unique in complexity and diversity. However the tenure systems of Malabar, Cochin and Travancore had common features but it varies from another according to the regional disparities.”¹¹⁰

The ancient Kerala society was the part of *Tamilakam*, called Sangam period and presently it is called early historic period. The Sangam literature gives more insights of ancient Tamil macro region. The “Tamil macro region has five micro ecosystems called *tinai* which derived from a poetic concept called *aintinai*. According to *tinai* concept the land is divided into five ecosystems which are *Kurinji* (hilly back woods), *Mullai*, (pastoral tract), *Marutam* (wet-land), *Palai* (parched zone) and *Neithal* (litterol). Each *tinai* had its own forms of means of subsistence like hunting gathering in the *Kurinji*, plundering and cattle lifting in *Palai* (*palai* were uncultivable land also it is draught) animal husbandry and shifting cultivation in *Mullai*, wet land agriculture of *Marutam*, fishing and salt manufacturing in *Neithal*.”¹¹¹ Each *tinai* had the material productions practices like plow agriculture, craft production and animal husbandry. And each *tinai*s had produced different forms of material goods for their subsistence. “The *Mullai tinai* had produced milk, curd and ghee, *Marutam tinai* paddy and sugarcane, *Neithal tinai* produced fish and salt and the *Kurinji tinai* collected goods from the forest.”¹¹²

The property relations and ownership right in Kerala are directly connected to the caste based occupation in Kerala and the formation of caste based society is always debatable in the history of Kerala. It is believed that the formation of caste society is linked to the

¹¹⁰ M. A. Oommen, *A Study on Land Reforms in Kerala* (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing, 1975), pp.7-8.

¹¹¹ Raghava Varrier and Rajan Gurukkal, *Cultural History of Kerala*, Vol-1, (Thiruvananthapuram: Department of Cultural Publication, Government of Kerala, 1999), pp.161-162.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 70-74.

land owning system which made certain section of the people as just laborers of the land. The Marxist interpretation on Kerala history says that, there is various types of production relations had been emerged by the introduction of the plow agriculture system. This modified system of plow agriculture might have been the reason of division of labour and the labour dispute. Interestingly, the Brahmins were not agricultural labors, they were full time priests, therefore there are chances of emergence of new type of production relations in their centers and they might have given their land to the *Atiyalar* groups for cultivation. Moreover, the production relations had happened outside the family structure of Brahmins, as a result, some of them were not related to the agriculture but they were the owners of means of production like land. At the same time, “the other group did not have the ownership right over land, who worked in Brahmin’s land as landless labors. Hence this may sow the seed of caste based society in Kerala.”¹¹³

During the *Sangam* period the society was divided based on the different forms of cultivation of land. The *Aintinai* land was further classified into “*Vanpulam* (non-agrarian region) and *Menpulam* (purely agrarian region). *Vanpulam* included hill region also quite larger than *Menpulam*. Vetar and Kuravar caste groups were the cultivators of *Vanpulam*. The advanced farming economy of *Menpulam* have produced surplus which was enough to the people who were directly or indirectly involved in the farming economy. Thus the society was structured by the specialization of labour. The land was owned by ruling aristocrat called Vallar, the scholars (Pulavar, including Brahmins and warrior-chiefs and merchants). The people who have landed property called Uyarnder

¹¹³ Ibid., 89.

(high-born) and the landless as Ilisinar (low-born).”¹¹⁴ There is no much information about the relations of production in *Menpulam*. However, the land in *Vanpulam* was owned by the chieftains and warrior chiefs. The owner of the land in *Vanpulam* called *Natan* and *Menpulam* is *Uran*. Thus the “Brahmins with their social status and ritual primacy took the lead in the task of making organizational and institutional changes in the *Menpulam* agrarian setup, through a new ideology of loyalty.”¹¹⁵

By the time of Sangam period, the Brahmins, as a community were receiving enormous gifts from the villagers as well as chieftains and started the possession of wet land. Large scale of land that was controlled by the Brahmins called *Brahmadeyas* originated by the time of Pallava-Chola period and the Brahmins’s land exempted from plunders because of their priest status in the society. Holding the status of priesthood, Brahmins have controlled the peasants and other social groups under their control. The Brahmins “were well enough to manage the peasant economy with their ritual status. The other landowners were incapable to stable an organization for peasants. By using the warrior power to the peasants the Brahmins colonized large scale of agrarian land. The royal grants also made them to possess the wetland in south India.”¹¹⁶

The period between the third century BC to the four century AD were generally identified as Sangam period and the Sangam literatures are the best source to get the clear picture of the ancient Kerala society. Monarchical system was very prevalent in that period. In Chola and Pandya period the property inherited through the patrilineal

¹¹⁴ Rajan Gurukkal, “Aspects of Early Iron Age Economy, Problems of Agrarian Expansion in Tamilakam,” in *Iron and Social Change in Early India*, ed. Bhairabi Prasad Sahu (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.220-224.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 227.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 228.

system particularly in the Royal families and no evidence of matrilineal system of inheritance. The people of Sangam enjoyed the freedom and equality with dignity, and the rigorous caste system and social division did not exist in the period. There was no evidence of degradation on the basis of occupation and the dignity of labour and the idea untouchability was completely unknown to the Sangam people. The woman had enjoyed high status and they had the right to education, adult marriage was very common and there was no child marriage practiced. Sangam literatures also show that there was an economic prosperity in the society, private property existed in this period but it was given for agricultural purpose. It is believed that “from 5th century onwards the Aryan culture began to spread over the most part of Kerala. The dominance of Aryans might have created degradation in the society.”¹¹⁷ Thus, the Sangam period was quite ideal in terms of equality and other forms of rights.

Modern historical evidence suggests that the Aryanization went to its peak stage by eighth century AD in Kerala which influenced all spheres of life. Aryan missionaries made propaganda against Buddhism and Jainism and established their ideology both in religious and social life of the people. Simultaneously, the Brahmin immigrants started to construct Hindu temples in great extent to establish their religion. There was a drastic change in the social life of the people by the influence of Aryan dominance. The Aryan ideology primarily based on a *Chaturvarna* system which foisted on Sangam people who do not have the idea of caste. It is believed that the Brahmins started *yagas* and other ritual performances for the prosperity of local rulers by which they convinced their scholarship to the rulers. Thus “the local rulers might have influenced by the Brahmins

¹¹⁷ A Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History* (Kottayam: DC Books, 2007), pp.74-80.

by accepting their knowledge over Vedic literatures. In fact the Vedic Aryans established their supremacy in Kerala by defeating the Buddhist tradition.”¹¹⁸

This ownership of Brahmins and non- Brahmin ruling caste over land was very prevalent in ancient Kerala. The historical documents are available to understand the land ownership like *Brahmaswam* and *Deavswam*. The *Brahmaswam* is Brahmin property and *Devaswam* is the property to God but practically it was for temples. Interestingly, the Kerala history itself was silent on non-Brahmin agrarian relations. According to the historiography of Kerala the Pulayas were at the bottom part of agrarian society and there is no evidence about their wages or gift and this community does not have any right over the product which they produced. In fact the primary producers did not have right over the product in an agrarian based Kerala society. The surplus was produced by the peasants and other slave caste groups, but they were completely lacked the ownership of land. It assumes that there is a strong relationship of caste hierarchy in land relations of Kerala society and believed that the *Jenmis* of Kerala were the feudal aristocrats who had enormous landed property.

Brahmaswam and *Devaswam* were the two important ownership rights existed in Kerala and these ownership rights over the land emerged during the medieval Kerala. The *Brahmaswam* refers to properties held by Brahmins and their particular kind of rights over land called *Jenmam* rights. The word *Jenmam* rights denote the birthright to hold properties and the available evidence shows that a *Jenmam* right is of the family rather than individuals, this *Jenmam* rights do not bestow absolute ownership rights over land to the holder.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 88-91.

The *Jenmam* rights enabled the Brahmins to lease out their lands the, “*Brahmaswam* land had so many features that first of all the *Jenmam* rights is conditional, there was a multiplicity over it apart from *Jenmam* rights, this land was exempted from tax, subsequently liable to pay tax, the land subject to light tax. There were multiple rights on *Brahmaswam* land. Numerous rights were held by various groups on the same piece of land.”¹¹⁹ Moreover, the people who had *Jenmam* rights were permanently exempted from tax, and as a community the Brahmins only occupied such kind of rights during that medieval period. It can be argued that the special category called *Jenmam* right created the divisions among various classes and communities which made the tenant as dependent to the land lords.

The *Nampoori Brahmins* were the primary holders of right over the *Brahmaswam* land even if other tenant group also had the possession over such land. Though it called as *Brahmaswam* land the Brahmins did not have the absolute ownership rights over these lands. Essentially these lands were never given to other Brahmins or *Devaswam* by absolute sale. Even if it is alienated to the other caste for money matters, they had to pay ‘*rajabhogam*’. These lands were given for various tenures in different times, there were multiple rights over *Brahmaswam* land held by various groups for the same land. Thus, Under “*Kanapattom* tenure thousands of people occupied land for generation to build houses and churches and other improvements have done in the land since it was considered as a permanent tenure. There was no problem for the land owners if the tenant continues to pay the tax without fail.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ *Working Paper on Social Sciences* (Kottayam: School of Social Sciences, 1995), pp.114-115.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

Although, the Nampoori Brahmins were primary holders of the land bestowed to them, many caste groups have attached to the Brahmaswam land. But the Nampooris do not transfer the right of ownership to any other caste; as a result they have enjoyed all the benefits of land which has given them the *Jenmi* status along with priestly supremacy. This has historically reinforced the dominance of *Nampoori* Brahmins in Kerala. There was another type of tenancy right called *Kanom* which was based on tenant at will this rights might have given to sub-lease but it is not clear, however, in comparison with *Jenmam* rights the *Kanom* rights was not transferable, when the *Kanom* rights are mortgaged, then the revenue rights over the land alienated.

Under the *Kanom* tenancy the right of the tenant would not be disturbed if they pay their dues on time. In fact, the *Kanom* rights vary to different community on the basis of their relationship between the landlords. The malayala Sudras, “Nairs did not pay rent or *michavaram* fee called *Kanom* to the Brahmins though they got family allotment and household from Brahmins. Hence the Sudra caste did not cultivate the land instead they made it through serfs and slaves.”¹²¹ Thus, it can be argued that the various forms of tenancy rights placed the people into different strata which created the gradation among society. Interestingly, most of the tenancy right have occupied by the middle castes that gives more predominance to them to suppress the lower caste and slave castes in Kerala. To put it differently the tenancy right were the reason for the emergence of slavery and other severe forms of casteism in pre-modern Kerala.

The middle caste groups have mortgaged the *Kanom* rights to *Jenmi* and received them on lease by agreeing to pay rent as well as interest from the total production of land.

¹²¹ Ibid., 118.

Since “the *Kanaom* tenure was always in high due to its interest and lease on it. Thus it was a customary tenure as well as hereditary to middle caste in Kerala.”¹²² In fact both *Jenmam* land and *kanom* rights leased out to a group called ‘*Karalar*’ who were Sudra caste in Kerala. The *Karanma* system was existed in the temples and Brahmins land which allowed certain section of people to get the profit of these lands without working in the soil. It can be argued that though the means of production existed in the hands of few *Jenmi* castes but the right of tenancy leased out to various other castes except lower caste and slaves. As a result, the net profit has been accumulated in the hands of Nampoori Brahmins and their service caste in the name of lease and other tenancy rights. The supremacy over land has reflected in the political structure too, therefore the Nampoori *Jenmis* were able to possess enormous land in the name of *Brahmaswam* which gave them dignified life by that they suppress the lower caste in the society.¹²³

K. N. Ganesh observes that the different land tenure existed in Venatu region which is located in present day southern part of Kerala, stretching from Kallada in Kollam district to Kovalam in Kanyakumari district. The nature of land rights, Ganesh argues, undergone changes after thirteenth century and under *Karanmai* tenure the members of the ruling house and local chief transferred their land and temples is declined. Though the *Karanmai* tenure has declined other tenure like *pattom* became dominant lease with different varieties. *Pattom* tenure had various features which collected the share of the overlord called *melvaram* and another *pattakkanam* have collected from the garden lands.

¹²² Ibid., 120.

¹²³ Ibid., 122.

After thirteenth century, under *kanom* tenure the land transaction has done through lease-cum-mortgage tenure which increased substantially. It is believed that “the large scale *Kanom* transactions had happened between members of the ruling family and major temples like the Padmanabha temple of Thiruvananthapuram. *Kanom* tenure has continued and renewed for centuries and the ruling house has given it out to the ordinary peasants. In fact, around 160 people hold tenure rights under *Kanom* in Thiruvananthapuram which is also known as *adhikaram*. *Kanom* transactions were not only limited to the food-crop regions but also house sites, gardens growing coconut, fruit growing trees also mortgaged. *Kanom* tenure also found in association with other tenure called *Kulikkanam*.”¹²⁴

Historical evidences are available to prove that the tenure rights have concentrated in the hands of few elite sections in the society. In Kerala, it has proved that the ruling families have controlled the temple property and same groups transacted their *Kanom* rights for their livelihood as well as engagements in the temple centered economy. Since, the untouchability and other forms of caste system were rigid, the lower caste has no entry into temple therefore they might have lost their right over tenancy like *Kanom*. Despite the various tenure rights available they utterly failed to give any possibility to lower caste and slaves to enter into the temple related economy that resulted in forceful exclusion from the property relations which continuing even in the modern Kerala social formation.

¹²⁴ K. N. Ganesh, “Land Rights and Political Structure in Medieval India,” in *National seminar on State and Society in Pre-Modern South India*, P.G Department of History, Sri.Achutha Menon Government College, Trissur, Edited by R. Champakalakshmy, Kesavan Veluthat and T.R. Venugopalan (Trissur: Cosmo Books, 2002), pp.145-155.

The tenures like *pattom*, *kanam*, *kulikkanam* had different features of rights over property especially on the land. To put it differently, the tenure rights made the people to possess various rights under same property which fixed their social status and political supremacy. Initially the hierarchy over land or property emerged in the food crop regions which controlled or mediated by temples and Brahmins. However, the emergence of these tenures, “two tendencies have happened that, the tenant become very rich and temple and royal servants acquired more lands. Since the cash crops also produced under the *kanom* tenure forest land also might have converted as garden lands. The tenure holdings have given different right over the property from land lords to peasants including temples, therefore the right over the land or property had divided on the basis of tenure which specifically mentioned and classified land and its rights.”¹²⁵ The developments of *Kanom* tenure indicated that the cash crops like coconut, areca and pepper were spreading, therefore the people had the tenancy right called *kanom* could accumulate money.

By the emergence of garden lands as well as food crop regions, there the changes happened in the form of hierarchy in land holding and its rights. The famous ruling family called Attingal had large shares of land called *pandaravakai* which means it belongs to treasury and *etavakai* which is for royal relatives. The ruling families have occupied these lands through their tenure rights and the transaction with temple lands. The largest landholders, in fact, were the temples, like Padmanabha temple in Thiruvananthapuram and Sucindram temple which are located in the southern Kerala. Apart from temples the Nampoori Brahmins and Malayali Brahmins controlled most

¹²⁵ Ibid., 149.

parts of lands, along with this; the Brahmins also established their aryanization process by getting political supremacy over people.

Since they were owners of the property it was very easy for them to segregate the people by fixing their work in relation to land. Arguably, the rigid caste hierarchy has developed initially in land rights which given enormous power as well as dominance to the Brahmins. The ruling families' engagements in land were also the reason for their dominance and political power. In fact, the non-Brahman landlords were disappeared and became the subordinate to the ruling house and temples, or they might have become servants of temples and ruling houses, hence, there are no evidences of the non-Brahmins landlords in Kerala.

Most of the people “either *pattom* or *kanom* holders of that period who paid their tax called *varam* and other things which required by landlords. The primary producers were *Atiyalar* who were transferred along with land who provided their labour service to the landlords and *pattom* holders.”¹²⁶ There is a clear division of society on the basis of occupation which organizes people into different caste categories. The *Atiyalar* groups were treated as the properties for landlords or *kanom* holders. Since they were treated as landless, the *Atiyalar* might have confronted the problems such as lack of dignity and right at that point of time. The land patterns and the land ownership in particular along with intermediaries forced the *Atiyalar* caste groups as the properties of *Jenmis* and *kanom* holders.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Ibid., 150.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 151.

Further, it is argued that the land pattern was the main reason for the formation of caste based society in Kerala which made *Atiyalar* as the menial workers of the land. Thus the primary producers became the landless laborers without any rights over the land whereas; the people who owned land have accumulated wealth as well as social status. This historical process of accumulating wealth in the hands of few people has rightly described by Marx and Engels in communist manifesto. They have explained that the people who are doing wage labor has no right over the property; therefore, the bourgeoisie makes profit out of the surplus of the labor.

In fact, the Marxism says that the wage labor does not create value for labors; instead it produces capital by the exploitation of labor. Capital cannot increase unless it exploits the laborers, therefore, whenever the labor increases capital also increases. Thus, it says that simply an individual cannot become a capitalist or it's not being purely personal and also it is a social status by involving in production. Hence, the capital is a collective product and motion that depends upon the members of the society. Therefore, capital is a social force, Marxism gives a different dimension of property in the context of capital, that even if the capital converts into common property into the members of the society, the personal property is not transferred as social property. But finally the character of the property may change; also it loses its class character.¹²⁸

The *Atiyalar* caste groups, in Kerala, who worked as the labor force to landlords, have produced the capital for the needs of the society. Since, the majority of the *Atiyalar* caste groups belonged to the ex-untouchable castes and they might have faced dual

¹²⁸ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Communist Manifesto* (Malayalam), (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), pp.23-25.

discrimination. As a labor they have been exploited by upper caste landlords on the other hand they were ill-treated on the basis of their caste too. The Kerala Brahmin capitalist has not only exploited the economic labor of the peasantry, but also their religious life, which placed the Brahmins on the top of social hierarchy as capitalist as well as dominant social caste. Thus, the power hierarchies in Kerala have divided into four like, Naduvazhi, Desavazhi, Karalar and *Atiyalar*.¹²⁹

Naduvazhi was the most powerful position in this system which consists of many Desom (regions). Desavazhi had the supervisory control over Karalar, and the Karalar were the tenants of land owned by Desavazhi, Brahmins and Temples. *Atiyalar* were slaves who worked in the soil without any right. Land owning Brahmins were known as Uralar who occupied the ownership right over land and temples. In medieval Kerala, the Uralar has given the tenant right to the Karalar which created the land lord Naduvazhi system in Kerala. The Karalar were Nayars and the domination of both Brahmins and Nayars were the reason for the formation of Jenmi system in Kerala. Since the formation of intermediary castes like Karalar, the entire land pattern was aggregated on the basis of land ownership. In this hierarchy, the most vulnerable group was *Atiyalar* who, directly attached to the soil, also forcefully worked on the land for food production.

Since the Naduvazhis and Karalar required more production, all the burden of workload satisfied by *Atiyalar* castes. The wage of the *Atiyalar* caste is unknown in most of the historical writing, while the statistics available for Brahma swam and Devaswam land about their total production. As Karl Marx and Engels explained the *Atiyalar* caste faced discrimination for wage therefore their workload benefited for the landlords in Kerala.

¹²⁹ K. N. Ganesh, "Land Rights and Political Structure in Medieval India", p.150.

Thus the social division over land rights created the division of labor which was mediated by the caste system.

Various tenure rights formulated among Karalar caste, therefore the division of labor might have required for the food production. But it could be argued that there was not only mere division of labor instead laborers themselves divided on the basis of caste. For example, the Karalar was the tenant group but they did not cultivate in the land, but they forced other caste to cultivate for food production and to satisfy the Uralar as well. Thus, “the primary producing group belonged to different castes called Ilavar, Canrar, Pulayar and so on. Generally, these castes were the *Atiyalar* for the temples and ruling families. Ilavar and Canrar enjoyed relative independence because they were associated with cash crops, but the Pulayar and Parayar were held as part of property even in Pandaravakai lands.”¹³⁰

The castes like Ilavar and Caliyar held the relative position in society not only associated with caste also they acquired tenancy right in subsequent period. Since Pulayar and Parayar forcefully attached with soil for the food production, they could not achieve any tenure rights in caste based society because they were treated as labor force for landlords. Here the fact is that the Paulayar and Parayar were treated as property of *Jenmis* therefore never got an autonomous right over themselves to achieve space in land relation. These complex dual liabilities towards landlords made the *Atiyalar* in general and Pulayar and Parayar in particular into more vulnerable labor force in temple centered economy. It is very clear that “there was no monolithic land relation existed in Kerala. The gradation has changed from cash crop to food crop regions. There was diverse caste

¹³⁰ K. N. Ganesh, *Land Rights and Political Structure in Medieval India*, p.151.

relation existed in midland and coastal region. It is believed that that fisherman in the coastal region has autonomous right when it compares to untouchable caste. The landlords and temples always tried to control the labors under their supremacy and it was both judicial and ideological forms, the right over land and the political supremacy located under this system of control.”¹³¹

Along thus with economic control of the production, the caste has also acquired the ideological domination. The *Jenmis* of Kerala became more powerful not only through the achievements of capital but also the caste domination. Since the caste system was more rigid the labor cannot crack their barriers unlike the labor in the European context. The caste system forcefully made certain section of the laborers as mere operative which was assigned as their caste duty to perform or to serve for higher caste. K. K. Kochu observes that the *Karanma*, *Pattaom*, and *Otti* emerged and it was not separated in the beginning but the strong land relation emerged in Kerala which continued till the modern period. He further criticizes the Marxist interpretation of Kerala history especially about the landlord system.

K. K. Kochu says that “till 9th century AD there was different land relation existed in Kerala, which indicates that there was no centralized power structure controlled the land, land relation in general. But after 12th century temple documents say the temple became the most powerful land controller like *Devaswam*, *Brahmaswam*, *Cherickal* etc. Along with this the *pattom* (lease) became an important activity in land relation.”¹³² He

¹³¹ Ibid., 151.

¹³² K.K.Kochu, *Kerala Charithravum Samooharoopikaranavum* (Kerala History and the Social Formation), (Thiruvananthapuram: The State Institute of Language, 2012), pp.290-300.

concludes that, “therefore this change in the land relation was not merely economically dominant landlordism but it was economically dominated caste system.”¹³³

Thus there is a paradigm shift from the traditional analysis of land relations in Kerala, the interpretation on the basis of economically dominant caste system. Most of the analysis on the agrarian relations in Kerala connected with *Jenmi* system which has given more importance to production. It can be argued that the dominance of Brahmins and Nayars in Kerala not only emerged through *Jenmi* system but also they economically dominated by creating agrestic slavery, the caste domination functioned even in temple related activities where the *Atiyalar* caste groups were excluded from its structure. It is clear that the laws of *Smritis* especially the laws of *Manusmriti* have been operated in the social structure to exclude certain section of the people on the basis of purity and pollution. Therefore, even if the *Atiyalar* caste groups have the right to hold the tenancy, their social conditions were backward.

Hence the dominance of temple and Brahmins in the medieval period cannot be read simply on the basis of production relation, since it is totally connected to the caste hierarchy in Kerala. The caste has operated as an additional benefit to the Uralar and Karalar and the role of caste in exploiting their labor force to get maximum surplus from the production is abundantly evident. The people who worked cash crop region obviously got relaxation as the cultivation had done annually, but the Pulayar and Parayar were attached the soil ever since the production of food was daily activity. Moreover, the ideology of *Manusmriti* had an important role in the temple centered

¹³³ Ibid.

economy which has given enormous right to the higher caste to occupy land and other rights.¹³⁴

The land relations by the 12th century AD were divided into four categories more visibly. Firstly, the *Brahmaswam* land (Brahmin Land), secondly, the *Devaswam* land (Temple land), thirdly, the *Cherickal* land/*Pandaravakai* land (Royal Land), lastly the *Viruthi Bhoomi* (Allotted Land). Brahmaswam land was directly controlled by Brahmins where in Devaswam was under Uralars, who were the trustees of the temple. Uralars were Brahmins therefore the Brahmaswam and Devaswam were under the control of Brahmin landlords. Cherickal land belonged to the Naduvazhi or King and Viruthi Bhoomi used for temple Kashakam. Karalar was the caste groups played an important role in all these lands as tenant, the Karalar was the operational groups connected with Brahmins, Temples and *Atiyalar*. These lands were cultivated through pattom, Kanam and so on. And they have to give a share to the landlords as well as *Atiyalar*. Hence the caste background of Karalar is a debatable question but most of the history writers placed them as Nayars.¹³⁵

K. K. Kochu further argues that the Karalar were not *Jenmis* or feudal lords, owned tenure rights like Kanom for cultivating the land but they were not land owners. Therefore, the Karalar has continued their social dominance by controlling *Atiyalar* caste. The different people were there in Karalar's land who have done physical activities and other works related to agriculture. Further, the people called *Panimakkal* (labor force) received share at the time of harvest and also received the pattom for

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

temples divided among them. Since the wealth has accumulated in the hands of temple and Brahmins the importance of production also increased, therefore agriculture got more importance than land without much advancement in agriculture. Thus, “the Karalar has no ownership right over land; therefore, they could not modify the agriculture sector with irrigation, modern equipment and so on. As a result, they have exploited the labor force to the maximum level for more production by negating the basics necessities of Atiyalar caste. Nevertheless though the Karalar was not land owning caste, they themselves converted as an exploitative group in Kerala economy.”¹³⁶

The *Atiyalar* were exploited menial workers of the land who were treated as the properties of landlord's. Thus, it is debatable that whether they were slaves or the slavery attached them to get more production for the *Jenmis*. It can be argued that, temple related activities made it as sanctified one but those who detached from it considered as lower caste or their work considered as awful. Though the majority of labor force came from Pulayar but there were other communities also participated in the agriculture activities. Increasing cultivation of paddy in the food crops region, required division of work force, once the economy transformed these jobs became traditional occupations which have no sanctity since it is away from the temple related activity. This non-sanctity of the labor was the reason for the division of labors in society also it treated as the labor force as untouchable caste groups.¹³⁷

Devaswam refers to the properties of religious institutions. *Devaswam* lands were granted for God, but in reality it was the part of temple, therefore, the historians say that

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

there were many groups to manage the *Devaswam* land called *Ganas*, the Brahmins were exclusive members of this *Gana*. However, there were many caste groups who survive with the *Devaswam* land and the caste groups who got land from *Devaswam* did not cultivate it and in turn they leased it to the *Karalar*, the *Karalar* groups were not directly involved to agriculture since they were tenants for Brahmaswam land. It also had the *jenmam* rights over land.

Devaswam, thus, possessed extensive landed property which was called “*Sreepandaravaka*” which belonging to the holy treasury as stated earlier the Sree Padmanabha Swami Temple comes under this land system. The *Sabhayar* had great control over land and they were the custodians of temple holdings. In Travancore state “the Hindu temple had enormous land as the part of *Devaswam* property. The managers had to pay certain dues to the royal authorities who protected the temple and temple land.”¹³⁸ The *Devaswam* land cannot be confiscated by the ruling class. In fact, the priestly class might have benefitted such type of land arrangements, thus the Hindu temple could possess such a huge tract of land through various rights.

Evidence suggests that the *Dharmasastras* has given the authority to hold the large tracts of the land by Brahmins; in fact *Dharmasastras* did not allow the Sudras, lower caste and women to hold any property rights. Therefore, the roots of *Jenmi* system connected with *Smritis* cannot be problematized by the traditional analyses of land relation in Kerala. The temples enjoyed lot of revenue from the land owned Brahmins, Crown land also endowed to the temples therefore full authority of the land was concentrated in the hand of Brahmins which gave more political power over people including Kings. Thus

¹³⁸ Ibid., 116.

the Brahmins were the proprietors of *Devaswam* land, large share of the land was controlled by them, and the non-Brahmin people have also transferred their property to Brahmins for two reasons, “one was to get exception from taxation and other one is spiritual to get *moksha*. Every day their areas of land have increased and the majority of land they have achieved through *Jenmam* rights which sanctioned the Brahmins to get property as their birth right.”¹³⁹ In Travancore, temples were commonly constructed with endowed property and the revenue of the temples used to meet the expenses like worship, festivals and feeding of Brahmins. The management of the temple property belonged to Uralar and in many of the cases they mismanaged the temple property and became the *Jenmis* of that land.

Sri Padmanabha Swami temple which belonged to Trippappur Swaroopam holds extensive lands in fact the Swaroopam was the power center in the hierarchical setup, further they have used other power structure like Desavazhi, Karalar and *Atiyalar* for their own supremacy. The *Devaswam* land managed by Yogakkars who had control over temple property and every one of the tenants were the holders of *Devaswam* land. Thus it is proved that the “Hindu temples in Travancore had large tracts of land which cultivated by tenants on the basis of rent. Also temple authority paid dues to the royal family to protect the temple and its property.”¹⁴⁰

Brahmins could achieve the large tracts of the land in Travancore and other parts of Kerala, promoting the idea of *moksha*, thus the caste and spiritual supremacy were the reason for the landlord system in Kerala. Therefore, the formation of Jenmi system

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ *Working Paper on Social Sciences*, p.116.

simply cannot connect with economic dominance of land relation in Kerala alone; it is also a social, the caste dominance and hierarchy. The tenure right called Karanmai, the Karalar groups were remitted their dues in the form of paddy to the temples, the normal share of the temples from the Karalar was either 1/3 or 1/5 of the production. The Karanmai right were hereditary but at the same time there were restriction to the individual Brahmins to possess the Karanmai rights and the temple was recharging by giving away the Karanmai rights to Karalar and Kudimai rights to the artisans respectively to retain the property right Uranmai.¹⁴¹

The Brahmins occupied higher status in all Malabar, Cochin and Travancore regions that is why the land relations in these regions have many similarities. In Malabar, the land system which connected with the caste domination can be explained saying that the Brahmins were not only on the top of the social order but also they were the dominant land owners who possessed the absolute ownership right. Majority of cultivable and uncultivable land have controlled by *Jenmis* in this region. Nayars were second position who had superior tenancy right called Kanom and the Kanom and Pattom were the common land tenure which existed all over Kerala. Ezhavas has the third position in land relation and had the right called Verumpattakkaran means a lower tenant in the system. Agriculture labours were at the bottom, and most of them belonged to slave caste groups. The Karalar groups transferred their holdings to lower tenant since they had permanent tenure rights over land, the Izhavas were tenant-at will without any rights over the holdings. K. K. Kochu rejects the dominant arguments that the Karalar were Nayars, argues that “many caste-religious people had the ownership right in medieval times,

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

therefore the arguments that the Karalar as Nayars is a deliberate attempt to place them as the dominant political class in Kerala. The traditional Sudra historians have begun this reading to establish their own caste as a politically affluent class in the history of Kerala.”¹⁴² The *Brahmaswam* and *Devaswam* first mentioned in Malabar during 10th century which means it was formed around this period, however, in Venat it was formed in the period of 12th century, when the dominance of the Perumals was diminished while fighting with the Naduvaazhi for the power.

In Cochin, the land ownership almost similar to Malabar, even then the state tried to control it directly; therefore, they have reduced the power of chieftains. By the eighteenth century around forty percentage of the cultivable land was under the control of state, and rest of the land belonged to private landlords. In Travancore, where majority of the cultivable land under the control of state and the *jenman* tenants faced terrible condition across the state. Jenmam tenants’ groups were minority in Travancore and Cochin and they were majority in Malabar. Compare to Malabar, the conditions of the peasants were good in Travancore in terms of obligation, therefore they have got more incentives in modern period. Moreover, land rights were an important factor in the economic structure of Kerala which has divided the people on the basis of ownership.

Ownership of the land was the base for the social status, the precious form of wealth and also the symbol of power. Along with land, caste was the other rank which decided the superiority or inferiority in the society. P Shungoonny Menon observes that, “Devaswam possessed immense wealth and landed property, and they enact the rules and regulations to manage the huge tracts of land. It is believed that the Devaswam tenants were at the

¹⁴²K. K. Kochu, *Kerala Charithravum Samooaharoopikaranavum*, p.297.

mercy of Devaswam community. Generally the King did not interfere into the affairs of Devaswam and Brahmaswam land.”¹⁴³ The temple based agrarian economy was formed in medieval period by the establishment of Brahmin settlement in Kerala and the appropriation of the surplus production has been the crucial reason for the new temple centric economy which resulted in absolute ownership right to the Brahmins.

Since land is the principal matter in the process of production which determined the various relations of production in the land, it is clearly evident that the land and caste are interlinked in a complex manner in pre-modern Kerala society. The monopoly of the Devaswam and Brahmaswam formed a huge division in land relation, the landless people as tillers of the land with the tenure rights; the intermediary caste got an opportunity to involve relations of production. The royal families, Swaroopams, and caste were the deciding factors of power which also controlled the relations of production. “The extension of plough agriculture demanded permanent labor force that resulted the formation of the caste system. To hold the dominance over labour Brahmins made the labour into extreme servility. But no doubt that the Brahmins and ruling families joined together to extract more surplus from the labours.”¹⁴⁴

To comprehend the genesis of the caste system in Kerala, the very idea of a permanent labour force is an unacceptable fact. In an agrarian society, the Dalit critique is differentiated when it comes to the permanent labour force. They claim that there were no *Atiyalar* who labored as indentured servants for no pay. There were Kutiyalar who used their work power to dwell in *Jenmis* country. The Kutiyalar were from various

¹⁴³ P. Shungoonny Menon. *History of Travancore from the Earliest Times* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1998), p.80.

¹⁴⁴ M.P.Mujeebu Rehiman, “Formation of Society and Economy in Malabar 1750-1810” (Ph.D, University of Calicut, 2009), pp.60-68.

castes and did not own any land to cultivate. It is claimed that because the Kutiyalar did not assert ownership rights like the Karalar, they may have been subjected to terrible servitude by the dominating caste *Jenmis*. As a result, certain mediaeval land records mention thalavila, mulavila taxes for the Kutiyalar caste, implying that they could pay such taxes to the landlords even if they were landless laborers. 'If a laborer works in *Jenmis* land without a wage, he or she will certainly be unable to pay such taxes. As a result, imagining a permanent labour force with no rights may be a mistake in interpreting the social existence of the *Atiyalar* caste groups in Kerala.¹⁴⁵

The caste had been the basic determinant; it enabled to acquire property and other forms of wealth in Travancore. Historical suggests that there was a perfect combination temple and temporal authorities in extracting the tax from the lower castes out of their meagre wage earnings. The temple authorities by the help of Rajas imposed and collected, along with land tax, variety of taxes on the body parts of the lower caste like Thalakkaram (head-count tax) and Mulakkaram (breast tax), such taxes were exempted for other dominant castes like Nayars. The head taxes were counted from untouchables between the age group of sixteen to sixty. There were number of such tax collected by Rajas of Travancore which concentrated in the vaults of the temples. Roopvari, Aandakazhcha, Kuppakakzhcha, mudi eduppu, alankaram, kaikooli, thankasseri velikettu, munduvechu thozhal, ezhavathi, Mannanmattuvari, Kachappanam, thirukal-yanam taxes from the lower caste.

M. S. Jayaprakash observes that, "It won't be an exaggeration to say that Travancore economy was a kind of breast tax economy. There is a shocking episode in the history of

¹⁴⁵ K. K. Kochu, *Kerala Charithravum Samooharoopikaranavum*, p.298.

Cherthala (a place in Alleppey district in Kerala) an Ezhava lady chopped her breasts and presented them on a banana leaf before the tax officials who came to collect breast tax. The piece of land where her house situated is still known as ‘Mulalchiparambu’ i. e, ‘breast-land’ (‘mula’ in Malayalam means breast).¹⁴⁶ Thus it is noticed that the huge tracts of wealth concentrated in temples is not just because of the agrarian economy, but there was severe other taxes which collected by the Travancore Raja for Sri Padmanabha temple. Therefore, agrarian economy was not only the reason for the formation of caste system in Kerala, especially in Travancore region but also exploitation of lower castes based on their social position.¹⁴⁷

The lower castes, in Kerala, could not possess resources due to forced labour and multiple castigatory tenacious taxes imposed on them by the temple authorities and rulers as well. As a result, their condition had become worse and more vulnerable than other resourceful caste groups. Kerala, by 12th century, became agrarian based economy in which land was the prime means of production, linked to the production relation. Since land is the most important aspect for the production, the ownership of land gets more attention. The owner of the land was the King but practically it was divided among various land lords. There were Brahmin and non-Brahmin settlements and non-Brahmin land was not gifted by rulers. Thus the non-Brahmin settlements have taken over by others and setup Devaswam land. Interestingly the people who have associated with temples for any works like Kooth, Vaadyam, Bhagavatha Parayanam were given land called *Virutti*. The “people who have associated with land did not cultivate the land also they have their land to the Karalar for cultivation. Here the fact is, whoever assisted the

¹⁴⁶ M. S. Jayaprakash, “The Padmanabha Swami Temple Myth and Reality,” *The Modern Rationalist*, (2011): p.73, Accessed on November 23, 2017, www.themodernrationalist.com

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

temple related works gifted with land and their occupation considered as a sanctified profession.”¹⁴⁸

Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier observe that, *Atiyalar* were the last groups in the chain of production relation in Kerala and, Pulayas were the *Atiyalar* and there is no mention about their wage. Since they were last section of the people in the agrarian economy they were denied right over the product. Paddy was the main cultivation in Kerala and the people attached with paddy had to work for an entire year for the production as the permanent labour forces. It has become common practice that the Pulayas were transferred along with the land whenever it was transferred to others and the Pulayar were the foremost *paniyal* (workers) groups in that land along with other artisans.

In the process of production, initially Karalar collects paddy from the *Atiyalar* and this is the first phase of distribution, in this stage an amount of paddy redistributed for the labour class and others who indirectly related to the production. In the second stage the product goes to the land lords and they share their resources to their relatives and dependents. “The Landlord has given a share to the Naduvazhi in the redistribution process. Moreover, temples were the largest accumulating centre of resources which has come through pattom and kanom rights. Majority of the Brahmin temples were very rich in terms of accumulating paddy especially in river valleys. A large share of paddy has spent for feeding Brahmins.”¹⁴⁹

There are few other arguments about Pulayas that they were the agricultural labour grouped as field labours. The field labours remained as agrestic slaves till the middle of

¹⁴⁸ Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier, *Kerala Charithram (Kerala History)*, (Shukapuram: Vallathol Vidyapeedam 1991), p.112.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 120.

the nineteenth century. They have tilled the land without having any right over it. K. Saradamoni quotes Buchanan, “the ‘chermas (Pulayar) are absolute property: they are part of the livestock on an estate. In selling and buying land it is not necessary that they should follow the soil: both kinds of property are equally disposable and may fall into different hands. The chermas may be sold, leased, or mortgaged like the land itself, or like cattle or thing. Further he says the husband and wife were not sold separately. Thus children could be separated from the parents and between themselves.”¹⁵⁰ It is believed that the Pulaya castes were part of process of production but they did not have any right over themselves since they were the property of others. Thus, the *Atiyalar* castes paid different tax to the Travancore Rajas in the medieval times, it is debatable question how they were able to pay such tax as the history categorised them as mere agrestic slaves. Hence they were not allowed to possess the land and or any other valuable property; therefore, they may not have any other option to choose except forced labour.

The agrestic servitude of Pulayas may not be applicable to all Pulayas because there was patron client relationship that existed. Joseph Tharamangalam observes, that “strong personal bondage and loyalty existed between Pulayas and their masters. The idealised version of Pulayas responsibility for their master’s property is an example of the relationship between them. But the bondage with their masters was terrible in most of the cases and they had to work for the land owner according to their requirements. Along with that the labour castes have to do all other odd job to the masters, and there was no

¹⁵⁰ Francis Buchanan, “Slavery: Letter from the Government of India dated 8.2.1841, with Report of Indian Law Commissioners.” in K. Saradamoni, *Emergence of a Slave Caste: Pulayas of Kerala*, (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1980), p.52.

payment for such jobs. Moreover caste prejudices has controlled the social relationship.”¹⁵¹

Caste and untouchability has practised in society. There were three categories of slave caste and considered as out caste: Pulayas, Parayas and Kuravas and there was a relative value for slaves in pre modern Kerala. In fact, the category called agrestic slave is a European category applied by the European travellers and slavery existed in second half of the Nineteenth century. The emergence of private property resulted landed aristocracy who controlled the means of production, therefore, the social condition created the slave to cultivate the land in the process of production. This peculiar landed aristocracy created the three forms of social relation, “On the top of this system placed by *Jenmis* had absolute ownership, next to that Kudiyan and slave caste at the bottom. But unfortunately the Jenmi-Kudiyan system did not give any attention to the labour caste; also the landlords met their expenses by exploiting labour. This caste ridden aristocracy created such labour divisions which gave enormous power to higher caste.”¹⁵²

The prevailed social relations led to the concentration of the properties in the hands of few caste groups. P. Sivanandan observes that the economic basis of slavery can be traced back as early as the origin of private property and accumulation of wealth in Kerala. Applying Marxian perspective, Sivanandan says that the class division characterised by the development of field cultivation that took the form of caste division destroying the primitive communal society and the division of society happened in the ninth century, stimulated by Chera Empire. Those who occupy more wealth became the higher caste and those who did not categorised as lowest in the social formation.

¹⁵¹ Joseph Tharamangalam, *Agrarian Class Conflict* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), p.55.

¹⁵² K. K. Ramachandran Nair, *Slavery in Kerala* (Bombay: Mittal Publications, 1986), p.35

Brahmins succeeded establishing their supremacy over others and given privileges to other castes which supported them.¹⁵³

Chathurvarna system becomes more prevalent which, subjugated, degraded and divided the labours, the Pulayas and Cherumars were lowest. Thus, on the basis of social and economic privilege each community enjoyed and had various production relations like ownership of land, involvement of trade and commerce etc. There are arguments, however, saying that Kerala society had never undergone the Chathurvarna system like other parts of India. Marxian scholar like E.M.S. Namboodiripad (E. M. S) observes that the caste in India conceals the essences of class division. He argues that the “caste system in India fit into the social organisation called in the Marxist terminology called primitive communism, slavery, and feudalism. There are many elements of tribal organisation can be seen in the caste organisation. Caste was a social organisation therefore the society could not completely outlive from that. Hence the caste is superimposed on tribal society which established the superiority and inferiority within the caste to serve the purpose of division between slaves and owners. When the society transformed from slave to feudal caste has covered up the social relations.”¹⁵⁴

E.M.S further argues that the caste system in India has positive and negative elements. Europe moved from feudalism to capitalism but Indian caste hierarchy unable to catch it. In India the caste operates as monotonous repetitions so one has to do the same job for generation after generation. Hence the absence of trading caste in Kerala shows that the production for the market was insignificant in the social life of the people and the social

¹⁵³ P. Sivanandan, “Economic backwardness of Harijans in Kerala,” *Social Scientist*, Vol 4, No.10, (1976), pp.3-28.

¹⁵⁴ E. M. S. Namboodiripad, *History, Society, and Land Relations: Selected Essays* (New Delhi: Left Word Books, 2010), p.82.

evolution had happened in the form of caste stratification only. The transformation of land, land lord tenant relation, land revenue and other taxes during the British colonialism added misery to the rural population, the people had to suffer because of the slow emergence of capitalist formation, therefore, the pauperisation happened because of this prolonged process which did not leave any caste groups. Since the capitalisation process was very slow the people had to attach with their traditional jobs which made them into more miserable conditions.¹⁵⁵

Different perspective narrated about the formation of caste, some argue that the division of labour were the reason for the formation of caste system but others opined that this was the division of society based on a value system. It can be argued that the basis of caste system connected to the bondage between work and value system. The temple related activities were considered as holy and higher in social status others categorised as the lowest and menial strata. The ritual supremacy made the Brahmins on the top of the hierarchy, to hold that higher status, created the untouchability among people with the help of Sastras. But, the division of labour was inevitable in the social formation process and occupational divisions have been continued as a traditional job for all caste groups in Kerala.

Another argument about unequal property mobilisation is associated with Chera Chola war in 10th century A.D. Since the Nampoothiris Brahmin were top in the social hierarchy helped Kulasekhara to fight against Chola's attack. The educational institution called *Salai* which was the place for Vedic studies converted into military centres. Thus this war increased the social and economic power of Brahmins, because in 9th and 10th centuries many people have gifted and donated the land to the temple and educational

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 88-90.

institution which were controlled by Brahmins. The requirement of war landlordism reshaped Kerala's land relation. Nampoothiris were the trustees of the temples during those period enjoyed landed properties, endowments and revenues. The ordinary peasants who owned land and other properties transferred to Brahmins to have an exception of tax from the state however later these lands made it over as Brahmaswam and Devaswam lands. Thus, "this newly accrued economic status made the Brahmins is powerful in Kerala, under this circumstances the Jenmi system emerged in Kerala. By the time Jainism and Buddhism disappeared and Hindu society was formed on the basis of caste."¹⁵⁶

Historical evidence suggests that, in the Sangham period, there was no division among the people based on Chaturvarna or caste. The Arya Brahmins affiliated with the farmers in Tamil Nadu where they had established their power by making an affiliation with warrior caste in Kerala. With the support of this warrior *gotra* they have protected the temple and collected land for temples, gold, and paddy from Rajas, Naduvazhis and local chiefs. The Brahmins became a dominant political force by achieving property and knowledge dominance. The caste system was formed in Kerala when the Hindu *Dharmasastras* attached with Dravidian customs. The "Brahmin migration happened by seventh or eighth centuries, by that time untouchability might have begun to practice Kerala. The huge land ownership of temples, surplus wealth and its distribution were the reason for the formation of caste system in Kerala."¹⁵⁷ Therefore the formation of caste system cannot be easily connected with agrarian economy; it also associated with the domination of Vedic Brahmins, Knowledge hierarchy and so on.

¹⁵⁶ A Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History*, pp.135-140.

¹⁵⁷ K K. Kochu, *Kerala Charithravum Samooharoopikaranavum*, p.297.

Kerala undergone the Vedic tradition and it influenced the people in various level, the Smritis, Vedangas got importance in the society, the people got high ritual status by learning it, also it helped to get the supreme position in social relation. By 8th century Sankaras' Advaita Darshana became famous and he was the representative of the people who have completely involved in the studies of Vedas. "Sankara has given that epistemological world view of the Brahmin land lords who were socially dominant during that period."¹⁵⁸ The people who dedicated for Vedic studies themselves assigned work to others in their own land to earn profit. The knowledge engagement became a reality with the surplus income and enormous land tracts achieved by the help of Sastras. In fact, *Atiyalar's* labour force was used for the extensive production by which the Uralar had got surplus time for knowledge related activities and the same labours became untouchable by the Sastra rule. Thus, by the help of *Dharmasastras*, the caste law was enforced and it made the social relations is more rigid. Here the fact is the ideology became more prevalent which directly involved in the relations of production. Compare to other states in India, there is no much evidence for the land grants to the temples or Brahmins by the King. Even in the absence of such land grants the Brahmins become land owners in Kerala with the help of agrarian economy and dominance of caste ideology as well. Sankara's Vedanta made the Nampoori Brahmins equal to God propagated tried to prove that the ultimate knowledge is Vedas by which they have appropriated the new religious traditions of Bhakti movements into Hindu fold.

Secondly, by the help of this philosophy they have controlled all the temples which were constructed during the time of Sankara, received gifts and other items from the Naduvazhis and local people. The temples became very dominant and controlled the

¹⁵⁸ Rajan Gurukkal, *Aspects of Early Iron Age Economy*, p.193.

entire societal relation headed by Brahmins. Sankara created sixty-four customs which divided the Kerala society on the basis of caste and Brahmins set their domestic life by internalising it. Thus the Sankarasmriti, has created a social condition which is temple centric also given dominance to Brahmins. Further, “these 64 customs became the essential part of caste system which influenced the political structure too. Hence it de promoted the techno scientific knowledge as well as the expansion of trade and agriculture. In short Sankara tied to keep the medieval society under caste system which completely destroyed the social progress in Kerala.”¹⁵⁹ Therefore, the present difficulties of the lower castes especially the Dalits might be a setback of ideological dominance by land owned communities.

The social dominance of the higher caste in Kerala is merely connected to the ownership of land and production relation. Thus the land and caste determined the relations of property system in Kerala, the dominant caste groups acquired properties in the process of production but the primary producers were excluded from the ownership right especially in medieval times. Temple centric agrarian economy created the occupational division among the people which was materialised by Sastras. Large majority of land came under the Brahmaswam, Devaswam, and Cherickal, controlled by Brahmin landlords, resulting forcing the lower section of the people as landless labour. V. K. Ramachandran observes “land system and caste system are closely connected, therefore there were close link between agrarian relation and marriage and the family system. Subsequently, hierarchies of land ownership, caste, and ritual purity overlapped. But the ritually inferior’s caste had to bore the double burdens of caste and class, As a result the

¹⁵⁹ K. K. Kochu, *Kerala Charithravum Samooharoopikaranavum*, pp.240-241.

untouchable caste groups faced oppression and subjected to slavery also faced various forms of bondage and slavery even after the formal abolition of slavery.”¹⁶⁰

The ritual hierarchy directly reflected in Kerala’s land relation, also it determined the power, wealth and supremacy. Moreover, the land tenure system of Kerala was very complex and there were twenty-eight different tenures existed. One of the *Atiyalar* castes, the Pulayar was ancestral property and they attached with plot. By the formation of agrarian cum temple centred economy the caste groups were divided like service caste and temple castes. The service castes like washer man, artisan, and barbers had to perform their duties according to the requirements. Since “the caste system was so rigid the lower caste did not liberate themselves from the oppression and caste ties. Ritual hierarchy reflected in the economic position too.”¹⁶¹ The caste was historically rigid, gained economic power with the ritual supremacy. The higher castes, in Kerala, achieved economic power by the super imposition over the non-Brahmin land which made them as the proprietors of the large land tracts.

The medieval Kerala is characterised as the *Jati-Jenmi-Naduvazhi* system, temple centric agrarian economy influenced the socio-economic and cultural life of the people, land and the caste ideology determined social relations, ideological reproduction of the caste system reflected in social relations and same pattern continues even today. The agrarian system in Kerala is the chain of Uralar, Karalar, and *Atiyalar* who had different role in the process of production which created a different societal relationship. Compare to North India, Kerala had a different habitat, in north, Brahmins had stayed inside the

¹⁶⁰ V. K. Ramachandran, "On Kerala's Development Achievements," in *Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives*, ed. Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen (Delhi: Oxford, 1997), p.287.

¹⁶¹ Robert L Hardgrave jr, "Caste in Kerala: A Preface to the Elections," *Economic Weekly*, Vol.16, No.47 (1964), p.1847.

village and the untouchables were in outside wherein Kerala, various caste groups stayed nearby due to the geographical features, therefore caste has determined with the distance of body.

The property relations in Kerala is controlled and mediated by land ownership and ritual supremacy. The ownership right and control over the lands were separated, and the landowner means those who have the titular rights over land as applied as Jenmam and Swam. Also there were two types of ownership rights like birth right and customary right. The term control means the actual control over the processes of production and distribution. “The people had traditionally birth right who held the direct ownership of the land. Also the land grants were received by the land lords. Due to the predominance of Jenmam lands, hardly get the evidences of non-Brahmin land lords in Kerala. If any non-Brahmins had the possession over land, it may achieve through their might which became as a birth right after generation. The non-Brahmana land owner takes pleasure of autonomy under Brahmanas landlords, which means, they had to do service for the Brahmin landlords.”¹⁶²

Hence there is a need of clarity towards the *janmi* (land lord) system in Kerala to get more understanding of Kerala’s land relations. “The *janmi* has been defined in the Malabar tenancy Act of 1930 as a person entitled to the absolute proprietorship of the land.”¹⁶³ Some of the scholars believe that the Kerala *janmi* system was a prototype of European feudalism and this system could provide more power to the *janmis* to suppress the lower sections of the society. Other says that “The *janmi* system in Kerala was very

¹⁶² K. N. Ganesh, “Agrarian Society in Kerala (1500-1800),” in *Perspectives on Kerala History*, ed. P.J. Cherian, (Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Gazetteer, Vol. 11, 1999), p.123.

¹⁶³ A. Sreedhara Menon, *Social and Cultural History of Kerala* (Kottayam: Sterling, 1979), p.76.

exploitative of those at the bottom but which provided with tremendous economic, political, and social power to the social groups who placed in the top of the system.”¹⁶⁴

The *janmi* system accelerated the agriculture consequently there were lot of agricultural labours attached with the soil. It means the *janmi* system fuelled the caste hierarchy in Kerala. The *janmi* system had been practiced till the abolition of slave trade in Travancore and they have exercised their power on slaves in order to hold higher status. By the beginning of British rule, they were forced to hand over their power to the British administration. The abolition of slave trade in Travancore was one of the revolutionary steps taken by Travancore Royalty by the influence of British. “In 1792 the English east India Company issued a proclamation against slave trade in their territory. In Travancore during the reign of *Gouri Parvati Bai* (1815-29) a Royal proclamation abolishing slave trade was issued in 1818. Cochin also issued a similar proclamation in 1821. The abolition of slavery was a nail struck into the coffin of feudalism in Kerala.”¹⁶⁵

This *janmi* system has created so many gradations among the society. “With the development of *janmi* system the land which came under the direct control of the *janmis* and it began to be leased out in the form of ‘*otti*’, ‘*kanam* (land tenures) and so on. These arrangements made the land productive and Brahmin *janmis* got a portion of surplus from the land regularly.”¹⁶⁶ The caste system was widespread in all spheres of Kerala during the medieval period. The terms *jenmam* has common and the *janmi* shows the concept of rights over the land, and land grants to the Brahmins were the reason for the

¹⁶⁴ Joan P Mencher and Raman Unni, “Anthropological and Sociological Research in Kerala Past, Present and Future Directions,” in *Essays on South India*, ed. Burton Stein (Hawaii: University Press, 1975), p.123.

¹⁶⁵ A. Sreedhara Menon, p.79.

¹⁶⁶ M. Nizar and Meena Kandasamy, *Ayyankali: A Dalit Leader of Organic Protest* (Calicut: Other Books, 2007), p.22.

emergence of *jenmam* rights in Kerala. It was a permanent right over the surplus that continued as a hereditary right. The growth of the *jenmam* rights is also related to the growth of the temple and the privileges of Brahmins who controlled the activities of the temple. These Brahmins have received land and other privileges by the King and other people. “Along with these developments, the *Naduvazhis* and Brahmins had maintained the patron-client relationship which ultimately made Brahmins the dominant authority all over Kerala.”¹⁶⁷ Moreover the *jenmam* right has given enormous power to Brahmin land lords by which they occupied supremacy over land over time to time.

The tenure system in Kerala was largely a caste based *janmi* system. The historians assume that some of the caste groups were the land owners in Sangam period and they became landless people after the Brahmins gained supremacy over land under Chera’s rule until the first quarter of the eleven century. “Prior to that (until fifth century) Kerala was known to be in *Sangham* age. Hypothetically the private ownership of land began in Kerala even before the *Sangham* age and owners of land were Pulayas, Idayas, Vedaas, Villavas all belonging to either cultivators or chieftains.”¹⁶⁸ Further, “The ownership passed to the present class of land owners in the period between nine and thirteen centuries.”¹⁶⁹ There is necessity of historical understanding that why the non-Brahmins groups were forced to give their land to the Nampoothiris and temples. New kind of economic structure emerged by the influence of Brahmin landlords that created new type of tenure system. After the *Chera* Kingdom the Kerala became a Brahmin dominated state which completely stratified and divided the people on the basis of ownership right.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History* (Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1970), p.44.

¹⁶⁹ T. A. Thomas, “Changing Production Condition in Agriculture: A Study of Kuttanad,” (Ph. D. Submitted to Mahatma Gandhi University, 2004), pp. 24-39.

Various land tenure system which practiced even during the colonial period. The agrarian economy transferred into overseas trade especially the arrival of Europeans, in 17th century, new intermediaries emerged and the tenure relations began to be redefined. The system of *pattom-panayam* (tenures) became popular in the place of simple pattom system and new forms of land tenure like *kuzhikanom* evolved. The ruling class had *jenmam* rights and the intermediaries were controlling the rights. After the invasion of Mysore in eighteen century, Kerala especially Malabar region had undergone the direct taxation on land which was not common in Kerala before the invasion, “By eighteenth century the state was the biggest *janmi* through conquering all the land and they converted it as *circar land or pandaravaka*.”¹⁷⁰

Nevertheless, the pattom proclamation of 1865 has changed the agrarian scenario in Kerala, which was one of the pioneering efforts to change land relations. This proclamation has given ownership right to the pattom tenants who were the tenants of the state and they received the right to transfer their land freely. Over the years many people have sold their land among cultivators, however, this proclamation has given the assurance to the tenants from the arbitrary eviction; it was a radical proclamation which destroyed the monopoly of the land lord aristocracy. Thus the valuable properties like land become commodity in the market; the development of the land market has given opportunities to all communities to buy land. The Christians and Muslim communities involved in trade and commerce which made them to mobilize money, hence they could buy landed property in the post- pattom proclamation times. Over the years the inferior caste bought landed properties of higher caste which shattered the traditional land

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 41.

ownership pattern in Travancore. Moreover, this proclamation led towards an egalitarian land ownership in the later periods, the Jenmi Kudiyan Act of 1896 was another important step taken by Travancore Raja which gave permanent occupancy right to the Kanom tenants in Jenmam lands. These all reforms were favorable to the agrarian condition.

Travancore emerged as a powerful state, by 1788 A. D through suppressing the local chieftains, it was estimated that one half of the cultivable land were under the state ownership out of 0.7 million acres. Before that in 1750 the Travancore ruler Marthandavaram dedicated to his tutelary to the Sri Padmanabha, later he himself called as Sri Padmanabha *dasan* (servant) which is known as *Tripadidanam*, the land belongs to the Padmanabha temple treated as sircar land. Henceforth both Pandaravaka and non-Pandaravaka lands considered as sircar lands. “In 1812 the Travancore government has taken over the private properties of temples along with the properties of royal relatives, farm land of the temple monarch, and the Swaroopam. Even then the main Jenmam rights have been continued with respect to the nature of right. During this period a *Pattah* has started to give all tenants specifying tax levied on each property.”¹⁷¹ In 1818 the wasteland also treated as sircar land which was given for the cultivation to the people with tax concessions. Compare to Travancore, the Malabar region did not undergo such proclamation which prevented the lower caste to possess landed properties. The invisibility of Devaswam land helped the *Jenmis* controlled the land for long. But in Travancore the sircar land had been cultivated under the tenure rights called Pandaravaka

¹⁷¹ *Working Paper on Social Science*, p.129.

Pattom. The net result of the pattom proclamation was the ownership right given to the tenants which changed them as peasants from the category of tenant farmer.

All these proclamations have given changes in the life of tenants in Kerala which reflected in the social relations as well. However, these developments in land ownership did not create much difference in the life of *Atiyalar* caste like Pulayas and Parayas. In continuation of Pattom proclamation, the Europeans and natives have started huge plantations. Both these activities are completely made the land as commodity in Travancore. By the emergence of plantation, the ownership of land has been concentrated in the hands of few people. In the post independent times the Europeans withdrew from these plantations therefore the ownership right has concentrated in the hands of individuals, companies and the government. This new land relation helped higher caste Christian and Muslims to become the owners of landed property and the middle caste groups acquired dominance in that new social relation therefore they have achieved landed properties. It is believed that “some of the caste groups could not achieve any property in the new forms of land relation due to untouchable status hence they continued as landless labors in *Jenmis* land. These untouchable castes were lived in the land of *Jenmis* and tenants as mere laborers doing agricultural and related work almost like slaves.”¹⁷²

The agrestic slave position made the depressed classes to continue as a landless labor in Kerala. T. C Varghese observes that around 0.8 million acres of land cultivated by 0.5 million tenants. Among the laboring population majority of them belonged to Cheruma and Pulayas who were the agrestic slaves to the families. Though the slavery was

¹⁷² K. K. Kochu, *Kerala Charithravum Samooharoopikaranavum*, p.294.

abolished 1843 no much difference happened in the economic conditions of the slaves. In Malabar “these slave castes attached with cultivating families. Even after the slavery abolishment the social condition forced the depressed caste people to work like dependent labour. Thus the growth of cultivated land increased the wage and employment position of labors. Hence the opening of plantations also did not give any changes in the life of depressed caste laborer since the cheap labour was available from Tamil Nadu to work in the highland plantations.”¹⁷³

Thus, it can be argued that these unusual circumstances did not give chance to the *Atiyalar* caste to occupy the landed property in Kerala. Needless to say caste and production relations were the major reasons for the unequal property distribution in Kerala, which caused for new land movements by the marginalized caste groups.

¹⁷³ T. C. Varghese, *Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences: Land Tenures in Kerala 1850-1960* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1970), pp.42-45.

CHAPTER-III

REIMAGINING RESOURCES: ANALYZING THE POLITICS OF LAND STRUGGLES.

In India, the question of relationship between ‘right to land ownership’ and ‘the dignity and social position’ is an age-old debatable subject. Unequal land ownership pattern promoted hierarchical divide between owner and tenants, it encouraged an imbalanced social relationship among the people, and being born into a particular caste might have helped to get the right to hold property and other social status to an individual, thus rejecting all the possible ways towards an egalitarian society. Dignity and social position is based on caste system, the socio-economic and cultural backwardness of lower caste in India, identified with the lack of land ownership. The caste or communities with no ownership right have suffered cultural, social and economic disabilities. Hence, caste is the centrality in Indian social organization; it has given the right to ownership to the elite castes, those positioned in the upper strata of the society. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the unequal social order that practiced in Kerala which divided the people as backward and forward in relation to caste and resource ownership habitually defined the mobility of individuals.

In the last few decades, Kerala has been witnessing the struggles for land ownership led by Adivasis and Dalits. In fact, these struggles have brought many fundamental questions on the model of Kerala’s social development into the public sphere. Hence, the present work is limited to the land struggles lead by Dalits; it addresses the questions of caste, identity and citizenship. According to the protestors, it is a revolt against the governments who never considered them as equal citizens even after more than seven

decades of Indian independence; they have not found any space in the well acclaimed Kerala land reforms. The marginalised groups in Kerala say that they have continued to be the victims of land reforms since the reforms placed them in the margins of Kerala society. The controversies and struggle for land highlights that the land question is still unresolved in Kerala; further, it raises the democratic questions about the unequal pattern of land ownership. In fact, the land struggles posed a critique to the social development model of Kerala often used an emancipatory mechanism by the marginal groups to express their vulnerabilities in the public.

Land serves as an essential resource to make the people owners, and it gives identity to those to claim the rights of citizenship in the public by state categories. The land struggles expose the hidden part of land reforms. Though the land reforms transferred the land to the tenants, it did not give the agricultural land to the labourers who were attached with soil. The numbers of landless people increase every day among the lower caste groups due to the scarcity of housing as well as agricultural land, obviously they chose the struggle as a matter of protest to get land from the government. This chapter is an attempt to problematize the lack of resources and inquire into the new imagination of social capital by the Dalits even after the renowned Kerala land reforms.

Chengara: Analyzing the Impact of Land Reforms in Kerala.

The Chengara land struggle started on August 2007 under the leadership of Laha Gopalan, the founder of *Sadhujana Vimochana Samyuktha Vedi* (SVSV)*¹⁷⁴ it was a historic move with the migration of three hundred families to Chengara rubber plantation in Pathanamthitta district of southern Kerala by SVSV activists and other landless

¹⁷⁴ The Sadhujana Vimochana Samyuktha Vedhi-SVSV (The United Front of the Poor for Liberation) has led their struggle for land in Chengara.

individuals. After one year, the total numbers of families increased to seven thousand and seven hundred. In Chengara, the majority of the protestors were from a Scheduled Castes (SCs) and converted Christians, indicating that these communities continue to remain landless even today. These landless people have demanded agricultural land at Chengara plantation, which had been leased to the Harrison Malayalam plantation by the government of Kerala.

Historically, the Chengara estate leased out for 35-years to the Kandathill Varghese family, one of the most dominant Christian families in Kerala and the publisher of *Malayala Manorama*, the largest daily in Kerala and one of the leading regional papers in South Asia. Once the lease ended, the Harrison Malayalam Limited got it for ninety-nine years, which continued till 2006. However, when lease ended in 2006, the land should have been transferred to the '*original owner*', the feudal ruler or in the absence of the feudal ruler, it should have been taken over by the Government. However, the day of the government, without much following the land transfer formalities, simply made an agreement with Harrison Company to fell the rubber trees, resulting in a huge profit for the company. The Harrison Malayalam Limited has thirty-three estates like Chengara in Kerala.¹⁷⁵

The Chengara people opposed the illegality of Harrison Company and its land lease saying that the company has not paid the lease money to the government since 1996. Thus the Chengara people led the struggle against the Harrison Company and the leaders of the Chengara struggle have raised many irregularities in the lease agreements that peaked suspicion in the public's opinion towards the company. For instance, in Chengara

¹⁷⁵ Prakash Louise, "Land Struggles of Dalits in Kerala," *Integral Liberation*, Vol.12, No.4 (2008), p. 256.

itself, “the actual amount of land given by the feudal ruler to the Harrison Malayalam was 1,048 hectares, but it is reported that the company has occupied around 60,000 acres of land under its custody through illegal means. The leaders of the land struggles accuse the Tata company of occupying around 50,000 acres of land in Munnar, Kerala. Though the left government earlier directed officials to unearth the extent of land owned or occupied by the Tata in Kerala, this move could not be carried to its logical conclusion because of inner-party rivalry.”¹⁷⁶

Hence, the Chengara land struggle originally started in June 2006 at Chandanappally estate of Koduman Plantation Corporation by the Sadhu Jana Vimochana Samyuktha Vedi (SVSV) activists. Later this protest withdrew after the discussion with the then revenue minister K. P. Rajendran. There were twenty-two demands submitted to the government by the SVSV, demanded agricultural land to the Dalits and fifty thousand rupees to the protesters in order to cultivate it. Other demands were one government employee from each scheduled caste and scheduled tribe families, the inclusion of Dalit Christians into the scheduled caste category, declare Ayyankali’s birthday and the death day of Ambedkar as holidays, and five acres of land for the development of Kalleli Appoopen Kavuv* situated in Konni Pathanamthitta district. However, minister assured the agitators, they would distribute land like the former Chief Minister, Achuthan Menon, the Communist Party of India (CPI) had done or the way in which Mr. Karunanidhi Government had done in Tamil Nadu. However, the government failed to

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

*Sri Kalleli Oorali Appoopen Kavuv is an ancient temple located at Kallelithottam in Konni, Pathanamthitta district of Kerala. The deity here has long been worshipped as the supreme power of nature and the lord of around hundred and one Mala Daivangal (Mountain Gods). The temple is also noted for its festival which falls during the Monsoon season of Kerala. The major ritual performed in this temple is the Karkkidaka Vavu ceremony, a Hindu ritual observed in memory of the departed souls of ancestors. During the day, special offerings in the form of tender coconuts and betel leaves are offered to the presiding deity of this temple.

fulfil the promise, the Chengara people again started struggle, the leader of Chengara, Laha Gopalan observes that, “we were forced to start the Chengara agitation again since the government did not keep their promises. Consequently, they have encroached the Kumbazha estate of Harrison Malayalam plantation in Pathanamthitta district. Initially, the government tried to destroy the struggle with police forces. The rubber trees in the area were not good for tapping even though people have collected small amounts of latex for their income. The SVSV demanded five acres of land, but they changed to one acre to resolve the problem as early as possible. Hence the labours of plantation also started a counter protest one day before the district officials began to collect the detail of the protestors in the land struggle.”¹⁷⁷ It was found that the lease became untrue and the property reverted back to the government in 2006, however, both left-right wing governments did not show any interest to take it over, the landless agitators gathered and demanded the government distribute the land. According to the protestors, there were possibilities for the state government to take over this land from Harrison Company, but no such initiatives have occurred. In the fifth year of the struggle, the left government distributed land in different parts of Kerala as the part of Chengara settlement package. Beneficiaries complained that the distributed lands were not worthy for cultivation, geographically alienated places and nearer to forests. The Chengara package* ended paradoxically, but the leaders of the land struggle have been demanding agricultural

¹⁷⁷ Laha Gopalan, (Leader Chengara Land Struggle), Interviewed and translated by the Researcher, June 2019.

* The agitation was "resolved" after 790 days on October 5, 2009, following a meeting between the struggle's leadership and the government of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) As part of the settlement, 1'432 families out of 1'738 families who had begun living on Harrison's Malayalam Ltd.'s rubber plantation would receive land elsewhere in the state and financial aid to build houses, and the land will be made available to the beneficiaries within three months. The land parcels would be located throughout Kerala. The remaining 300 households already own land and are thus ineligible. It's worth noting that the SJVSV estimates that 7,000 families lived on the estate, compared to the government's estimate of 1,738.

land; unless and until they get it, they have decided to not leave from the Chengara plantation.

Since the beginning of the Chengara land struggle, human rights violations have taken place: police torture, harassments, rape, and assault against Chengara women. These sorts of violence were the result of the protest started in front of Chengara estate led by the various trade unions backed by political parties. Protestors argued that it is a state sponsored violence against the marginal groups to prevent the assertion for landed property. The resistance of Chengara cannot be read as the mere demand for land but for the resources that give individuals dignity and self-respect. Earlier the government and society tried to negate their rights over resource ownership by imposing the barriers of caste and other social norms based on Dharmasastras; therefore, it is well evidenced that the basic concept of human rights does not exist in a society dominated by the caste elites. K. T. Ram Mohan says that the signals from Chengara are clear, “there is need for a land policy that engages with the serious deficiencies of the earlier land reforms. The reforms of the 1970s sought to address, even if partially, the class aspect of the land question. The present situation demands to address its caste and community aspects. Given the marked asymmetries in land distribution and intensifying struggles by the landless Tribal people and Dalits, and the ploy of absolute scarcity may no longer work. Indeed, it is possible to make land available to the landless Tribal people and Dalits without disturbing the small and middle holders. Very large extent of land could be mobilised but not renewing the leases of big, corporate plantations.”¹⁷⁸ The question of caste has been neglected in modern land reforms since it was entirely an economic

¹⁷⁸ K.T Rammohan, “Caste and Landlessness in Kerala: Signals from Chengara,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.43, no.47 (2008), p.15.

reform; it never considered the caste as a matter which played a crucial role in the long process. Hence, many studies carried out on Kerala land reforms had projected land only as an economic unit; it does not have any other social implication over the people in terms of resources and ownership. However, few other works tried to understand the sociological aspect of land reforms problematizing the ownership pattern including the definitions of land, owner, and labour.

Moreover, the land as social capital gives power and pride to the people in the society; the real beneficiaries of land reforms became rich and identified as middle class in Kerala. In contemporary Kerala, the Christians own five times more land, the upper castes four and the other backward castes (OBC) and Muslims own three times more land than the Dalits.¹⁷⁹ It creates a huge divide as well as hierarchies among the communities and shows the upper castes only own landed property. The leftist organization called *Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishath* (K.S.S.P) conducted a survey in 2006, and concluded that, “in Kerala as per the land ownership per family is the upper castes have 105 cents, Christians 126, Muslims 77, the OBCs 63 and Dalits only 27 cents.”¹⁸⁰ Further, “Any enquiry into the differential impact of land reforms on different communities is interpreted by the civil society and the intelligentsia in Kerala as divisive, which is not the case when it is based on a class or regional basis. And this hides the fact that property and power is still with the upper castes.”¹⁸¹

Last fifty years of modern Kerala, changes in the economy and politics hardly touched the traditional caste hierarchy, the large chunks of economic resources are possessed by

¹⁷⁹ K. P. Aravindan ed., *Kerala Padanam* (Kerala Studies), (Kozhikode: Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishad, 2006), p.53.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 54.

¹⁸¹ M. S. Sreerekha, “Illegal Land Illegal People,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.47. no.30 (2012), p.21.

upper and middle caste groups, and the modern land reforms helped all other castes except the Dalits and Tribals to acquired ownership rights. The Dalits had been prohibited from property rights in the traditional caste society and could not capture the capacity of ownership even in the democratic setup. The land reforms are considered as a key stone of the socio-political changes of Kerala, but in reality the Dalits excluded from the proclaimed Kerala model of development. The traditional caste has worked as a social base in the modern Kerala. Four decades of land reforms, the figures show that there is a huge distance in terms of ownership of the land among various caste groups. These “facts show the Kerala model land reforms may have drawbacks since it was an economic process and not a social reform.”¹⁸² Land reforms in Kerala, an economic reform policy that provided land to the landless communities, barring the majority of the marginalized Dalits and tribal from its benefits, as a result, it violated the basic rights. Land is not merely a resource of wealth but a sign of lot other things in life, self-respect, security, independence. B. B. Mohanthy says that the “in recognition of the fact that scheduled castes and tribes are the most disadvantaged in terms of land, which accounts for the majority of their perpetual property and make them vulnerable to injustice and exploitation, union and state governments have attempted to promote and protect their land control and use rights. Even after fifty years of planned initiatives and policy measures, the landholding situation of scheduled groups and some states has not improved significantly; in fact, it has deteriorated.”¹⁸³ It is evidenced that the Dalits who had the ownership of land faced less violence than the landless; the ownership of

¹⁸² Sunny M Kapikkadu, *Janathayum Janadhipathyavum (People and Democracy)*, (Kozhikode: Vidhyarthi, 2017), p.19.

¹⁸³ B. B. Moahanthi, “Land Distribution among Scheduled Caste and Tribes,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.36, no.40 (2001), p.3857.

resources gives precise power to the powerless groups which may enrich their social mobility. The “Dalits managed to possess even a small tract of land; they were less vulnerable to assaults and human rights violations. Therefore, the state policies want to empower Dalits need to start earnestly with pivotal measures of land reforms as basic rights.”¹⁸⁴

Further, the “Record on land distribution in the year of 1857 shows three percentages of Pulayas (Dalits), four of OBCs, seven of Nairs and five of Christians were landowners in the princely state of Travancore.”¹⁸⁵ The data illustrates that the non-implementation of modern land reforms made the state of Dalits more vulnerable, therefore, Dalit scholars argue the left government implemented land reforms by the influence of Kerala renaissance but does not imbibe caste as a reality and they expose it as one of the major draw backs of Kerala’s social development.

Studies indicate these reforms have begun long process that made the foundation for Kerala model of development. Chandra Bhan Prasad pointed out few draw backs of Kerala land reforms in a comparison with Uttar Pradesh and the rest of India. He raised the question that what prompted the Adivasis/Dalits of Kerala to raise the question of land reform.

¹⁸⁴ Felix Wilfred, *Dalit Empowerment* (Delhi: Cambridge Press, 2007), p.171.

¹⁸⁵ K. K. Kochu, “Land Reforms and Dalits in Kerala,” in *Bhooparishkaranam: Dalit Paksha Vimarshanavum Vibhavadhikara Prashnangalum*, (Chengara Land Struggle Solidarity Network: 2009), p.5.

Table: I
Landless Agricultural labours in Kerala, Uttar Pradesh and All India (Per Hundred)

Category/States	Kerala	Uttar Pradesh	All India
SC	53.79	38.76	49.06
ST	55. 47	-----	32.99
Non-SCs/STs	20.78	10.03	19.66

Source: *From Dalit Diary: 1999-2003 Reflections on Apartheid in India.*

The above figures establish two points most emphatically, one that in comparison to UP (It has a negligible tribal population) in most of India, it is only in Kerala that more than half the SC/ST population consists of landless agricultural labourers. Two, the index of inequality is much too high in Kerala. For instance, in the difference between SC/ST and non-SC/STs in terms of proportion of landless labourers is 33.01 and 34.69 per cent, whereas in UP, the difference works out to 25.73. At the all-India level, the difference is 29.40 and 13.33 per cent.”¹⁸⁶ He says there is a need of conclusion from these figures taken from the census of India that, in Kerala, a land of reforms, the condition of SC/STs is worse than in areas known for their backwardness and lack of land reforms. He poses criticism on left intelligentsia for not telling the nation that land reform policies of EMS Namboodari Pad were more hostile to SC/STs than land reform measures elsewhere in the country. Moreover, these divergent facts specifically lead towards the new understanding of Kerala land reforms through a human rights perspective since it was more hostile to untouchable communities. The agitators emphatically pointed out the Dalit settlements became new spaces of cultural domination to the caste elites; further, it

¹⁸⁶ Chandra Bhan Prasad, “All the Myths about Kerala,” in *Dalit Diary: 1999-2003 Reflections on Apartheid in India*, ed. Chandra Bhan Prasad (Chennai: Navayana, 2004), p.158.

viewed the settlements as uncivilised and depicted them as ghettos full of wicked fellows.¹⁸⁷

Kerala is the only state where Dalits live in the separate ‘colonies,’ and it hardly addressed by the democratic governments, therefore, the protesters says casteist governments are more interested in making more colonies than providing land in order to reproduce their saviour consciousness of upper caste over Dalit subjects. Geographically these colonies are located outside, boycotted by the society, branding like untouched spaces. Consequently, land struggles try to obliterate hopeless living conditions and recreate thriving defined notion of ownership/resourcefulness that may leads to the dignified life mobility as well. P. K. Michael points out, “The socio-political movement led by the Communist party in Kerala had two major slogans for their popular mobilisation that successfully materialised one for united Kerala and the other for comprehensive land reforms. Both of these slogans had their appeal beyond class, caste and community feelings. Nevertheless, it was not as mobilizing a programme as the land reforms or unification of Kerala. It seems to have not been completely successful in realizing the widely held expectation that further developmental initiatives will be driven by social movements and civil society organizations in the wake of the campaign. It also failed to fully integrate previously marginalised sections and their demands.”¹⁸⁸

The meaning of land goes beyond mere property discourses, resonate different space, security, and self-respect. From the ancient period onwards the property has divided into two kinds like movable and immovable property in India. As R.S.Sharma notes, “In the earliest Vedic age movable property was almost identical with cows and was far more

¹⁸⁷ Mohanan (Chengara Activist), Interviewed and Translated by the Researcher, June 2019.

¹⁸⁸ P. K. Michael Tharakan, Kerala Model Revisited: New Problems, Fresh challenges, *Working Paper No.15*, (Kochi: CSES, 2006), p.8.

important than immovable property, Immovable property included land and house.”¹⁸⁹

Hence earlier times onwards the Brahmins were the owners of property like land, cows and so on. As a superior caste group in villages the Brahmins used their power to possess land. S. Selvam quoted Beidelman; “caste system entails inequality in the distribution of power. It considers the land as the major integrative factor around which the caste and village system operate.”¹⁹⁰

Modern India has witnessed several opinions on the question of land and its ownership. Ambedkar pointed out “Agriculture shall be a state industry, the farm shall be cultivated as a collective farm, and the land shall be let out to villagers without distinction of caste and creed.”¹⁹¹ As a policy the state was a failed to distribute the land to the villagers in modern India. “The Indian states tried to make changes among the agrarian relations, but it did not touch the real intermediaries who owned land and it had not chosen radical reforms in agrarian structure; instead, it gave emphasis to reorganise the agrarian relation and redistribution of land.”¹⁹² Land reforms concentrated for sectorial changes in society; however, did not problematize much on property discourses in relation to ownership. It can be argued land reforms addressed ownership questions slightly, but the major share of the property concentrated in the hands of the higher caste farmers who could easily continue as agrarian surplus groups. In contemporary India, landlessness of Dalits receives attention; nevertheless, it was not proposed as a social justice issue, and they are not treated as equal citizens unless they become land owners. According to Sukhadeo

¹⁸⁹ R. S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1983), p.29.

¹⁹⁰ S. Selvam, “Sociology of India and Hinduism: Towards a Method,” in *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, ed. S.M.Micheal (New Delhi: Sage, 2007), p.192.

¹⁹¹ B. Ambedkar, “States and Minorities,” in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, (Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, 1989), Vol.1, p.396.

¹⁹² P. C. Joshi, *Land Reforms in India: Trends and Perspectives* (New Delhi: Allied, 1976), p.34.

Thorat “The pattern of landownership is highly skewed against SCs. Nearly 70 per cent of SC households either do not own land or have very small landholdings of less than 0.4 ha. A very small proportion (less than 6 per cent) consists of medium and large farmers. The scenario of land ownership among SCs is even grimmer in Bihar, Haryana, Kerala and Punjab, where more than 90 per cent of SC households possess negligible or no land.”¹⁹³ Land reform policies have not provided agricultural land to the Dalits in Kerala; consequently, they were not able to generate income from this limited portion of land where the other agrarian class heavily benefitted since they were holding enough agricultural land.

According one study, “The Harijans (Dalits) continue to be a depressed section of the society in terms of income and property as well. For instance, among scheduled castes, the basic agricultural communities like Pulayas, Cherumans, and Kanakkans, more than 58 per cent of the households are landless and even among the owners 90 per cent have only less than half an acre, only two per cent own more than two acres.”¹⁹⁴ The majority of the untouchable castes were forcibly attached with soil like slave labourer that might have caused for immense hierarchical segregation from the mainstream socio-political discourses; further, it alienated them from resource ownership which is visible in terms of their mobility nowadays. Ravi Kumar states, that the relation between Dalits and land is strange, “they are inextricably tied to the land but do not have any right over it. The ownership of land might change but the coolies stays with the land.”¹⁹⁵ The Chengara protestor states that the Dalit community’s lack of ownership rights is due to norms of

¹⁹³ Sukhadeo Thorat, *Dalits in India Search for a Common Destiny* (New Delhi: Sage 2009), p.56.

¹⁹⁴ P. Sivanandan, “Economic Backwardness of Harijans in Kerala,” *Social Scientist*, Vol. 4, no.10 (1976), p.15.

¹⁹⁵ Ravikumar, *Venomous Touch: Notes on Caste, Culture, and Politics*, trans.R.Azhagarasan (Kolkata: Samya, 2007), p.8.

caste in the ancient societies, and it has been repeated even in the modern land reforms program which obviously led to the struggle for land. On the other hand, the government generally considers the landless people as a single category which would hide the present realities of landlessness. Present struggles are an alternative way to achieve justice through a democratic approach promised by the constitution.

Land Struggle: The question of Dignity and Resources

The state and its machinery usually obstruct any agitations carried out by untouchable groups since these groups are socially weak and politically powerless. However, in Chengara the protesters beaten up by the labours of the plantations belonged to various political parties. Protestors argue that planned violence strategically corners emerging voices of untouchables to silence the dignity question in the public sphere since ownership would obviously change the nature of their occupation and provide freedom from the given identity of mere wage labourer. The traditional caste society always desires to place the untouchables either as wage labourers or agrestic slaves; therefore, new forms of struggles get constantly rejected by the social elites. Ramnarayan Rawat pointed out “the occupation and dignity were the parameters to analyse Dalit histories.”¹⁹⁶ During this blockade, Laha Gopalan spoke to the media, saying that the sanctions of the state had forced the landless poor to remain strong in the struggle and they were ready to die even by starvation. The present siege has consciously done to provoke protesters to create law and order problem in Chengara which also aims martyrs from the plantation workers, however around 250 civilians were attacked.

¹⁹⁶ R. S. Rawat, "Occupation, Dignity, and Space: The Rise of Dalit Studies," *History Compass*, Vol.11, no.12 (2013), pp.1059-1067.

The entry into the Kumbazha estate of Harrison plantation happened a year after, and since then the government did not keep any of their promises. Gopalan said that the withdrawal of the then existing struggle were not good enough for the workers because they were surviving by it. He alleged that the plantation workers began siege when district administration had decided to distribute questionnaire to find eligible people in the Chengara. The workers realised if the information was collected, the landless victims are more likely to receive benefits from the government others would be dismissed. Around six thousand applications have collected which showed one thousand families were living in rented premises. However, Chengara agitators never demanded land in Chengara alone, similarly showing their interest to move any places but till then would continue there.¹⁹⁷

Gopalan, the leader of the struggle says that the government must give land to whoever participated in the struggles if it is difficult to acquire land in Chengara, they could take over other leased over plantations through available central funds.¹⁹⁸ The protestors of both Arippa and Chengara were not merely demanding agricultural land but instead problematizing the social dynamics of caste and its power relations in the society. There is no doubt that the “accessibility and redistribution of land would give more opportunity to the deprived section to wither away from the caste-based occupation that would obviously make changes in their mobility and would allow them to achieve dignity.”¹⁹⁹

Present land struggles are the attempt to erase the element of inequalities and imagining dignity, social space, and resourcefulness. Hence, these new imageries may help to

¹⁹⁷ Laha Gopalan, Interviewed and translated by the Researcher.

¹⁹⁸ Laha Gopalan Interviewed by Varun Ramesh, Azadiworld's Blog, January 28, 2010. <https://azadiworld.wordpress.com/2010/04/27/>

¹⁹⁹ Ishan Anand, "Dalit Emancipation and the Land Question," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.51, no.47 (2016), p.13.

rewrite the history about Dalitness differently and break the cultural colonization of caste elites over untouchables, leading towards an egalitarian society where the marginalized groups may feel autonomy over identities. These struggles envisioned disrupting traditional barriers of caste that never allowed every individual to hold landed property; therefore, it is a discursive formation of the untouchables which rejects all forms of subjugated memories. Secondly, it often confronts Brahminical nature of the state and its ideological apparatuses. Thus, it is an engagement with modernity since the untouchable castes, constantly neglected; further their claims on modernity have not been recognized by the state or in Hindu society as well. As a policy, land reforms tried to actualize the constitutional provisions in the post independent era, besides the deprived section enjoyed the aids of modernity that integrated them into national mainstream. Modern claims such as ownership, education, lifestyles had been rejected to untouchables since they were treated as mere agrestic slaves or wage laborers. Thus the “Dalits became limit to their caste based inferior works and other social inferior jobs because of the caste Hindu mind set of the state and Hindu civil society.”²⁰⁰

There were 7,000 (seven thousand) odd families living in Chengara, waging a struggle to change their material condition that imposed by caste imperialism. They were gathered from desolate living conditions across the state at Chengara where an alternative community was built. They found certain places to live, cultivate, and worship. It cannot be understood as protest against anyone; instead, it was an effort to regain spirituality that would lead to a counter-culture or Dalit renaissance. The tents “with plastic roofs have given place to semi-permanent huts with raw earthen bricks and tin sheets. These

²⁰⁰ Gopal Guru, “Dalits in Pursuit of Modernity,” in *India: Another Millennium*, ed. Romila Thapar (New Delhi: Penguin, 2000), pp.123-137.

people have showed a new method of self-expression and aspiration in this hilly region of planation by saying; we were left out from the well acclaimed land reforms.”²⁰¹ Moreover, their life is connected to land and its nature; hence, they demand that ‘giving us agricultural land would do labour in it’. It is noticed that the untouchable castes were attached with soil but hardly owned it, often defining the social position of individuals particularly in the agrarian society.

Those who largely acquired agrarian surplus invested on other ventures to earn more profits where the actual producers never enjoyed the benefit since they had to undergo servitude of caste. Ironically, the state not showing any interests to the landlessness question of marginalized groups brings this struggle and Kerala’s developmental issues to the public, “if there is no access to land, would it be challenging to make the surplus that provides the cultural capital like education, mobility so on and so forth.”²⁰²

Present day disadvantages of untouchables in Kerala is not just limited to caste, since there is an absence of ownership of landed property, in addition to that, the state and civil society have not engaged with them as equal citizens. Land reforms tried to abolish intermediaries, “it made former tenants mostly upper and middle caste citizens land owners, as they could prove their status as tenants by presenting rent receipts.”²⁰³ The landlessness question created new debate around the absence of resources and the problems of accessibility into modern life of the marginalized castes. The “livelihood matter became more problematic to the Dalits and other indigenous groups since they set aside from the resources which forced them to reimagine the need of ownership over

²⁰¹ <http://chengarastruggle.blogspot.com/?m=1>

²⁰² Darley Jose Kjosavik and Nadarajah Shanmugaratnam, *Political Economy of Development in India: Indignity in Transition in the State of Kerala* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p.12.

²⁰³ Sanal Mohan, “Land Struggles in Contemporary Kerala,” *The Hindu Business Line*, December 19, 2011.

landed properties. Hence this may be treated as one of the drawbacks of Kerala land reforms.”²⁰⁴ Protestors say these struggles would reveal the hidden characteristics of Kerala model of development that never gave importance to certain groups.

The Chengara land struggle occurred in the Kurumbatti division of Harrison Malayalam planation, at Athumbukulam near to Konni, Pathanamthitta district, Kerala. In the initial days, they made around four thousand huts out of plastic, later most of them have constructed their own houses. They had to cross a small stream to reach there, where a bridge was built. Compared to other struggles, the children shouted slogans ‘time and story has changed and it’s the time for poor’ ‘give us land or bullets’. They strictly maintained discipline to make the struggle a success. Alcohol was prohibited in Chengara and volunteers used to check bags in the front office. The total areas of land struggle were divided into six counters; each one had the places for worship where they kept photos of Buddha, Ambedkar, Ayyankali and Kallara Sukumaran. Generally, day starts with a common prayer followed by attendance, started nurseries for kids where qualified youngsters taught.

Interestingly, these people arrive from various colonies and other slums even though there was no abundant publicity about this protest. The landless masses have taken it as an opportunity to become owners of landed property; struggle has provided new perspective about the contemporary politics thus they have been raising serious critiques to the leftist parties who initiated the land reforms. These landless laborers showed unity among themselves in order to fight against the oppressors which brilliantly broke the broad consciousness that the Dalits do not have unity. In other words, land became a focal point for them to form as a community to fight for their justice; subsequently, it

²⁰⁴ M. S. Sreerekha, "Illegal Land, Illegal People", p.21

broadened as one of the vibrant social movement of untouchables in the post- colonial times.

Land struggle: Political Redefining of Dignity

The Chengara struggle raised fundamental question on the land control in Kerala saying that who controls the agricultural land in Kerala? Protestors voiced that the unequal distribution of land puts them into dangerous social crisis and pushes them to the bottom of the society. Hence, “the land has been transferred into other modes of property like gold shares nowadays; therefore, traditional farmers became landless as a small minority kept buying huge tracts of land, consequently victims of the land reforms once again were humiliated in the new land market economy controlled by the huge real estate groups.”²⁰⁵ Recently, land became an important capital for investors and they created an artificial shortage by keeping agricultural land empty, further unifying urban land, which decisively changed the idea of land from agriculture to investment.

The ex-untouchables in Kerala are the workers of the tenants, their rights were violated in land reforms leading majority of the ex-untouchable castes to live in the *Harijan* and the *one lakh colonies*. Moreover, they often faced violence since they raised the fundamental questions on land that questioned the traditional caste structure. Dalit intellectuals opined that there has been an unequal distribution of land through land reforms, therefore, the Dalit movements and people groups have repeatedly raised these questions since the 1980s.²⁰⁶ In January 1970, a bill was introduced in the Kerala legislative assembly proclaiming that the landlord system abolished, and it is called ‘land reforms bill of Kerala’. Earlier some other bills were also introduced to reform land, but

²⁰⁵ K. N. Harilal, “Kerala Development”, *Madhyamam Daily*, 22 March 2008.

²⁰⁶ K.M.Salimkumar, ed., *Bhoomiyude Jathiyum Rashtreeyavum(The Caste and Politics of Land)* (Kottayam: Pavithran Smaraka Dalit Padana Kendram, 2008), p.1.

they were changed by the influence of right wing political parties and struck down by the court. Prior to the land reforms Act, the Kerala agrarian relations Act was introduced in 1957 which suggested land to the landless people then it reintroduced with certain amendments.²⁰⁷

Records show that the ex-untouchable castes were not tenants, they were the labours of the tenants doing agricultural and other menial works for their (*Jenmis*) masters and in fact these masters were considered as tenants in the government's account since they hired the land from the landlords for farming, and it belonged to Ezhavas (OBC), Syrian Christians, and Nairs (Kerala Sudras). Further, the 74th clause of the land reforms Act defined the tenants as farmers, allowing them to cultivate land nearby their house. However, by this bill the workers of the tenants (Dalits) got ten cents of land in panchayath, five cents in municipality and three cents in major municipality, since it was insufficient the left government has introduced '*one lakh colonies*' to the landless mass.²⁰⁸

The studies over the Kerala model of development often stated that the land reforms paved the base of it, contrary; some studies critically evaluated it through subaltern view. Since ex-untouchables were the properties of feudal lords (*Janmis*) during slavery they were exchanged as commodities in Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar, and this practice has continued till the abolition of slave trade in these regions, hence, some groups claim properties like land to redefine their slave identity.

The Kerala land reforms Act has been debated a lot within India and abroad since it was an effort to abolish feudal lords thereby, the Kerala model of development studies

²⁰⁷ K. K. Kochu, "Land Reforms and Dalits in Kerala" p.3.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

consciously received higher preference. M.A Oommen says “with effect from January 1, 1970 (as per the land reforms Amendment Act, 1969) landlordism in Kerala has been legally abolished. All the rights of landlords on land have been vested in the government and the tenants are declared the virtual owners of the land.”²⁰⁹ However, there is a need of understanding about the relationship between tenure system and caste hierarchy since there were numerous tenures which made the land reforms process much more complex. K. K. Kochu argues that most of the land ownership had been concentrated in *Brahmaswam*, *Devaswam* and the local chieftains in Kerala. The Hindu Dharma Shastras were the reason of above situations that introduced the caste system which prevented untouchables to become the owners of land. From nineteenth century onwards the need for land reforms were realised, the colonial government introduced under different forms in Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar. The first law over land was introduced in Travancore on 1865 June called *Patta Vilambaram* which means the declaration of lease and it also known as the ‘Magnacarta of the farmers.’²¹⁰ This law endorsed the possession on the leased properties of the government, besides preventing the illegal eviction from the government’s property. Historically, by 11th century onwards the Namboothiri Brahmins functioned as trustees of all the temple properties by which they accumulated much tracts of land and wealth and during this time the ordinary tenants were forced to hand over their land to the local Brahmin and the temples, with the help of regional rulers. Thus the Brahmins could control land and temple property for a long period of time, this ‘ownership on resources’ gave the power to the Brahmins and non-

²⁰⁹ M. A. Oommen, *A Study on Land Reforms in Kerala* (Delhi: Oxford and IBH1975), p.8.

²¹⁰ K. K. Kochu, “Land Reforms and Dalits in Kerala”, p.2.

Brahmins *Janmis* to dominate over other caste groups. Moreover, the above land tenure system existed till the modern land reform came into existence.²¹¹

Kerala land tenure systems never gave opportunities to the untouchables to access any kind of landed properties. After the *Patta Vilambaram* proclamation in 1865, most of the middle caste groups acquired the right to own property. Since the untouchables were only caste groups directly attached to the soil they had to continue in agrestic slavery even after the proclamation. Sanal Mohan quoted K Saradamoni, “down to the nineteenth century, all land in Kerala not owned by the state was the property of big landlord families and temples. The Maharaja of Travancore’s Pandarappattom proclamation of 1865 gave proprietary rights to cultivators, and there emerged a middle stratum peasantry drawn mainly from the upper castes which included a substantial number of low caste Ezhavas. But these changes had only marginal effects on the untouchable castes of Travancore, who were in the main the actual tillers of the soil.

On the contrary, the lower castes, particularly the Pulayas and Parayas, were reduced to the state of agrestic slaves a form of labour relations having a long history in Travancore.”²¹² From 1850 onwards, numerous laws were introduced in Travancore with diverse changes from time to time, but there was no law that proclaimed the ownership of Dalits over land, at the same time they were forced to do agricultural and other menial work for the tenants and landlords. The untouchable castes were called *Kudiparppukar* (those who live in tenants or landlord’s land). According to the land reform bill, the tenant can be the owner of land if they were living in the same land before 1963. By the

²¹¹ A Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History* (Kottayam: DC Books, 2007), p.76.

²¹² Sanal Mohan, “Religion, Social Space and Identity: The Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha and the Making of Cultural Boundaries in Twentieth Century Kerala,” *Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol.28, (2005), p.36.

result of it, around five lakhs tenants got land till 1976, but none of the untouchable castes have benefited since they did not include in the tenant category defined by the government, consequently they continued as mere labours without any rights. Paradoxically, the Dalits received maximum ten cents, at the same time, tenants and other small farmers of non-Dalits received up to twenty acres of land through the provisions of land reform bill.

This decisive impact of land reform expelled untouchable communities from getting agricultural land further and placed them into a more vulnerable situation.²¹³ However, the 74th clause of land reforms bill (Tenancy Reform Act) passed for the landless community particularly those who did not have any kind of possession over land. According to this clause, the untouchable groups received ten cents in panchayath, five in municipality, and three in corporation. Since untouchables never had any kind of possessions, they became principal beneficiaries under it. By implementing this bill, around five lakhs families became mere owners, even though a large amount of people remained landless. Around “1.2 lakh acres of land was identified as ‘surplus land’ through land reform, but it is noted lakh of ‘surplus people’ also existed without any possession over land.”²¹⁴ The rehabilitation of landless people was a difficult task; therefore, the C.P.I government introduced a programme called *one lakh houses* scheme for untouchables and to the landless lower castes. It is observed that Dalits and Tribals forced to live in the colony which clearly showed they were neglected from the land reforms further these realities shadowed in the Kerala model of development discussions.

²¹³ Sunny M Kapikkadu, “Vibhavadhikaram Neridunna Dalit Prashnangal,” in *Kerala Bhooparishkaranam; Dalit Paksha Vimarshanavum Vibhavadhikara Prashnagalum*, (Chengara Land Struggle Solidarity Network:2009), p.16.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 17.

Hence larger number of Dalits and Adivasis live in the colonies where their situation is pitiable since many of the families have maximum three cents which comprises a house and toilet. After generations, members of families were increased but land continued as the same, subsequently, they very often faced problems with burial ground, drinking water, and other infrastructures.²¹⁵

Protestors from Chengara and Arippa said that apart from colonies, large amounts of people still live in roadside, canal, and wasteland, yet to be include in the government's record. Dalit movement has been raising various debates and questions on unequal land distribution and the caste dynamics of land reforms over the last two decades. Their constant critics on the issue of landlessness received slight responses in Kerala's public sphere lately.

Chengara and Arippa aroused from this new Dalit consciousness that problematized the lack of resource ownership in relationship to caste. Protestors opined that both Communist and Congress governments did not show genuine concern to take over and distribute surplus land. Further they argued the making of the colonies to the untouchable was a conscious act done by the governments in order to silences the question of surplus land.²¹⁶

M. S. Sreerekha observes that the "land reform survey in 1966-67 identified 0.11 million acres of land available *michha bhoomi*, (surplus land) the kind of land suitable for distribution, but the land declared as *miccha bhoomi* in 1978 was just 1.5 lakh acres, while only 1.32 lakh acres were identified by the government to retrieve for distribution.

²¹⁵ P.N. Provint, "Holistic Land Reforms through Agricultural Revolution," *Keraleeyam Magazine*, May, 2008, p.17. <https://www.keraleeyammasika.com/>

²¹⁶ Sathyan Mundakkal, (Activist Chengara Land Struggle), Interviewed and translated by the Researcher, June 2019.

By 1989, only 92,338 acres of land taken over by the government in which 24,333 acres were distributed among scheduled castes (SCs) and a meagre 5,052 acres were distributed to the scheduled tribes (STs).²¹⁷ According to the Clause 81 and 82 of KLR Act, “the total land in Kerala was classified agricultural and plantation land and as per the 81st clause there were no limits to possess plantation land. Another possibility to include in the third sub clause of the 81, if any landlord wanted to convert their agricultural land to plantation could do so through a gazette notification. Thus, the landlords could easily hide their land from the government’s account. Moreover, the KLR Act was not applicable for Kuttanadu region and plantation lands.”²¹⁸ In 1824 during British colonial period the state authority gave the forest land to the Europeans to plant different crops, as a result, large plantations emerged after the lease proclamation of 1864 since it made the land as an exchangeable commodity.

After 1947 most of the European companies withdrew from the plantation business and the ownership reverted back to the government and private individuals. These exchanges happened all over Kerala, and the government has formed a coffee board, tea board, and rubber board in order to promote the plantation business. Moreover, total area for rubber plantations increased from 2.5 lakh acres to 11.75 lakh, coffee increased from 41,600 acres to 2.09 hector.²¹⁹ During this period, the total area of cash crop plantation was larger than total agricultural land, consequently, the food production declined. In turn, coffee, tea, cardamom, and rubber were the major plantations, therefore, the government

²¹⁷ M. S. Sreerekha, “Challenges before Kerala’s Landless: The Story of Aralam Farm,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.14, no.21 (2010), p.56.

²¹⁸ K. Mukundan, *Kerala Bhooparishkarana Niyamam: Marxistukal Thozhilali Vargathe Vanchicha Charithram* (Kerala Land Reforms Act: The History of Marxist betrayal to Proletariat) (Calicut: Bahujan Sahithya Academy, 1995), pp.10-11.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

decided to exclude it from the land reforms. It is observed that most of the owners of these plantations were “the upper castes and big companies like Tata and Harrison. Through the land reforms bill the government fixed the limit of land holding of each family up to 20 acres. Hence the government has identified 7, 20,000 acres’ surplus land; nevertheless till 1991 government took over only 93,178 acres. In these 93,178 acres the government has distributed around 64,237 acres.”²²⁰ It is argued that large majority of untouchables have not benefitted through the land reforms and that is reflected in the lack of material mobility of Dalits. K. K. Kochu argues “many untouchable families became landless throughout land reforms; they continue to be landless even today and are concentrated in Chengara, Arippa, indicating one of the visible draw backs of Kerala land reforms.”²²¹

Arippa Land Struggle: From Colony to Agricultural Land

The Arippa land struggle began on 2012 December 31, by Adivasi Dalit Munnetta Samiti (ADMS), was another important move initiated by Adivasis and Dalits, who occupied Arippa forest in Kollam district, Kerala. Later it became known as *Arippa Bhoosamaram* (Arippa land struggle). The protestors demanding agricultural land and their motto is ‘from colony to agricultural land,’ the protestors task was successful since they entered into the Arippa forest on night of 31st December along with their children and women much before the activists of Communist party of India Marxist, CPI (M). Later the CPI (M) activist also started their protest at Arippa calling ‘pointing surplus land’ to the government. However, the party sponsored activists withdrew their protest

²²⁰ K. K. Kochu, “Land Reforms and Dalits in Kerala”, p.6.

²²¹ Ibid.

by making an agreement with the then Congress led government that the deadline of application for 'Zero Landless Kerala' would be extended. Contrary, the ADMS has continued their protest despite the CPI (M) activist withdraws their struggle. According to the sources, ninety acres of Arippa land possessed by a Muslim feudal businessman named Thangal Kunju Musaliar (Late), actually, "it was leased to him for ninety years but he possessed it up to 102 years, nevertheless in 2011 the government of Kerala took it over and declared surplus revenue land. Out of these ninety acres, 21.54 acres given to the Chengara protestors as part of Chengara package, 13 acres were given for the Ambedkar model residential school. Now the government has kept 55.47 acres for developmental purposes where protestors are doing their demonstration by saying it must be distributed to landless Dalits and Adivasis."²²²

The Arippa along with Chengara struggle brought the inequalities over resources to the political spheres and have given more visibility to the landless untouchable mass.

These struggles, first of its kind intensely problematized the ownership of the plantations since it carries the legacies of colonial economy, hence, these movements received threats from the middle caste and state that adhered to the colonial consciousness. Communities at the bottom of the graded caste structure frequently suffer violent outbreaks by dominant caste elites in general and the middle castes in particular whenever they raised political questions over land, resources, and ownership. Thus the Chengara and Arippa land struggles encountered similar experiences of attacks from the middle caste plantation workers who targeted the Dalits and the Tribals with the support of dominant political parties and the state. In fact, these middle caste groups, despite massively benefitted from the earlier initiated land reforms, they habituated to discard

²²² P.T.George, "The Battle for Survival: Arippa Land Struggle," *Ritimo*, (2014), p.243.

any sensitive debates discard any other sensitive debates raised by the Dalits and Adivasis particularly over resources.

Smita Narula observes that the “first wave of land reforms in the 1950s aimed to offer the ownership rights to the tenants. The land reforms legislation vehemently destroyed the feudal landowners who owned huge tract of land called *Zamindars*; further, it created medium size owners many of whom were OBCs. After this first wave of legislation these groups tried to block the further land reform process that would have benefitted to the farmers and landless labors they belonging to the lowest strata of social hierarchy, most of them were Dalits.”²²³ The untouchables’ uprisings obstructed by the feudal dominant castes at the time of pre independence, continues by the middle castes associated with political parties even today. In the context of Kerala, majority of middle castes have been politically organized by left parties; moreover, they became sheer owners of land through land reforms. It is argued that their opposition to land struggles is to maintain the Dalits into margins in order to seize political power.²²⁴

The claims of landless Dalits and Adivasis are to democratize the resources in Kerala society. The KILA (Kerala Institute for Local Administration), a government agency’s study (2011), found that around 26,198 scheduled castes (SC) authorized colonies and 6588 scheduled tribe (ST) colonies exist in Kerala. The unauthorized colonies might be more in number where they have maximum three cents of land for meager housing. Several times, it is reported on the lack of cemeteries in Dalit colonies, therefore, they often dig graves on their veranda and kitchen to bury the dead, these realities manifest that untouchables are not only left out from ownership but their habitus became new

²²³ Smita Narula, *Broken People: Caste Violence against India's Untouchables* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999), p.39.

²²⁴ Bose, (Leader Chengara Land Struggle), Interviewed and translated by the Researcher, June 2019.

spaces of discrimination, as a result, an invisible caste border drawn over each colony which depicts them as fourth grade citizens in the eyes of society and the government. It is argued that these “colonies reproduce parental consciousness to dominant caste and dependency to Dalits, although it geographically situates within Kerala, considered uttermost excluded spaces. The present land struggles aimed to leave these excluded spaces that birth pitiful lives to the untouchables.”²²⁵

The struggles have created a new notion among Dalits that it is essential to become more resourceful in terms of material things like land in order to have a better and dignified caste free life. Secondly, Dalits and Adivasis have realized the importance to fight for themselves instead of receiving help from the dominant political parties. Most importantly these struggles are not framed under the traditional left party struggles which focus only on landlordism and retain silence on the resources of marginal communities. K. M. Salimkumar observes “these movements emerged out of the political parties, those who led land reform movements and the other socio-political structures which developed in modern Kerala. Hence these struggles are not ‘self-extensive’ but it has a political ideology behind it, which evolved among Dalits from the time of abolishment of landlordism in the seventies. The earliest Dalit leaders like Kallara Sukumaran summoned the Dalits to conduct land struggles by calling themselves the ‘children of the soil.’”²²⁶ It is broadly believed that Kerala has completed the land reforms process successfully compared to other Indian states; this impression is largely supported by the political parties and the left-right wing intellectuals. However, the present Dalit movements prove that they have not benefitted from these land reforms; therefore, the

²²⁵ Sunny M Kapikkadu, *Janathayaum Janadhipathyavum*, p.62.

²²⁶ K.M.Salimkumar, *Bhoomiyude Jathiyum Rashtreeyavum*, p.2.

present struggles are the culmination of Dalit experiences which directly problematized the common agenda of both Congress and Communist governments that were aimed to concentrate only to the abolition of landlordism and limit the land possessions. The exclusive focus on the abolishment of landlordism prevented the Dalits to become owners and failed to consider them as the people who have right over resources like land.²²⁷

The deficiency of resources for Dalits and Tribal is not only an old phenomenon but the post independent governments in Kerala have decisive roles in it. With regard to the untouchables' landlessness, the Communist party accuses Congress that backed the Nair, Christian, Muslim land lords during the notorious anti-communist *Vimochana Samaram* (liberation struggle 1958-59) which led the dismissal of first elected communist government in Kerala on July 31st 1959.²²⁸ Prior to the land reforms bill EMS Namboodiripad's government introduced the Kerala stay of eviction proceedings Act, 1957 that impeded the eviction of peasants (Kudiyans) by landlords. In united Kerala, the first land reforms bill was passed by the Kerala legislative assembly on June 10th 1959 called Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill 1957. This bill had certain important provisions like a ceiling on individual land holdings, distribution of surplus land among landless people, permanent ownership of land to the agricultural labors and so on. The provisions of this bill created tension among the landlord communities like Nairs and Syrian Christians; therefore, they started to protest against the elected government that was backed by Nair Service Society (NSS) and the Roman Catholic Church. Eventually, Vimochana Samaram dismissed the first Communist government, paving the way for

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

president's rule in Kerala under article 356 of the Indian constitution. The left parties constantly nailing Vimochana Samaram was the foremost reason for the landlessness of Dalits and Adivasis since it opposed an egalitarian society that might have happened through the re-ordering of Kerala's land relations.²²⁹

Thomas Isaac, left lenient intellectual held the view that the main reason for the lack of land ownership among the Dalits, that prevented them to transform their position into landowners from landlessness was Vimochana Samaram.²³⁰ Thomas says that after obtaining power in 1957, immediately the left government issued an order to stop eviction, comprehensive Agricultural Act was passed in 1959, for which, the landowners created troubles in eroding the spirit of the law. The law was passed by the state legislature but delayed for president's approval, later the bill became law with the approval of president in 1960 which was passed in 1959, the section of 'will' was added. Most importantly, "the plantation had to be exempt from the land ceiling as per the directions of the Central Planning Commission. It is noted that between December 18, 1957, and July 27, 1960, there were ten lakhs land transfers that happened which indicates massive land transfers took place in order to undermine the land ceiling system."²³¹

The comprehensive land reforms Act passed in 1968, by that time around 7.5 lakhs acres of surplus land had been transferred. According Thomas, around one lakh acres of surplus land acquired but only 20,000 acres were distributed and acquired surplus land

²²⁹ Somarajan (Activist Chengara Land Struggle), Interviewed and translated by the Researcher, June 2019.

²³⁰ T.M Thomas Isaac, "*Dalitharude Bhoomi Kavarnneduthatharu*," *thomas isaac blog*, October 8, 2012, <http://dr-tm-thomas-isaac.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2012-10-22T19:13:00-07:00&max-results=7&start=7&by-date=false>.

²³¹ Ibid.

was sabotaged by the Congress party which would have reached to the landless Dalits.²³²

Laha Gopalan takes the movement position and attacks on the views of left parties with his personal as well as movement experience. He says that “the land reform Act stated the kudikidappukar (tenants) would get ten cents in panchayath, five in municipality and three in corporation, but in the subsequent years the average three cents were fixed to the Dalits. The Act enforced thirty years back, but Dalits have never received more than three cents. Now the untouchables cannot buy three cents either in rural and urban areas with the amount offered by the government; therefore, they often get land on the hills, rock, or other areas where no connectivity of roads exists. ‘There are three or four families living in these three cents from the time they are born; hence, a minimum fifteen people live in each one. They need a house, toilet and well; meanwhile, the government gives goats and cows but everything needs to be accommodated within three cents.’”²³³

The protestors of Chengara and Arippa struggle rejects the view that the Vimochana Samaram was responsible and the reason for the Dalits and Tribes landlessness, in fact they vehemently argued that the so called land reforms betrayed and let down them and driven out from public sphere. They argue that the land reforms bill of EMS government was a trap since a group of people were called Kudikidappukar (tenants) had been rejected selectively from getting agricultural land.²³⁴ They substantiate their arguments with another point that the Communist party, who was the sympathizer of marginalized groups, came into power various times in the post Vimochana Samaram era; however, they have not taken any action against huge plantation owners who grabbed huge tracts of revenue land under their custody without any proper documents.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Laha Gopalan interviewed by Varun Ramesh.

²³⁴ Mani, (Activist Chengara Land Struggle), Interviewed and translated by the Researcher, June 2019.

They argue that the Rajamanickam report²³⁵ clearly states around 58 percentage of revenue land under the custody of big companies like Tata and Harrison due to false documents. People of Chengara say that the land we are in is not Harrison's land; it is encroached by the company after seventies but not a leased space. The workers of the Harrison plantation admit the same, so we are housed in a recently occupied land by Harrison.

Politics of Land Struggles: Re-Imagining Resources

The present land struggles demand the redistribution of land and resources which made them to reimagine their material condition that would obviously lead to an inquiry into the role of democratic governments for the past fifty years in Kerala. The political changes over the past fifty years did not obstruct traditional social structure; consequently, the resources have continued to concentrate in the hands of higher and middle caste groups. Land and resources helped the elite castes to move a lot and acquire economic capital while untouchables were driven out due to the political pressure created by the dominant castes. The idea of "re-imagination over resources has been obstructed to landless Dalits, further; they had to remain mere assets to the land lords for their own survival. It is noted that whenever the Dalits fight against landlords retaliation comes in the form of the denial of wages, other social boycotts and non-supply of necessary items."²³⁶ New Dalit imagination over land has faced the same types of attacks from the upper and middle caste groups since it addresses the exclusion of Dalits from the

²³⁵ As directed by the government under the provisions of land conservancy Act Ernakulam district collector M.G Rajamanikyam was directed to conduct an inquiry and submitted the report. He pointed out that that Harrison Malayalam Limited misinterpreted the Kerala Land Reforms (KLR Act) to their favour to grab the land. In his report that nearly 30,000 acres of land were occupied legally by the HML in the districts of Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Idukki and Kottayam.

²³⁶ Shivashankara B, Somashekhar J, "Social Inequality and Land Holding for Dalit in India," *The International Journal of Business Management and Technology*, Vol.1, no.2 (2008), p. 36.

economic resources. Moreover, the question of right to ownership is unattended in the land reform, new movements for land demand more radical change in the social structure.

In fact, the tenure system became illegal when the land reforms Act came into existence. However, some tenure was continued particularly in the agricultural sector. P. K. Prakash observes that, “not the agricultural laborers but the people who were doing non-agricultural work primarily received agricultural land through land reforms. They did not have any interest to cultivate the land; therefore, they developed the tendency to keep land empty. Consequently, unemployment became severe and agricultural labors were forced to get the land through tenures in order to find jobs.”²³⁷ Both Chengara and Aripa struggles openly declared their interest to cultivate the land, they felt that it is a right solution against keeping agricultural land empty particularly paddy fields. Secondly, it also addresses the present crisis in the agrarian sector like the lack of agrarian productivity. It is important to note that the land has been provided to the farmers through ‘land to the tiller’ policy, but it does not ensure the agrarian productivity.

Further, the agricultural land has been fragmented to the smaller farmers that the agrarian sector into more complexes. Aripa struggle showed their greater interest for cultivating paddy fields, they transformed muddy fields into fertile paddy land which has not been cultivated more than hundred years since it was mere muddy holes filled with palm leaves and thorns where people used to graze cattle.²³⁸ This muddy hole was a promenade of water leeches turned into cultivable land, initially they used wooden board

²³⁷ P.K.Prakash, “Bhoomiyude Jaathi,” in *Bhoomiyude Jaathiyum Rashtreeyavum*, ed.K.M.Salim Kumar (Kottayam:Pavithran Memorial Dalit Study Centre,2008), p.3.

²³⁸ Ibid.

to clear the land, it was pulled by two persons and four were stepped on it. They say “it was a hectic process but recaptured their tribal culture, and they realized the importance of collective farming, thrilled to do this processes since they were forced to live in the colonies like mites and pushed into slave life since they were dispelled from their own land in which they lived without burden since the shifting agriculture *ponam krishi*.”²³⁹ The land reforms Act of 1969 banned the tenure system and prevented new land tenures. Hence tenants got permanent ownership rights where landless *Kudikidappukar* got just ten cents of land where they lived. It is observed that both of these processes have been completed successfully, however, failed to take over the surplus land in order to distribute for remaining landless groups. Consequently, “land reforms law did not affect the large-scale farmers who were doing their own farming before land reforms and they escaped becoming landless through finding loopholes in the acts. The small-scale farmers also were not much affected by the land reform law.”²⁴⁰ Prakash further argues that “the existence of tenure farming and the exploitation indicate that land reforms were not introduced in the right manner.”²⁴¹

The protestors in both land struggles realized the defects of first land reforms; they often demand second land reforms by which they may become the owners of agricultural land. Moreover, present struggles lead them to imagine a better life by achieving resources in order to transform material conditions. The slogans and demands of the protestors depict the relationship between caste and land which problematizes Kerala’s social development. The land reform process has ignored the realities of varna-jati structure,

²³⁹ Sreeraman Koyyon, *Bhoomikkayulla Avasana Porattam* (Kulathupuzha: Adhivasi Dalith Munnetta Samithi, 2015), p.2.

²⁴⁰ P. K. Prakash, *Bhoomiyude Jaathi*, p.4.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

reflects in the disparity of land relations. Radhakrishnan. P. did a comparative study over the changes in the land system in the pre-and post-land reforms period in a Kerala village. According to him, “the land reforms have reduced the extreme concentration of land in a single group by breaking the larger holdings. The size of the leased holdings varied tenant to tenant, however, the people had larger holding were more benefitted than the smaller holdings. The service castes, untouchables and Muslims not benefitted much by the implementation of this Act since they were not part of the tenant. Therefore, land reforms have still not achieved its wider national objectives of eliminating the constraints on agricultural production and securing social justice to the different section of the agrarian population.”²⁴²

Radhakrishnan’s study clearly shows that the middle castes became the owners of land in the post reforms period since they had larger holdings where the untouchables hardly any progress in their ownership rights. Hence, the demand of permanent ownership for agricultural land can be identified in relation to caste since the untouchable had multiple exclusions from ownership.

Another study by Yadu and Vijayasurian finds the triple exclusion of Dalits placed at the bottom of land ownership. The land-based caste system, land reform policies, and the inability to participate in the land market were the major reasons. Land reforms of 1970 did not recognize Dalits as the tillers of the soil, the social inequality in land ownership continued. Yadu and Vijayasurian goes on to state that the “forward castes are five times higher in the land owned and eight times higher in case of land cultivates when it compares with untouchable castes. Hence the land-caste nexus not disappeared that often

²⁴² P. Radhakrishnan, "Land Reforms in Theory and Practice: The Kerala Experience," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.16, no.52 (1981), pp.129-137.

prevented the Dalit presence in the mainstream.”²⁴³ The tenancy reforms Act or land reforms act did not address the specific issues of untouchables since the government considered tenants a homogenous category.

The changes that happened in the middle of 19th century have affected the material conditions of Dalits since the ownership rights transferred to the middle caste tenants and peasants through various laws related to land. The “Royal Proclamations of 1865 and 1867, along with the Janmi Kudiyan Act of 1896, granted ownership rights to the cultivators in Travancore. The Cochin Tenancy Act of 1914, the Cochin Tenancy Act of 1938, and the Cochin Verumpattomdars Act of 1943 were the major legislations initiated in Cochin. The Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930 brought radical changes in the case of tenancy reforms in Malabar. Hence, Cochin accomplished more achievements with regard to tenancy reforms in comparison with Travancore and Malabar.”²⁴⁴

Though Kerala abolished the *janmi* system, it failed to abandon the land-caste nexus since the untouchables were not considered as tenants. The left government more concerned about the land-tenant relations, did not give priority to the untouchables who contributed to the major share in agricultural labor. T. T. Sreekumar observes that these land struggles have the ideological base that fundamentally questions the idea about the success of land reforms. He criticizes the formula that emerged during land reforms that the agricultural land to the tenant and homestead land to the agricultural labors.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ C. R. Yadu and C. K. Vijayasuryan, "Triple Exclusion of Dalits in Land Ownership in Kerala," *Social Change*, Vol.46, no. 3 (2016), p.407.

²⁴⁴ T.C.Varghese, *Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences: Land Tenures in Kerala 1850-1960* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1970), p.22.

²⁴⁵ T.T. Sreekumar, "The Challenges of Second Land Reforms," in *Chengara Solidarity Book*, ed. Muhammed Velam, (Kozhikode: Solidarity, 2009), p.85.

Hence, from 1979 to 2009 four times the left parties have come into power, reluctant to distribute the land to the labors or to resolve these limitations, instead, they created a general opinion that the idea of land reforms is almost over. According to Sreekumar the Left parties claim often that “there are 28 lakhs tenants received ownership rights, and 5.03 lakh homestead tenants got right over homestead land nevertheless only small amount of surplus land were retrieved and distributed since major share of it was transferred by the landlords. It happened since the Kerala Agrarian Relation Act of 1957 sabotaged by the Congress party therefore the agricultural labors have been continued landless.”²⁴⁶ From this point of view, two features need to be stressed here that the agricultural labors did not get the cultivable land because of someone’s deception and secondly, there was no proper decision that what kind of land to be distributed to the untouchables.²⁴⁷

N. Krishnaji says that, “under various tenancy agreements the ownership rights conferred to the *Kudikidappukar* (Hutment Dwellers) and to the poor peasants who used to cultivate landlords’ land. The overall impact of land reforms assessed with three factors like, hutment dwellers, tenancy and land ceilings. Kerala Land Reforms Act of 1963 (as amended in 1969 and 1972) gave ownership rights to the hutment dwellers who were essentially landless agricultural labors living in the huts on pieces on landlords’ land. Most of the *Kudikidappukar* obtained ownership rights to such land although in a number of cases rights may still have to be secured.”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ N. Krishnaji, “Agrarian Relations and the Left Movement in Kerala: A Note on Recent Trends,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.14, no.9 (1979), p.515.

Hence, the right to land secured and protected by the left movement gave them a special character for a wage laborer with some land that is a better fighter than one without any. Krishnaji clearly stated that “the gains to the agricultural labors in terms of redistribution of land might not have been very impressive. However, the left has emerged as a stronger force especially in the struggle for a better working condition for the labors.”²⁴⁹

One of the major goals of the land reforms was to abolish *janmi* system and somehow it succeeded. The tenants who had larger holdings became new landowners and the agricultural labor’s *Kudikidappu* was protected. The idea of land ceiling and the distribution of excess land to the landless agricultural labors were not fulfilled since the large-scale land transfers from 1957 to 1966. The big landlords “rightly believed that their feudal interest in land would be at stake when the first communist government was formed in Kerala in 1957, and this fear paved the way for large scale land transfers in the state even before the Agrarian Relations Act of 1960 was adumbrated. Hence, the Agrarian Relations Act of 1960 and the Kerala Land Reforms Act of 1963 prompted some hectic sales and transfers around those years. Over the 40 percent of the disposals of leased out land during the decade 1957-1966 took place in 1963. These evasive transfers limited the abolition of tenancy effectively.”²⁵⁰ Krishnaji critically observed that the left parties have not shown interest in the struggle for excess land after land reforms.

Hence, the movement had not been able to prevent big land owners from successfully evading the ceiling law. They believed the capitalist landlords ceased to exist even after the land ceilings and the abolition of tenancy was virtually eliminated. The fierce protest

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 516.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 516.

of hutment dwellers in 1970 was the reason for ‘land grab ‘movement launched by CPI (M) in 1972. The aim of this movement was to unearth the surplus land bringing it to the notice of the government. This movement lasted 80 days and about 175 thousand acres came to light in the process besides it did not yield any land to the agitators. It is noticed that “the gains would have been more substantial that surplus land brought to the notice of the government and distributed. Since many legal obstacles were there, a small part of it actually got distributed.”²⁵¹ The CPI (M) has backed off from these land grab movements, shown any interest on the question of second land reforms in their land policies. Besides, the CPI (M)s withdrawal from the land movements might have happened because of their severe confusion about land reforms. Communist party’s policies of land reforms in Kerala often determine the socio-economic-class divisions on the basis of land ownership. They try to find their class enemies and own class on the basis of land ownership, hence, the introduction of land ceiling divided the people into two categories, they need to eliminate the class groups, who were placed above the ceiling and the people below ceilings kept with party as part of revolutionary strategy. Thomas Isaac says “the agricultural protest was aimed to fight against Five percent of *jenmis* by unifying Ninety Five percent of farmers and labors. However, the people demanding second land reforms are trying to organize 20-30 percent labors against the elite farmers who are 20 percent in agricultural sector that may destroy the people who wished to join in the people’s democratic front.”²⁵² The CPI (M) prime focus of farmers’ unity obviously wiped out the idea of land reforms, therefore, no radical change happened to the hutment dwellers rather the mere shift to the wage laborer.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 517.

²⁵² Thomas Isaac, *Bhooparishkaranam Ini Enthu* (Trivandrum: Chintha, 2012), p.24.

The reality in Kerala is that the Dalits and Adivasis have been continued to be landless even after the revolutionary land reforms. K.Venu says the trouble is that the Indian Communists failed to understand the problematic Indian reality based in *varna-jati* structure. They have handled class approach mechanically which led to the class reductionist method, they could not understand the problems of Indian land relations. Land reforms are not mere abolition of land-tenant relations, if it is viewed through the class perspective since the majority of agricultural laborers would be the tenants in the traditional feudal system.

The people who are working in the agrarian sector become owners of land by the eradication of the *janmi* system and transfer of land to the tenants. The aims of land reforms would be completed once the land-tenant relations come to an end; however, it is not that simple in Indian situation.²⁵³ It is observed that the untouchable castes did not have the right to own leased lands because of the *varna-jati* hierarchy; Dalits continued as agrestic slaves and forced to do labor not only for land lords but to tenants. They were never elevated to the position of dignified agricultural laborer. Hence the land reforms should have given the ownership rights to these real agricultural labors in the *jenmis*' as well as tenants' land since they were driven out from the social system. Venu says that the exclusion of plantation lands from the land reforms was another drawback because of mere class approach. Capitalist relations would emerge by the abolition of feudal relations.²⁵⁴ Further, the capitalist relations would be terminated by the emergence of socialist revolutions, planation was excluded since it is capitalist enterprise and justified the exclusion of plantations since the land reforms was exclusively focused the abolition

²⁵³ K.Venu, "Bhooparishkaranathinte Chengara Rashtreeyam," in *Bhoomiyude Jaathiyum Rashtreeyavum*, ed.K.M.Salim Kumar (Kottayam: Pavithran Memorial Dalit Study Centre, 2008), p.15.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

of feudal relations. Thus, Kerala's specific situation, the landlords who took it is an opportunity to protect huge tract of surplus land under their custody.'²⁵⁵

In short, the Communist ministry has passed Kerala Agrarian Relations, Bill 1957 that led to the deliberate *Vimochana Samaram*, furthering the dismissal of the government under article 356. The then Congress led government diluted the law in favor of land lord class. Hence, the *jenmis* and their well-wishers have got 13 years of gap when the Achutha Menon government passed Kerala Land Reforms Amendment Act in 1970. They got enough time to protect their interest through finding the loopholes by analyzing the provisions of land reforms. Huge tract of land transferred to *benami* name and the plantation land were registered under trust. Moreover, the landlessness issue of Dalits and Adivasis would have been solved if these surplus lands captured and evenly distributed, however, in the absence of such initiatives the untouchables had to continue without any right to ownership over agricultural land. Political parties diverted their attention from it to the increase of wage and right to work. Dalits and Adivasis land struggle, however, strongly out busted in the form of Chengara and Arippa struggle.

The most important critique that the Kerala land reforms faced is that it did not do any favor to the right to ownership of the tillers of the soil. Therefore, the process has ended without giving a piece of agricultural land to untouchable castes. Ronald J Herring pointed out "the most common charge against the Kerala land reforms is that nothing has been done for the labors who were the most depressed class in the agrarian system. The most important potential benefits in the reforms for the labors were the redistribution of surplus land to the land less and option to purchase the nominal prizes with government

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 16.

assistance the hut sites or *kudikidappu* of up to 0.1 acres, frequently including a site for a kitchen garden and a few productive trees.

However, first potential was vitiated by the small amount of surplus land made available. The second applies to only those laborers who have a house site on someone else's land; these *kudikidappukars* traditionally occupied a status akin to that of attached labors or agrestic slave.”²⁵⁶ The pertinent question was raised on the status and position of *Kudikidappukars* during land reforms. There were no exact ideas about their numbers, figure shows in 1966-67 survey is 3.43 lakhs. Actual application for the purchase of *Kudikidappu* came to 433,106, of which 265,829 were allowed (61.4 per cent), most of the remainder rejected or settled outside official channels.²⁵⁷ The relatively low acceptance rate should not necessarily be constructed as a defeat for the hutment dwellers, many of the cases withdrawn were settled voluntarily between land lords and *Kudikidappukar* to the satisfaction of the later.

Ronald J Hering quoted A. Aiyappan that “the redistribution must be considered in comparison with situation of serf-castes historically, and with the situation of landless laborers elsewhere in the subcontinent. Hence, the amount of land involved in *kudikidappu* cases was not large; it was about 21,000 acres or 0.08 acres per family.”²⁵⁸ The homogenization of tenants was a conceptual problem that continued even today and identified as one of the reasons for the landlessness of untouchable castes in Kerala. Tenants enjoy relatively high status particularly *Kanamdars* who employed sub-tenants and wage labors to cultivate their holdings. The commercialization of agriculture and the

²⁵⁶ Ronald J Herring, “Abolition of Landlordism in Kerala: A Redistribution of Privilege,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 15, no.28 (1980), p.66.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

rise of agriculturist community through tenancy helped the elite castes to acquire and exploit the land. However, the majority of the tenants who received lands in the reforms were poor and socially oppressed. Herring identified that, the poor tenant's poverty was the reason for the small holdings; therefore, they received very little land through reforms.²⁵⁹ Technically the tenants in Kerala were part of production relations who were legally controlled land and labors process naturally benefitted surplus. It is noted that the Kerala legislation defined tenancy in terms of property relations rather than production relations.

The land reforms focused exclusively on tenancy reforms; therefore, the elite-middle castes largely benefitted by securing agricultural land, the untouchables were remained mere hutment dwellers. Most importantly it has continued the traditional caste structure through the exclusion of the Dalits from the ownership rights in agricultural land. Hence, it is an example to incorporate the dominant caste groups and separate the socially oppressed groups by using the modern democratic secular ideas. The land reforms did not give much impact to the agricultural sector; therefore, the land reforms had various drawbacks as a social reform as well as an economic reform. It not only excluded the Dalits from ownership but their habitus turned into new spaces of caste discriminations. Sanal Mohan observed the migration of Dalits in 1950s was an example to acquire the ownership in agricultural land, however, their migration from Travancore to the various places of Malabar regions were not much studied, whereas, the same migration by the

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 66.

higher castes was greatly emphasized. Migration seen as the control over the land, however, it was limited due to the socio-economic pressures.²⁶⁰

It is noted that the greater changes in the ownership of land happened mainly in the post reforms period. Agricultural land to the labors was the foremost aim of the land reforms. However, the very relevant question like, ‘Who are the labors?’ was not defined specifically. The Dalits, the real agricultural laborers, did not become the owners in the newly introduced system.

It is argued that the land reforms were favorable to the tenants, not the untouchable agricultural labors in the *Kudikidappu* land. Interestingly, the people who produced agrarian surplus became landless laborers, the people who did not take part directly in the agriculture and land related work included in the labour category, despite their owning of land. The protesters seriously raised certain serious contradiction in the agrarian sector which the left parties need to address. It was an agenda of Communist party before; however, it was not reflected in the land reforms when it introduced an agenda of the government. Hence, it indicates the demand of a new social order that may rearrange the various rights related to the land historically.

²⁶⁰ Sanal Mohan, “Caste and Acceleration of Capital” in M.Dasan, Pratibha V, and Pradipan Pampirikunnu, eds., *The Oxford India Anthology of Malayalam Dalit Writing* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.271.

CHAPTER-IV

REDEFINING CITIZENSHIP: RELOCATING CHENGARA AND ARIPPA

The Chengara and Arippa land struggles can be considered as a post-colonial social movement that redefines identity and citizenship of ex-untouchable castes. The aim of present chapter is to understand how these protest struggles problematized the question of citizenship in the liberal democratic system. These movements made a difference from other protests, the marginalized caste groups unitedly carried out autonomous struggles without mainstream political parties support. The difference was that the landlessness among higher and lower castes, challenging the notion that landless people are single categories. It exposed the role of caste capital in relation to land ownership through their experience which identifies the historical wrongs done to the untouchables by the state and civil society. For the Dalits, it is an attempt to secure social justice in a democratic society since the experiences in ‘the colony’ as well as ‘the hutments’ made their conditions static, further, it prevented them from migration, occupational specializations and other social transformations.

It often confronted the conception of dominant justice which distanced the socially oppressed groups in the periphery because the public consciousness in Kerala is not mature enough to completely accept a dignified untouchable individual even today. Therefore, the Malayali society and the political groups strategically ignore the land ownership question of the Dalits and Adivasis since it determines social position of every individual. Protestors observed that the title–deed issue of higher caste migrants often gets serious considerations by the political parties, while maintaining extreme

silence over these land struggles led by the lower castes. Hence, there is a paradigm shift in the Dalit movement that shifted their focus into civil rights matters in order to achieve citizenship status from religious and other discourses. Chengara and Arippa struggles can be read as initiatives which categorically demanded the state to reconsider them as equal-dignified citizens of this country.

The course of Chengara struggle articulated and raised the slogans like ‘give us land or bullets’ showing they are exiled citizens and highlighting the state’s triviality towards the protest and dispiritedness towards the lower caste people. The laws of land reforms driven to the structural exclusion of the untouchable caste in the modern state of Kerala. People who had any productive relation with land entered into the modern society, enjoying the benefits of it, landlessness is not just related to land but it may reject all the possible ways into the modern social system. The struggle for social justice needs to connect with the social position since a Dalit may be discriminated just for being Dalit. Hence, one cannot interpret these struggles as mere protest for material property instead of as Dalit assertion for self-respect through ideological affirmations from the grass root level which made them fight against the oppressive forces. There is a power that exists in these land struggles that tries to renew the Kerala society by problematizing Kerala and paradoxes in its model, therefore, these struggles are not mere land movements since it brings out the new debates over dignified civic status.

Bryan S Turner observes that the “Citizenship is the combination of legal, political, economic, and cultural behaviors that define a person as a full member of society and, as a result, affect the flow of resources to individuals and social groupings. Second, because citizenship is inextricably linked to the problem of unequal distribution of resources in

society, this definition of citizenship brings the idea squarely in the debate about inequality, power differences, and social class.”²⁶¹ According to him, the “citizenship is concerned with the content of social rights and obligations, as well as the form or type of such obligations and rights, the social factors that produce such practices, and the various social arrangements through which such advantages are dispersed to diverse segments of society.”²⁶²

These ideas wither away from the traditional understandings of citizenship that relates with various legal, political, and social entitlements which often define the privileges of the citizen. The Dalit land struggles address the unequal distribution of resources by problematizing the questions of inequality and power differences. Rajamma, an activist from Chengara says that this “struggle is not just for us but for entire landless Dalits in India because our people have to learn what is dignified life. I don’t have a space to go, why other castes do not have such issues? Aren’t we the citizen of this country?”²⁶³ Her dynamic words critically engage with the social construction of citizenship, forcefully revealing how this can be redefine through political struggles.

Citizenship privileges, in India, linked with the caste positions which institutionalized violence against the untouchables making inferior civic subjects since it maintained a closed system. Surinder S Jodhka says that the “caste was an epitome of traditional Indian society, ‘a closed system’ in which succeeding generations did similar kinds of work and lived more or less similar kinds of lives. In addition to that, it was exactly opposite to the western industrial societies where an individual could change their class

²⁶¹ Bryyan S. Turner, ed., *Citizenship and Social Theory* (New York: Sage, 1993), p.24.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Rajamma (Activist, Chengara Land Struggle), interviewed and translated by the Researcher, December 2019.

position in the social ladder, that level of individual mobility was not possible in caste system.”²⁶⁴ In short many caste groups were incorporated into the modern citizenship including middle castes in the post land reform period in Kerala. However, the Dalits, as a community, were neglected due to the closed nature of caste structure. The internalized nexus of caste and capital helped the higher castes to engage with the political institutions where the entries of untouchables into the modern discourses often get rejected. It is observed the organized caste groups trying to protect the interest of their community through interpreting the concepts like democracy, secularism, class and nationality.

The possession of land gives power and prestige, it provides an independent source of income, however, in the absence of it, inequality prevails among various caste groups that may cripple the egalitarian principles in the society. Niraja Gopal Jayal pointed that, “equality is the premise of the citizenship but equal civil and political rights in and of themselves are poor guarantors of substantiate equality, their egalitarian promise constantly undermined by the social inequalities that obtain in society.”²⁶⁵ Caste division as social inequality played a crucial role to prevent the untouchables to acquire land which undermined their civil and political rights.

An activist from the Aripa struggle, Shijo, says that “these are not just struggles rather ideological challenge against the state and society; therefore, it proclaims the politics of land in contemporary Kerala. In many places the untouchable caste lost their *kudikidappu* land even for betel leafs, toddy and salt. The lack of education among the Dalits is related to landlessness, it will give better education to my three daughters, if I

²⁶⁴ Surinder S Jodhka, *Caste in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2015), p.6.

²⁶⁵ Niraja Gopal Jayal, *Citizenship and its Discontents: An Indian History* (London: Harvard University Press, 2013), p.12.

get agricultural land. If we have land we would get better education by that we could overcome the barriers of caste then it would certainly lead us to dignified life.”²⁶⁶ Therefore, possessing the land, in Kerala, is an important for Dalits and other weaker sections in order to gain the socio-economic and the rights of full citizens. The land relation and its distribution in Kerala had undergoing serious criticism raised by the Dalits arguing that the Dalits were not considered as separate social category during land reforms since the process disastrous in problematizing the land and caste relations; therefore, once again it threw the ex-untouchable castes to natural hierarchies of traditional caste system.

Though the land reforms, in Kerala, tried to give the ownership rights to the landless but utterly failed to destroy the caste dominance over land. Land reforms have given the opportunity to become the owners of land, but the same opportunity to get the agricultural land consciously denied to the Dalits since their specific issues were unrepresented in the law making process. Thus, “Land reforms were the most important developmental initiatives of Indian states in the post independent era. It aimed to weaken the non-cultivating landlords and the transferring the land to the tillers of the soil. Even though land reforms legislation was only partially successful, it weakened the upper castes who were traditionally powerful and numerically small groups in the social order. However, the land reforms hardly did any benefits to the Dalits since these laborers were not seen as the tillers of the land.”²⁶⁷

Chengara and Arippa struggles led by the socially oppressed people who had been denied justice historically for various sociological reasons, exposed the state and civil

²⁶⁶ Shijo, (Activist, Arippa Land Struggle), interviewed and translated by the Researcher, June 2019.

²⁶⁷ Jodhka, *Caste in Contemporary India*, p.7.

society and the nature of ownership of agricultural land in Kerala. Initially, the respective governments called the Dalits struggles as an aggression by the Dalits; however, the agitators realized that unless and until they occupy the land their right to over land may not be satisfied. For the ex-untouchable castes, the land is not just for cultivation but a resource and citizenship by which social capital and political power can be secured, through the liberal frame work. Anupama Roy explains that the “notion of equal membership in the liberal framework involves the universal generalization of citizenship across social structures, implying equal application of the law and the promise that no person or group is legally privileged.”²⁶⁸ It is quite problematic while facilitating uniform application since it overlooks the differential position of individuals in the society and individual needs to be disassociated from the socio-economic and cultural contexts to engage in this masking process. It is observed the caste, race, gender determine the individual participation in the public-political role of citizens. Further, Roy says that the “dissociation may not be equally practicable to all, hence, the dissociation is a hegemonic idea since people shedding their ascriptive identities like upper caste, upper class, to enter into political community.”²⁶⁹ According to Roy, the multiculturalist has questioned the primacy of the masked, right bearing individuals. The existing framework of liberal citizenship unfolds putting the minority community at a disadvantage.”²⁷⁰ Hence, these kinds of masked citizenship rights do not consider the social position of untouchable communities, it puts them into the more vulnerable frameworks, and merely

²⁶⁸ Anupama Roy, *Gendered Citizenship: Historical and Conceptual Explorations* (New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2013), p.238.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

adding into the framework of citizenship discourse may not provide the qualitative life, though the liberal law says no person or group is legally privileged.

Theoretically, the multiculturalism takes the position on the historical wrongs and tries to alleviate the discrimination since it explains the political community is heterogeneous. Since, India has had the history of citizenship with entitlement rights, but without land entitlement the Dalits are exposed to insecurities. The right over land is legitimacy of belongingness that often restrained to ex-untouchables; therefore, it takes away their legal and constitutional rights for centuries. However, the struggles led by the Dalits are finding the new spaces in the citizenship discourses through deconstructing the blocked social relationship which is based on the traditional form of caste rigid exchanges in society. The Chengara and Arippa land struggles, in this context, clearly demanded the right to citizenship in order to get the access into modern nation, by the process of acquiring the assets and these struggles in the process tries to altered the idea of political community since the heterogeneity placed for the democratic public space.

T. H. Marshall says that “the citizenship is a set of rights consisting of three basic components: civil, political, and social rights are all important. Civil rights are required for individual liberty, political rights for participation in the exercise of political power, and social rights, which include everything from the right to a basic level of economic security to the right to fully participate in the social heritage and to live a civilized life in accordance with societal standards.”²⁷¹ Further Marshall says that the, “social class is a system of inequality, whereas citizenship is a position encompassing inherent equality of rights and duties. As a result, it is realistic to predict that citizenship's impact on social

²⁷¹ T. H. Marshal, *Citizenship and Social Class* (London: Pluto Press, 1949), pp.2-10.

class will take the shape of a confrontation between opposing values.”²⁷² He argues that, the citizenship redistribute the resources while capitalism inevitably involves in inequalities between social class, while the rights share equally all. Marshall asserts that, incorporating social rights into the status of citizenship is progressively to undermine the whole pattern of inequality and says that, it is hardly possible to maintain democratic freedom in a society which does not contain a large area of economic freedom.

The political process of land reforms, in Kerala, were one progressive social rights initiated for the citizens, however, they do not address the inequalities prevailed particularly in the land and caste relations. The ex-untouchables achieved democratic freedom in the post-independent era but the post-independent state could not provide economic freedom on the material properties like land. Hence, the Dalit intelligentsia understands the social rights were manipulative, therefore, they stress on the radical restructuring of land reforms and rural assets in India. While confronting with the caste mind realities, the Dalits, the landless masses strongly argues that it is time to share the country's wealth which they created.

The Chengara and Arippa struggles placed the land as the symbol of dignity, however, whether the land is distributed or not, these struggles, firmly underscores the relationship between the dignified citizenship and the land ownership in the public. The demand of land ownership by the Dalits is historical demand. It fundamentally challenges the public consciousness in Kerala which is influenced by various ideologies particularly the class understanding. Progressively, the Kerala civil society filled with several ideologies, but rejects the new voices comes from the subaltern Dalit groups which often challenge the

²⁷² Ibid.

tradition based solid caste dynamics. These struggles provided an ethical language to the movement, speaking with the power and dominance that afford them to express the issues of unequal social power and the need for full citizenship. Hence, the present land struggles are more political since, it identifies the historical wrongs and tries to problematize two antithetical concepts like caste and citizenship.

Modern Indian liberal state undermined the social hierarchy without addressing the thirst for equality of downtrodden groups by projecting individual over the community. Gopal Guru observes that “the hegemonic political groups in this country emphasized the individual over caste and creed in the independent India. Nationalism has provided a public domain to the individual which undermined the existing social hierarchy and paved the way for equality in respect of those who were in need of being equalized. Hence, the notion of citizenship offered Dalits an opportunity to taste equality of social status.”²⁷³ Guru argues that “the Congress and Gandhi were constantly denied the citizenship claims of Dalits with the Hindu bent of mind which also denied the status of private persons and citizens as well.”²⁷⁴ According to him, “The arrival of new political institutions promised Dalits a new identity based on an autonomous individual status through political representation, however, Gandhi denied it since it would a cut off of from Hinduism. Hence, they enveloped the claims of Dalits for citizenship within the citizenship claims that Hindus were seeking from the colonizers.”²⁷⁵

Similarly, the Dalit claims for dignified citizenship arising from the land struggles were often enveloped by the political parties since they do not consider them as the citizens in

²⁷³ Gopal Guru, “Citizenship in Exile: A Dalit Case,” in *Civil Society, Public Sphere and Citizenship: Dialogues and Perceptions*, eds. Rajeev Bhargava and Reifeld Helmut (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), p. 261.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 262.

the spirit of public. The civil society, in India, usually dismayed by the new claims of ex-untouchable, because of the casteist mindset which, prevent them from giving equal considerations in the society, consequently, they labeled the protestors are thieves and enemies. Dalits equal claims for citizenship deconstructed some of the progressive notions which also accelerated the democratization process. Hence, the social location of the protestors makes the civil society more appalling since the society has been practicing and offering respect to the certain sections those are identified as dignified Keralites; therefore, they cleaned the space with dung water where the solidarity meeting was conducted by the Chengara land struggle. Further, the paternalistic as well as caste prejudices forced some of the political parties to claim monopoly over these struggles. In this paradoxical context, Gopal Guru raises the question that, it is important to ascertain, which domain is more important for Dalits to establish their citizenship claims –civil society or state?

Another pertinent question here is whether the Dalits enjoy equal respect from the political community or not? Guru explains that, “the Indian public sphere imbued with the ideology of purity-pollution that seriously destroys the possibility of any intimacy and it also erases the boundaries between the private and public, with social discrimination travelling freely from one sphere to another and eroding the secular notions like citizenship.”²⁷⁶ Thus the notion of purity-pollution exists even in the progressive Kerala civil society where the people cleaned the space occupied by the Dalits with dung water. These irrational acts of intolerance towards Dalits and their

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 276.

struggles tell that Indian public sphere is not caste free; therefore, it lacks empathetic understandings which break the social and political interactions.²⁷⁷

The land struggles led by the Dalits and Adivasis, approved the real progressive stand by breaking the purity-pollution monopoly existed in Kerala society historically. A. K. Ramakrishnan argues that the real progress of the downtrodden groups, to achieve the basic rights like citizenship through having the power over resources. It is observed the people who had rights over primary resources like land were positioned in the higher status in the society; the denial of these rights excludes various caste groups and pushes them to the margins.²⁷⁸ He opined that the state government has to consider these struggles as an opportunity to address the neglected questions during land reforms, and if it is addresses the ownership rights that would reach to the landless masses. Hence, the state and civil society should restrain from their negative attitude and indictment against struggles initiated by the Dalits and Adivasis. However, the civil society in Kerala interestingly expresses its apprehension about the question of second land reforms which are demanded by the Dalits based on the citizenship and resources redistribution.

Liberal Democracy: Citizenship and Caste

The Chengara and Arippa land struggles have not received awaited support from the Kerala civil society; instead, it tries to unsung the agential participation of ex-untouchables since it is autonomous movement represented by them. The civil society in Kerala thus realized that it is not a mere struggle, instead, there is an agential declaration and identity formation happening through the assertion of subaltern rights in public. The state government on its part reduced the value of struggle as the problem of housing

²⁷⁷ Ramesan, (Activist, Arippa Land Struggle), interviewed and translated by the Researcher, June 2019.

²⁷⁸ A. K. Ramakrishnan, "Chengara Keralathinte Janaspathyavalkkaranamanu," in *Chengara Solidarity Book*, ed. Muhammad Velam (Solidarity: Kozhikode, 2009), p.58.

which can be dealt through managerial mechanisms of the government. Thus both the state and civil society shattered the subjective questions which are related to caste and citizenship of the Dalits and Adivasis. It is argued by the subalterns that the best technique that the state and civil society exercised to control the people's protest was not to contemplate them as equal citizens, but rather as mere muddled folks.

Hence, Chengara and Arippa are not mere lamentations about the land reforms but a highly charged political protest for citizenship. It can be argued that the liberal democratic institutions lacked the concern towards the subjective agential matters of the Dalits. K.Y. Ratnam observes that "the hierarchical caste relation provided a condition for the rise of Dalit consciousness hence its objective conditions transformed into democratic struggles when the Dalits are affronted with the liberal democratic principles."²⁷⁹ Thus the rise of Dalit consciousness in Chengara and Arippa land struggles problematized the structural dimension of Kerala civil society which historically denied the liberal democratic principles to the Dalits through different forms of exclusions.²⁸⁰

According to Gopal Guru "the liberal institutions would help the Dalits to reject the negative description of servile objects that was imposed on them for so long. Self-esteem, equal respect for persons, equality before law, and equal civil and political rights were the integrated part of liberal thoughts, hence, the same were in the cornerstones in the Dalit struggle for emancipation."²⁸¹ It is apparent that the liberal democratic

²⁷⁹ K.Y.Ratnam, "The Dalit Movement and Democratization in Andhra Pradesh," *East-West Centre Working Papers*, no.13 (2008), p.1.

²⁸⁰ Sreeraman Koyyon, (Leader, Arippa Land Struggle), interviewed and translated by the Researcher, June 2019.

²⁸¹ Gopal Guru, "Liberal democracy in India and the Dalit Critique," *Social Research*, Vol. 78, no.1 (2011), p.101.

institutions are more interested to offer social welfare programs rather than creative space provided by the constitution. However, these new social movements propose new visions of civil and political rights by rejecting welfare schemes, bringing contrary an alternative political discourse in the civil society. Hence, the non-institutionalized way of protest gives self-esteem and equal respect to the persons that democratize civil society into more radical forms.

Further, these struggles critically gaze into the developmental model and its absurd nature in order to bring out the degrading and repulsive tendencies against the oppressed caste groups into the public sphere. It is noticed primarily, though these movements attempt to give visibility to the excluded identities through their new claims, nevertheless, the skewed responses of liberal democratic institutions are highly undependable and unreliable referring the Dalits as ‘free rider’ that obviously provides chance for the dominant castes to resort deleterious reactions against which affects the Dalits self-respect and dignity.

The liberal democracy has delivered contextual condition in which Dalits articulate their political rights and get access to public office and self-esteem. However, the notions of liberal citizenship discourses give priority to the personal liberty and private property since it believes individuals are the bearers of universal, equal, and publicly affirmed rights. Thus the caste biased liberal institutions reduced the space of Dalits into filth through wretched approaches, therefore, the civil society often diminishes their self-worth.²⁸² The people of Chengara and Arippa said that they have attained confidence to enter into the public spaces like police stations only participating in the protest by which they could transgress the caste boundaries and assert their self-esteem in the public.

²⁸² Ibid., 107.

However, “It is believed in the contractual liberal view the individual is the sovereign authority over themselves since they are having rational advantages as well the conception of good.”²⁸³ Since the state and civil which is disciplined to give respect to the ritually pure society and alludes that the Dalits are not par with their social status raises the debatable doubt that whether the Dalits can affirm their right in the public sphere in the liberal democracy.

The state and civil society failed to admit the individuality of the ex-untouchable caste that often curtailed the sovereignty of individual self. Though the liberal view offers the individual is to not beholden to the community but the insulating nature of state forced lower caste more inferior through ritual supremacies of caste. Hence, it is noticed that “the politics would protect the individual from the interference of the government and exercise their right they inalienably possess. Hence, the individual needs to vote, pay taxes, obey the law as part of their political obligation against this protection.”²⁸⁴ However, the people of Chengara lamented that the government has not showed any interest in the first few years of the struggle. The same attitude has been ventilated even in the Arippa land struggle where the political parties are constantly muted these struggles characterizing as the mere wiles of the servile, thereby preventing their limited resources.²⁸⁵ During the initial phase of Chengara agitation, the scheduled caste minister of Kerala commented that the ‘Dalits are not supposed to do such protest by encroaching land’.

²⁸³ Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.4.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Sarada (Activist, Arippa Land Struggle), interviewed and translated by the Researcher, June 2019.

It is largely believed the political expression of the individual is possible through the strength of liberalism that would tolerate religious, political and cultural differences, therefore, the disputes are often avoided because of the conception of good. It is noticed that the Dalit assertion for dignified citizenship often leads to disputes and intolerance in the civil society which means the stigmatized society does not internalize the liberal principles that sabotages the Dalit claims. John Rawls argues that the notion of liberal justice may be viewed as a comprehensive moral doctrine that allows the emergence of overlapping consensus of moral principles between opposing doctrines. According to him, “these overlapping consensuses desirable to form the stability of the free society.”²⁸⁶

However, it is mere balance of power among the citizens since they have different world views. It is important to notice that Rawls does not assert that overlapping consensus is achievable in every society and it cannot endure forever. He claims that “some societies may have similar convergence on a liberal conception of justice; however, some others have unreasonable doctrines until they overwhelm liberal institutions.”²⁸⁷ Rawls observed in liberal societies trust and convergences were deepening in belief among the citizens which would give the possibility to the overlapping consensus that would contribute to the social stability and free society.²⁸⁸ Hence, the promises of liberal institutions like overlapping consensus and convergence may not be easily materialized when the civil society is divided on the basis of caste norms of hierarchy.

Historically, the caste biased institutions are not willing to accept the equality among the citizens, hence, the liberal conception of justice gets often undermine. The Indian society

²⁸⁶ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999), p192.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

is not the bunch of people who had equal rights, instead, it has numerous peculiarities where the ambitions of untouchable castes permissible within the caste limits which breaks the conception of justice and free society. The liberal doctrines when confront with the purity-pollution doctrines, that idealize the graded inequalities, ritual distinction and the caste boundaries, would blunt the egalitarian liberal principles. The impure identity forced the ex-untouchable caste to carry the stigma of untouchability since the religious hierarchy never allowed them to come out from political and religious subjugation. The 'Brahminical imperialism and cultural colonialism led any meaningful changes in the ritual practices of purity and pollution, priestly authority, nor brought any changes in the administrative control of institutional power. Hence, the impact of science and secular humanism has broken some of the old cultural values. It is noticed the religion and political parties presided over by caste people tend to divide the Dalits since they are very heterogeneous people even in the same region.'²⁸⁹

In the post-colonial times, social movements led by the Dalits are in constant efforts to overcome the social taboos imposed on them because, the deprived and disadvantaged groups cannot access the justice without them easily. It is held that the liberal democratic institutions are neutral to the citizen by considering them as equal; however, Indian experience tells that "institutions do not have any control over individuals; therefore, they are often parochial and unfold their caste, regions, religion and so on."²⁹⁰ Shafir and Peled observed that the "liberal state is supposed to be neutral with respect to its citizens' conception of good, and treat all them as equal, regardless of their ascriptive and other

²⁸⁹ A. M. A. Ayrookuzhiel, "The Religious Factor in Dalit Liberation: Some Reflections," in *Dalit Solidarity*, eds. Bhagwan Das and James Massey (Delhi: ISPCK, 1995), pp.132-133.

²⁹⁰ Guru, "Liberal Democracy in India and the Dalit Critique", p.111.

affiliations, liberal theory must constitute the citizen as an abstract, universal subject stripped of all particularity.”²⁹¹

In India, the state and its liberal democratic institutions are not empty of casteism, therefore, the state institutions as well as the civil society eager to know the social location of individuals in order to judge and assess their ability. This illiberal attitude makes the individual constantly to be remain with particularity instead of reaching into the universal positions offered by the liberal democracy.

Both the Aripa and Chengara land struggles faced relentless violent blockades and threats by both the state and civil society since their ascriptive identity located in the ex-untouchable community. These struggles transformed heterogeneous Dalit identity to subjective agents that made them address the changes and their needs as a dignified social being. It is perceived that these people’s movement and their sensible questions are proficient enough to address the fundamental issues of the nation since they are demanding the share in the resources of nation. Hence, the assertion for citizenship not only in an abstract way but it brings the new politics of social justice by asking participation and equal share in the resources in order to challenge the consequences even in the globalized era. The caste has given the right to superior castes, to define the actions of lower caste individuals, movements of their body language, and even their emotional expressions. However, the prejudiced and caste powerful exclusionary nature of civil society dishonored these protests. Thus, it is not merely connected with the attitude of individuals but the graded inequality that compartmentalized the people in different caste biased chambers.

²⁹¹ Shafir and Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship*, p.4.

Dalits and Adivasis land movements accelerated the idea to acquire ownership rights since the resources would bring the social position and self-esteem. However, the civil society lacks the ethical resources, in accepting the universal position of Dalits, which leads to social tensions among caste groups. The ethical questions of the Dalits often undermined without any deliberations, since the dominant caste refuse to treat them as morally equal. Rajni Kothari observes that “the invoking caste identity claims by the ex-untouchables characterized obliterating, disparities and hierarchical. Hence, it undertakes basic transformation of the social order and does precisely what the larger secular order has failed to provide, that hoping a society free of exploitation and oppression. When more assertion takes place more backlashes happens from the upper caste since the rise of the masses is intolerable and it is something that they never have been used to, therefore, more efforts to divide and trying to co-opting the forces of changes.”²⁹²

Moreover, these backlashes against the identity assertions of the lower castes are results of prejudices of the higher castes that prevents social harmony, thus the new citizenship claims bring the excluded identity into the center stage. Further, the states very often brand these new social movements as the ‘Naxalite groups’ without understanding the ideological roots of the protest. Thus, “there is no clear and ideological framework that is relevant to undertaking these new struggles, the process of cooption, and buying up, of divide and rule by the dominant party or class continues. Hence, the mobilization based on caste, sub caste, and ethno-regional identities has happened because of their disappointment with the Indian state in which they relied a lot to end their

²⁹² Rajni Kothari, “Rise of the Dalits and the Renewed Debate on Caste,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.29, no.2 (1994), p.1.

discriminations and oppressions.”²⁹³ Thus these mobilizations of the oppressed caste groups seek their own future with their identities and numbers in order to democratize the state and civil society.

The political response of the political elites towards the new caste identity assertions were more antagonistic and unreceptive since it is always framed as animosity, therefore, the progressive groups including left labeled these identities as communal, though they assert their constitutional rights. The Chengara agitation prepared a pledge which says, “I like my country. I would obey the constitution and laws of my country. I will try for the aims of the constitution proposed. I would participate in the nation building process. I do not practice any discrimination against any Indian citizens on the basis of caste or religion. I realize ourselves that the owners of great tradition and the protectors of democracy. Nation for the people and the people for the nation.”²⁹⁴ Hence, the Dalits posed a challenge against their marginalization and mistreatment by upholding the constitution, which promised the democratic citizenship. Dalits exposed the liberal state that undermined the egalitarian principles of justice, liberty, equality and its role in ill-treating the Dalits which is violation against the Indian constitution which would treat the Dalits as passive subjects.

Hence, the Dalit’s affinity towards the constitution makes them politically visible subjects in the civil society and the nation. Contrary, the liberal democratic institutions controlled them morally inferior that made them passive agents. The liberal ideas were given the possibility to change and reorder the individual themselves, however, this possibility always connected with one’s own community. The structural impact of caste

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ “Report of Chengara Solidarity Network,” in *Chengara Solidarity Book*, ed. Muhammad Velam, (Kozhikode: Solidarity, 2009), p.193.

has been rooted in Indian social system, therefore, its internal mechanism tries to keep them as mere fragmented identities and non-citizens. Anand Teltumbde observes that “the political parties in India try to entice them and the civil society too has various stakes in their preservation because their ghettoized existence provides low caste labour and myriad services to the dominant castes”²⁹⁵. He also emphasized that “their very existence serves as the source of psychological solace to many, and they serve as props for the social *status quo* holding up the social hierarchy of the society. Hence, the ruling class always wants to see them in fragmented conditions; moreover, the Dalits cannot have a unified identity with radical consciousness discarding their baggage of past attributions. The class unity among the Dalits is the biggest threat to ruling class in India.”²⁹⁶ Hence, Teltumbde argues that the post-colonial political economy has had serious impact on the caste structure, collapsing ritualistic distinctions among the *dwija* castes which had adopted the capitalist mode first.²⁹⁷

The entice attitude of the state and ghettoized existence made the Dalit life miserable. The new social movement for the resources, dignity, and equal citizenship nevertheless, creates new political discourses which breaks the Brahminical knowledge-power hierarchy. The new political discourse oriented the protestors to hold the value of constitution by which they intervene into the liberal states and articulating their demands. Natarajan, an activist from Chengara, observes that ‘nobody can find a struggle like this in the world since its policy is truly relevant, and 1495 families received land through this protest. Hence, this protest is not only known in Kerala but it crossed the boundaries of states and nation. We showed the strength of our Dalit unity,

²⁹⁵ Anand Teltumbde, *Dalits: Past, Present and Future* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2017), p.46.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

therefore, the state engaged with us. I heard and learnt about the constitution through this struggle, therefore, I am not slave of any political parties. It is not about the issuing of a title-deed but we have to be considered as the dignified citizens of this great country. Some of the Dalits are devaluing this protest because they do not understand the constitution yet. Many Dalits realized the importance to hold the constitution along with their protest.’²⁹⁸ Further, “The new social movements based on caste identity ideologically shift from hierarchy to plurality, from ordained status to negotiated position of power, from ritual definitions of roles and positions to civic and political definitions. Hence, the politicization of caste undermining the rigidity of the system which makes the people bargains with political parties. The politicization of caste leads to the transformation of caste system.”²⁹⁹ The land struggles led by the Dalits accelerated this potential shift that sabotaged caste hierarchy, therefore, the consciousness of civil society over Dalits has been transforming slowly. Secondly, the undermining of the caste system provided a new outlook on life to the Dalits that has changed their way of looking to the society. Hence, these kinds of assertive political definitions for dignified citizenship enriched the self-consciousness of the Dalits since they realized that they have to move along with the progress of the civil society.

Moreover, the present struggles created Dalit political space through reproducing subjective claims; hence it cannot be read as the reproduction of the potency of caste. It is argued that the secular claims of modernity undermine caste, religious and communal claims in the post-independent period with the western and Indian emancipatory traditions. The liberal democratic institution is supposed to give equal opportunity and

²⁹⁸ Natarajan, (Activist, Chengara Land Struggle), interviewed and translated by the Researcher, December 2019.

²⁹⁹ Kothari, “Rise of the Dalits and the Renewed Debate on Caste”, p.2.

equality to every individual; therefore, it transforms the traditional caste identity to national identity. The Dalits “claims over modernity and modern liberal institutions had a serious setback by the lack of recognition by the state and Hindu civil society, hence, it did not offer any promising vocation to them.”³⁰⁰ The protestors from Chengara observed that the downtrodden castes must be united because caste systems created to destroy our unity and generated hate amongst individuals. Further, the caste biased liberal state and Hindu civil society are apprehensive about the Dalits achieving monopoly over the Caste Hindu society, therefore, they are afraid to concede the Dalits claim of any resources especially land. Society lacks the free will to accept the ex-untouchable as free agents; therefore, they have been locked in various ideologies and other political parties like slaves.

The land movements undoubtedly have given visibility to the Dalit masses who were pushed back to the backyards of Indian nation, these people serve as the backdrop to the Dalit critique, therefore, they put forth sensible questions about nationalism, liberal democracy, state and civil society. Laha Gopalan observes that ‘the Chengara protest became much more vibrant when the blockade began by the trade unions; it did not shatter the energy of the protestors. More importantly, in Chengara, it was not protest but we lived there, people often get sick, delivery and if there was need we went to the hospital, thus life was protest and protest was life. Therefore, the protest is done by the people who were affiliated with political parties not by us. We demanded land and took it over. If state and civil society are not allowing us to live, we will protest again.’³⁰¹ It is noticed that the Chengara and Arippa movements sensibly addressed the failure of liberal

³⁰⁰ Gopal Guru, “Dalits in Pursuit of Modernity” in *India Another Millennium*, ed. Romila Thapar (New Delhi: Penguin, 2000).

³⁰¹ Report of Chengara Solidarity Network, p.194.

democratic system in order to bring the substantive changes in their life which brings self-respect, and the notions of dignified citizenship. These agitations have created consciousness among the people regarding the importance to uphold the constitution along with their protest. Their life experience revealed them that the state and civil society is not free from caste biases, it is hostile to the untouchable castes.

In Chengara the study classes have been conducted for four years in order to build the confidence and to create awareness of constitutional rights. Laha Gopalan observed that the Dalits were fearful of the dominant people, were not showed any confidence to the struggle, hence, the study classes based on the constitution which filled them with more confidence to challenge any kinds of power structures in India. There were many independent protests that have emerged by the Dalits in Kerala which challenged the liberal state and political parties. However, primary focus of these struggles were to create collective Dalit emancipation rather than mere individual mobility that proposed by the liberal thoughts.

The elected government has to take decisions over the sensible questions of citizenship raised by the Dalits; however, the liberal state considered it as a legal issue and more interested to settle in the courts of law. The state is supposed to initiate negotiations on the needs and try to settle the issues, however, liberal state institutions made their situation more vulnerable by resorting to more violent arresting people and filing false cases which try to stigmatized their identity into fragile. Hence, people were forced to take up more of legal activities like legal struggle of securing bails there by diverting their collective organized struggles and make them more of individualistic. Further, even mainstream trade union activists resorted to violate the rights of the Dalits during the

blockade. It can be argued that state and civil society showed their incivility towards the protestors throughout the protest, taking the men to warehouses and beating them, molesting women, pushing them into starvation and extreme chaos by blocking people who brought medicines and food for them. Hence, the civil society with casteist attitude unprepared to accept the Dalits have the grown up capacity to represent themselves, therefore, they labeled them as incomplete citizens in order to maintain caste-ridden society.

Cheshire Calhoun observes, “the absence of civility turns nasty and sometime hazardous. Hence, it seems to be a basic virtue in social life. It has innate associations with etiquette or good manners; therefore, it distinguishes the civilized from the barbaric, the upper from the lower classes, and the members of the polite society from the rabble. Moreover, civility identified with complying with class-distinguishing etiquette rules it appeared not to be a moral virtue but a badge of class distinction.”³⁰² Hence, the good manners include the distinctly moral: considering other’s feelings, expressing gratitude, engaging in tolerant restraint, respecting other’s personal privacy. Earlier “the civility meant for the fitness of civility in the post feudal society involved obeying authoritative law and refraining from violence, similarly civility existed as a mark of the good citizen in contemporary times.”³⁰³

The Kerala civil society utterly failed to have civility when the new democratic questions arose from the subjugated identities since it interrogates the liberal democratic structures and enhances self-respect and redefines the idea of citizenship. The land movements represent the excluded social groups by symbolizing their excluded identity which brings

³⁰² Cheshire Calhoun, “The Virtue of Civility”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol 29, no.3(2000), p.1

³⁰³ Ibid.

out the nasty and hazardous nature of civil society, further, they try to distinguish themselves as part of Dalit civil society not the dominant Hindu civil society. Since the state and its liberal institutions neither understand nor coopt this new politics, they are often frustrated, intolerant and branded as an irrelevant move by the Dalits, moreover, the liberal democratic institutions are not capable enough or tolerant towards the Dalit critique. The Dalits' citizenship claims often confronted with the Brahminic social norms, therefore, it is a difficult task for the community to organize and establish themselves.

Kancha Ilaiah Shepherded observed that the caste system killed the basic initiatives among people to embrace others. He further argued spiritual fascism is the stagnation for Hindu society; therefore, the spiritual fascism and political democracy do not go hand in hand. Hence, it breaks the possibility to form as a nation. Moreover, a nation is not a political entity; it is a philosophical, economic, civilizational, cultural and spiritual entity. If civil society holds spiritual hierarchy imposes all kinds of restrictions on human development.³⁰⁴ It can be argued the political discourses in India are deeply connected with caste system and the individual entity measured with their social position, however, modernity and its liberal institution civilized the savage society into capitalist development with the colonial capital by the British. The rules of caste and religion made the Dalit claims of citizenship more complex and violent process. "The caste values of intolerance, indignation, and violence are performed most sternly against Dalits

³⁰⁴ Kancha Ilaiah, *Buffalo Nationalism: A Critique of Spiritual Fascism* (Kolkata: Bhatkal & Sen, 2006), p.61.

in public life. The Dalits have been excluded from the public spaces, and it continues. Hence, Dalit politics aimed to democratize civil society and public space.”³⁰⁵

In Kerala, the caste and its discourses often identified with the untouchable community alone for so long since the peculiar characteristics of the political environment. Therefore, the slogans aroused from Chengara and Aripa were not familiar to the state and civil society; hence, they assert claims over landed property by departing from the traditional left discourses. The new citizenship movements distinctively place an alternative initiative in order to address the issues of caste and self-respect. It I argued that the land reforms Act itself was a political idea of the middle class, therefore, it could not identify the downtrodden of the oppressed caste that led to these new social movements across India. The liberal democratic movements failed to understand the political discourses of the politics of identity and dignity which inevitable challenging the ideological dominance imposed on socially oppressed communities. Hence, the liberal democratic institutions have tried to fulfill the agendas of middle caste groups; therefore, the ex-untouchable castes were forced to organize themselves to fight against the dominant ideologies.

Even after the land reforms were taken place, in Kerala, huge tracts of land were concentrated in the hands of local landlords where the Dalits are mere laborers; therefore, they could not transform their identity in the social rankings. The contradiction is well showed here that the people are protesting for land and dignified life in a progressive state which branded as for successive implementation of land reforms. More importantly, the liberal democratic state tried to use force on them with the state mechanism, therefore, they were forced to create a suicidal squad in Chengara. The

³⁰⁵ Suryakant Waghmore, *Civility Against Caste* (New Delhi: Sage, 2013), p.11.

protesters cried that the state and civil society extremely lacked the civility whenever they confronted the non-familiarized agential question of the downtrodden caste because it proposes the transgression of social boundaries in terms of acts, speech and body-language.

In contemporary political discourse, “civility is considered as a virtue particularly in the liberal democratic societies; it fits in a pluralistic society and is closely connected to tolerance. Civil citizens respect the right of others; refrain from violence, intimidation, harassment. The tolerant self-restraint fits with citizen for life in the liberal democracy.”³⁰⁶ The people around the land struggle areas showed their intolerant behavior when these protestors entered into the estate which led to violent attacks on them. The basic concept of civil citizenship dismantled by the caste biased civil society at Chengara and Arippa that barred the doors of liberal democratic principle in the society. The “civil citizen should have an active willingness to listen others, and try to see the things in the point of view of their conception of the good, a fair minded accommodation to other views.”³⁰⁷

The protestors in both land struggles observed that the state government was not willing to hear their demands, instead branding them as ‘the Maoist’ since the majority of them belonged to untouchable castes. It can be argued though the civil citizenship proposes the accommodation of other views in the society, but the Dalit views were never accommodated easily. It is largely believed civil citizens magnanimously acknowledge opponent’s views as a moral position; however, these moral principles are often overthrown by the Indian civil society since its moral values are closely linked to the

³⁰⁶ Calhoun, “The Virtue of Civility”, p.6.

³⁰⁷ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p.337.

purity-pollution ideologies. Hence, it is observed that the Indian society is in contrast with the democratic civility and tolerance since hierarchies and status privileges defined by the caste structure. The political civility enables the individuals to transform the quality of citizenship from barbarism to civil society; however, it produces an exclusionary attitude and intolerance towards untouchables since they are the members of polluting caste groups.³⁰⁸

The idea of civility connected with respect, tolerance and considerateness; therefore, it is moral conduct and observed the citizenship practices in India do not show any interest to give respect to the individualistic rights of Dalits since the privileged social groups genuinely lack the civility in their attitudes which often produces biased social rules against marginal castes. The Dalits as vulnerable subject could not enjoy the full freedom and autonomy of modern citizens that offered by the constitution and liberal democratic discourses. Caste and the power of purity marked on the Dalits limited their possibilities of universal citizen though the modernity re-fixed their boundaries from the traditional caste bound spaces. It is observed the purity and pollution strategically used by the native capitalist to ghettoize the Dalits to keep them as enslaved citizens which curtails the political privileges.

It is observed that the Dalits in both land struggles discarded their individuated self and transcended it into social to achieve resources. The emerging new Dalit sensibility among the ex-untouchables seek delink personal from social and it will organize thought and action around the social self rather than individual self moreover social would be defined by critiquing personal. It is believed that “the social sensibility of the Dalits would be helpful to accumulate moral hegemony by which they reach to public

³⁰⁸ Waghmore, *Civility Against Caste*, p.12.

recognition for the political initiatives.”³⁰⁹ The lack of moral hegemony often driven out the Dalits from the public realm because of the tenacity of the caste structure, therefore, these new social movements try to accumulate moral hegemony with transparent intentions would expand the democratic realm of public imagination.³¹⁰

Dalits have been excluded from the developmental activities and victimized their social position since the absence of moral hegemony in the public domain where the other dominant community safely placed in that social ladder by uprooting Dalits. Hence, the new discourses seek civility in social life; therefore, it tries to reveal the inequality of resources and concentration of capital among various caste groups in the progressive state of Kerala. There is a community-based reason for poverty and the concentration of wealth, hence, those historical wrongs identified by the new social movements which made them to protest against the state to attain assets for dignified citizenship. The present land movements transform the individual Dalit self into collective self within the framework of modernity. Therefore, the Dalit discourse often butt up against the modern liberal institutions while at the same time being part of it and raises fundamental criticism to democracy, largely holding its values and principles. It has been raising critical questions on nationality by admitting the existence of the nation state; therefore, they are demanding the protection of law.

The Dalit protest pressures the state to consider them as an equals and dignified citizens; this alternative discourse interrogates civil society in order to democratize it. Gurpreet Mahajan observes “in a democratic setup the state has the obligation to enunciate a framework and protect a body of laws that enhance equal citizenship. Strong civil society

³⁰⁹ Guru, “Dalits In Pursuit of Modernity”.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

can demand the government to fulfill the obligation; however, a weak civil society needs to pressure the government to honor the fundamental obligations. Hence, various social institutions occupy with their agendas when the state is performing the task of formulating laws and the communitarian in the world are demanding for the withdrawal of the state to determine their own good life. The state has to enhance the equal citizenship since it is upholding the system of rights.”³¹¹

The Dalit self is identified with therefore weak civil society they are forced to pressurize liberal democratic institutions in order to fulfill the moral obligations. Hence, “in the liberal democratic setup the state has to be entrusted to have the responsibility to create a framework where the civil society institutions can expand the necessary condition for freedom and equal citizenship.”³¹² However, as far as Dalits are concerned, the communitarian logic cannot be acceptable since they do not have any power enjoyed in the past; therefore, they often go for protest, or upholding constitutional values to address the humiliation and exploitation in the society. It is noticed that the state and its mechanism are quite suspicious when the Dalits transform their individuated self into social because it brings the sense of community to enable them to critically observe the lack of state’s obligations. The protestors firmly believe these alternative movements would certainly provide a decent and relatively respectable position if they transform their social boundaries, otherwise, they would have to continue with their traditional social position along with demeaning jobs imposed by the caste system.³¹³

³¹¹ Gurpreet Mahajan, “Civil Society, State and Democracy,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.34, no.49 (1999), p.3472.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ T.R.Sasi (Leader, Chengara Land Struggle), interviewed and translated by the Researcher, June 2019.

The present struggles have been problematizing the liberal democratic discourses and the lack of civility by considering landed property as a reference point. Hence, this discourse exposes the construction of Malayali citizens through the constant critiques of modern liberal discourses that inform the caste and its mechanisms, which are widely operating in Kerala. J. Devika points out that “there is a dangerous silence about Dalit land struggles in Kerala. To some extent, the land issue was an agenda for the left parties till the end of seventies. However, in the post seventies, Kerala has witnessed various public welfare programs like minimum wage, one lakh houses, and developmental programs for unorganized sector and pensions so on. It is observed that, consumer citizen has emerged through these welfare activities by which Kerala moved to engaged citizenship process eventually and a state centered civil society has formed. Hence, the decentralization campaign started in the mid-nineties strategically buried the demand for the agricultural land to the Dalits, therefore, it has limited to providing minimum requirements to the needy.”³¹⁴ Hence, an oppositional civil society has formed under the ex-untouchable caste in order to mobilize resources by transgressing the class categories of dominant political forces. However, “the secular-liberal political groups failed to understand the cause of these struggles, therefore, they often reduce the sensible questions emerged from it, further labeling it as a vociferous act by the frustrated individuals. Moreover, the secular left political discourses try to consider it as part of class struggle that limits the issues of caste. Hence, they offer more welfare programs and propose the eradication of poverty among the poor.”³¹⁵

³¹⁴ J. Devika, “Left Babel in Kerala,” in *Chengara Solidarity Book*, ed. Muhammad Velam, (Kozhikode: Solidarity, 2009), pp.132-33.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 135.

The dissenting voices of marginal communities for equal citizenship bring the systematic attention of the liberal institutions since it deals with socio-historical negligence towards them. More importantly it talks about the need for universal citizenship that could provide respectful treatment to the fragmented identities by breaking the normative understanding of the civil society. Activists from both land struggles point out those secular political forces that are influenced by the modernist agendas need to give more attention to the unrepresented identities since they believe in the language of equality. However, Kerala has witnessed the progressive discourses often giving priorities to the groups who follow the dominant ideologies in the society. The parental consciousness of the progressive groups believes that the marginal communities need to struggle for emancipation through their ideological framework. Hence, it always curtails the freedom of the Dalits to raise their voice themselves which also shows that the secular groups believe Dalit selves are still unfit and not accommodative both in civil society and the liberal democratic institutions as well. Moreover, the secular-liberal discourses consider these movements are only for material properties. Hence, they are more interested to settle it as a mere land issue by ignoring the radical questions particularly for equal citizenship and social justice. As a result, the secular progressive attitude can be equated with colonial administrators who enjoyed every institution by saying Indians are unfit for administration. Accordingly, the “Colonizers believed poverty and illiteracy as the impediments to the realization of democratic citizenship to the Indians mind, therefore, they became more authoritarian and intellectually snobbish and made them to cherish free institution for their own people by portraying Indians as individuals who cannot handle self-government.”³¹⁶

³¹⁶ Rajni Kothari, *Politics in India* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 1970), p.391.

Thus it is clear that the Dalits are forced to fight against the liberal institutions and the dominant civil society for the radical changes in their social setup. Acquiring equal citizenship, in fact, a radical challenge of the marginalized groups since it could provide the opportunity to transgress the spatio-temporal boundaries imposed on them. The Dalits are denied the right to hold property and personal liberty which impedes their ability to achieve civil citizenship further, it led them to continue as mere members in the society. In the absence of material property and other assets, they do not have the right to enjoy the privileges in various social institutions like the markets. It is evident that the hierarchies are visible in the market where quality goods sold at higher rates without any competitive bidding and bargaining, these initial times considered as a privileged slot, therefore, the privileged consumers can join it since they have the purchasing capacity. In the class characteristic it is moneyed and in terms of caste perspective the higher caste often enters into the market that considered being the prime time. Hence, “the Dalits and poor classes have marginalized notion of time and they enter into the market during the closure of the bazar.”³¹⁷ The lack of purchasing capacity pushed the Dalits away from the market during prime time, further; they are satisfied with the perishable items through bargaining. The social factor like purity-pollution curtailed the freedom to obtain material properties; therefore, the oppressed groups culturally lacked the civil citizenship in the society.

The complex nexus between property and civil citizenship often ignored in the dominant time-spaces that used as demarcating technique by the caste biased civil society hence, the collective Dalit self exposes such nexus to find out the material reasons for unequal

³¹⁷ Gopal Guru, “Dalits from Margin to Margin,” *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol.27, no.2 (2000), p.113.

citizenship. Unequal citizenship created tremendous divide in every social institution that gives the priority to the privileged groups to have monopoly in the distribution of power, money and the ownership of property. The monopoly of privileged elites over power and wealth marginalized certain citizens; therefore, they demand several kinds of rights to maintain their collective identity and trying to restore justice in order to become accommodated within the liberal democratic institutions like an ideal citizen with full participation in the society.

The Chengara and Aripa land struggles can be understood as the struggle for ideal citizenship, to have equal participation in every activity of the state and civil society, therefore, the idea of citizenship primarily represents the notion of participation in the public life which is broader than political life, meaning a greater emphasis on the relationship of the citizen with society as a whole. Secondly, “a person as a citizen needs to be governed in this act judgment, loyalty, autonomy is expected. Thirdly citizenship deals with a person’s right and entitlements along with obligations in the society, hence, an active citizen in the public life must be willing to submit his private interest to the general interest of the society.”³¹⁸ Steenbergen quoted Marshal saying that “in the eighteenth century first type of civil citizenship emerged that focused for the individual freedom, right to property, personal liberty and justice. The second type, political citizenship, emerged in the nineteenth century and gave importance to the political power. The third type, social citizenship, constructed in the twentieth century which demanded economic and social security from the modern welfare state.”³¹⁹ Hence, the

³¹⁸ Bart Van Steenbergen, ed. *The Condition of Citizenship* (London: Sage, 1994), p.2.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

social citizenship is considered as the final stage of the development and is also ideal in which full participation of the individual in the community could be realized.

Nevertheless, as far as the Dalit struggles are concerned, they are in the struggle to achieve civil citizenship even today since they have been denied all social rights in the traditional society because of the norms of the caste. The moral hegemony has been denied to the Dalits due to purity-pollution ideology under Brahminic system established anti-egalitarian and segmental hierarchies among the communities which also curtailed the possibilities of transformation from the civil citizenship to political as well as social. The social rights are meant to give the formal status of citizenship; a kind of material well-being guaranteed for the citizen that would help the individual to exercise full participation in the society. However, social citizenship is not considered as ultimate but it is a historical development that would give new possibilities to think about new notions of citizenship like active citizenship, gender-neutral citizenship and so on.³²⁰

The Dalits as a community could not enjoy the freedom to exercise the full participation in the society since they lacked the social rights collectively. Valsamma, an activist from Aripa, pointed out that 'land is inevitable for the landless that could only change material circumstances of the Dalits. In colonies, the Dalits often fight each other due to insufficient spaces that always segregate them as mere individuals; therefore, the abundance of space would integrate them as a cultural community. People are much more comfortable even in the land struggle area since they have relative spatial freedom when it compares with their situation in the colonies. Collective consciousness has been derived from this protest that made people abandon fear on the state and its institutions.

³²⁰ Ibid.

Hence, it also pushed the people for a punctual and systematic life.³²¹ She further narrates that ‘the untouchable castes are often mocked in various state institutions since they are repeatedly appearing there for the same reason, therefore, common interests are inevitable to get attention from the state’s institutions. For any marginal communities the basis is important, otherwise, they cannot transform their unequal social condition.’³²²

Moreover, the governments showed their interest to distribute three cents of land to the landless groups; it can be read as one of the strategies of casteist state to pull out the Dalits from their collective demand for the spatial freedom to live like an ideal citizen. In addition to that, the three cent proposal clearly indicates the state and its mechanism do not want to see the Dalits as dignified-ideal citizens who are able to exercise equal participation in the society, instead, they forced them to remain with bitter memories of the past that would certainly delay all possible acts for justice and chances to form as collective groups rather than mere individuals.

Bhikhu Parekh observes that, “cultural communities often demand for various rights that they think will maintain collective identity particularly in the multicultural society. It may be called collective or communal rights, and it is quite difficult to accommodate within the liberal jurisprudence. Hence, it raises difficult questions such as whether this concept of collective rights is logically coherent or not. There are various kinds of human collectivities like a groups formed by transient as well as long-term common interest to the historical communities based on a shared way of life. In these collectivities, rights also cover a wide spectrum like non-interference, exemption from

³²¹ Valsamma, (Activist Arippa Land Struggle) interviewed and translated by the Researcher, June 2019.

³²² Ibid.

normal requirements, self-government, and claims on society's resources so on.”³²³ The Dalit land struggles can be seen as the collectivities of ex-untouchable communities who are having the common interest for equal citizenship, therefore, they have been demanding their share in the society's resources.

In Kerala, the Dalit protests are much more focused for resources because they claim that being resourceful is the only option to overcome caste burden, even in the globalized situation. The long-term common interest for resources and equal citizenship made the land struggle more contemporary. Hence, they emphasize the collective Dalit consciousness for material well-being. Human well-being is the basis and rationale for all rights, individual as well as collective, however, the well-being of the individual cannot be defined in abstract. Some collective rights can claim universal validity while others vary from society to society. Bhikhu Parekh further emphasized that, “a community that has long been subjected to systematic oppression may have less confidence to compete with the rest of the society. Hence, the supportive group-specific measures and appropriate remedies would make them to be equalized with others. The ex-untouchables in India and African Americans in the United States meet this condition.”³²⁴

The protesters observed that the offers for mere housing land are to create social tension among the landless community which would also pacify their struggle for emancipation. They further emphasized the Dalits need resources in order to become cultural community which would help them to acquire better education, in the absence of it they would continue as dependent individuals. Nevertheless, this is a radical movement as

³²³ Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.213.

³²⁴ Ibid., 217.

well as unique in India since land issues and Dalit concerns are deeply interconnected. These new social movements have emerged from the intense emotion that the untouchable castes were completely neglected by the welfare state and political parties for a long period, particularly in the post independent era. Therefore, the present movements cannot be defined as a sudden anger against the liberal democratic institutions, instead, they are the culmination of prolonged social tension that has emerged among the downtrodden groups whose basic rights for equal respect and individual liberties have been curtailed drastically. The protestors argued the approach towards them by the state and civil society was very problematic since the moral framework of the society often gives less significance to the marginal communities. Hence, this neglectful attitude is the reflection of incivility that based on the social norms further it expressed through social language.

However, social language signifies caste and its material forms in the public, to put it differently, language often try to identify one's caste in order to reproduce the relative hierarchy in every discourse. Hence, the eagerness of the dominant desire is manifest in its 'subtle' attempts to expose the other's identity which effectively is a means to designate as well as reinforce their social position in order to put the other as lesser humans. Arguably, the usage of 'valueless' terms such as poor and deprived in the liberal state language creates the image of Dalits as not-yet complete citizens. Hence, social language portrays Dalits as a heap of flaws. It then naturally validates the civilizing mission spearheaded by empowered citizens, the same constellation that grants recognition to others. This linguistic narration shapes the subjective contours of the marginal groups, those yearning for recognition from the dominant elites. The civilizing

project rejects the possibility of Dalit's self-fashioning. At the same time, it enforces the participation in the civilizing project which leads them to inextricable humiliation.

That the welfare state hardly talks about the social citizenship since it carries the entitlements to social provision is evident. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon addressed it; they say "social citizenship often brings social provision within the aura of dignity surrounding citizenship and rights; therefore, the people who enjoy social citizenship get social rights not handouts. Hence, the social citizenship is not only the guarantees of help in forms that maintain their status as full members of the society entitled to equal respect but also share a common set of institutions and services designed for all citizens, the use of which constitute the practices of social citizenship, for example public school, public parks, universal social insurance, public health services and so on."³²⁵ The social citizenship evoked themes from the major traditions of political theory; "liberal themes of social rights and equal respect; communitarian norms of solidarity and shared responsibility; and republican ideals of participation in the public life (through use of public goods and public services)."³²⁶ Hence, it is observed that the social provisions remain largely outside the aura of dignity surrounding citizenship. Receipt of welfare is usually considered as the reason for disrespect, a threat to, rather than a realization of citizenship further the word public often used as pejorative since the stigma attached with public institutions.

The social provision is often denied to the Dalits since they were not considered the full member of the society; therefore, they have been fighting for equal rights. Secondly,

³²⁵ Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "Civil Citizenship against Social Citizenship: On the Ideology of Contract-Versus-Charity," in *The Condition of Citizenship*, ed. Bart Van Steenbergen (London: Sage, 1994), p.90.

³²⁶ Ibid., 91.

their receipt of welfare schemes from the state branded them as state's subjects that produce humiliation and disrespect in the society since social stigma much prevalent on affirmative action programs. However, the legal equality granted to all citizens in India, therefore, the Indian constitution ensured social equality to the lesser privileged groups by making special provisions which largely benefitted the unequal group of citizens particularly Dalits. The constitutional provision for "legal equality does not fully help the ex-untouchable caste groups attain the goals of social justice, equality, liberty and fraternity due to the defects of the implementations. Hence, various Dalit movements in recent times effectively argue for the implementation of existing provisions that would attain the goals of Indian constitution, further, it would help the development and progress of the country."³²⁷

The social citizenship brings the idea of social provisions. Hence, the welfare state discards the spirit of it since the word 'welfare' became negative, therefore, the idea of social citizenship sounds contradicting. However, the social provisions and other welfare measures not only provide safeguards to the Dalits but it tried to bring them into mainstream along with other dominant social groups. Therefore, "the mainstream in India philosophically constituted by the socio-cultural and literary traditions of upper caste where in the village level the mainstream filled with land owning and landless upper castes now it is being contested by the Dalits and other marginal communities."³²⁸

The concept of social citizenship does not reach to its goal since the stigma surrounding social provisions has given the dominant privileged castes the ability to brand the Dalits as people who get concessions. Hence, the non-Dalits in India often view social

³²⁷ Ghanshyam Shah,ed., *Dalits and the State* (New Delhi:Concept,2002),p.373.

³²⁸ Shah, *Dalits and the State*, p.377

provision as a special privilege doled out to the untouchable caste at the cost of others, and they say it is against the constitution because it treats all citizens as equal. However, in the Dalit's perspective these are the compensation against the discrimination and exploitation done to the ex-untouchable communities for centuries. It can be argued that the deprivation and discrimination are being prevalent in various forms even today, which says they are not much equipped enough to compete with the privileged class.³²⁹

New social movements addressed the social discrimination and material disadvantages of the Dalits by problematizing the lack of proper implementation of the constitutional provisions and argues that, unless the proper implementation of social provision it would be difficult for the marginalized groups to achieve social, economic, and political justice in the caste ridden society.³³⁰ Thus the land movements demands a new socio-economic order in the society which would transform the social position of untouchables into full citizenship with equal respect which would enable them to play a key role to dismantle the hierarchies based on social norms. Social citizenship can provide self-esteem to the less privileged class since they have been humiliated under the local configuration of power under Brahminic rule. Notwithstanding the Dalit protest for citizenship strategically differs from the mainstream notions, therefore, it holds the constitutional provisions emotionally to show their pride against humiliation.

The Dalit movements try to acquire dignified social citizenship through the interrogation against the dominant class in the local level; these confrontations are often violently opposed by the caste elites since they are afraid of socio-economic reforms. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon quotes Marshal that "the social citizenship is the third and the

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid.

final stage of the development of the citizenship process which is not only a modicum of economic security but also entitled a far reaching right to share in the full social heritage and live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society.”³³¹ Hence, it can be argued that the Dalits as a community do not share the full social heritage; therefore, they severely lack the provisions of a civilized being and are forced to live without the prevailing standards in the society. The absence of socio-economic security makes the untouchable groups for a sluggish move which also leads them towards inherent contradiction and ultimately bound up with civil citizenship discourse also denying the universal position of full citizen. Social citizenship could renew social relation for higher equality through giving the universal status to the excluded groups in the citizenship discourse. The people who were excluded from the citizenship category often understood that this discourse is discriminatory since it does not provide the minimum standards for the marginalized groups to achieve universal positions; therefore, they are forced to fight for constitutional provisions and material well-being that have been seen in Chengara and Arippa.

The protestors observe that the categorization of citizenship on the basis of material property and class position would lead to the social inequality which is somehow similar to the Marshal’s famous doubt that whether the uniform status could be achieved while respecting the inviolability of private property and market dynamics. Hence, these social movements do not demand the dismantling of private property, instead, they talk about the unequal distribution of resources including landed property, therefore, they frequently challenge the existing hierarchical order placed even in the liberal democratic system. Social citizenship aims for the erosion of class inequality, protection from the

³³¹ Fraser and Gordon, “Civil Citizenship against Social Citizenship”, p.92.

market forces, and other areas of domination in the social-democratic practices. Hence, it does not problematize gender and race dimension in the citizenship discourse since it theorizes the citizenship through the white man's experience. Moreover, civil citizenship helped to promote the modern forms of male dominance, white supremacy, class exploitation since the individual property right emerged with the civil citizenship matters. Hence, the Indian case drastically differs from it since the Dalits were the servile object who does not have any rights on property even in the civil sphere; therefore, they could not enjoy the civic status entitled with citizenship meant for a free individual.

Hence, the modern state ensures citizenship to the individual irrespective of wealth and social background and the government tries to protect them through the various affirmative action programs to sustain their necessities. Herman Van Gunsteren observes "social security and the welfare assistance can be considered as equivalent to property which is also a prerequisite for citizenship that would help the underprivileged sections to access knowledge, culture and other organization. Hence, these are the essential factors for the effective practice of citizenship in the modern times."³³² Welfare assistance may not be good enough to get the admission into the citizenship discourse offered by the state, therefore, the marginalized communities often demand for material properties like land along with the social security and other welfare assistance from the state. It can be argued that the untouchable communities often lacked the citizenship as a moral choice since they are historically missed the essential factors for a dignified citizen like the ownership over private property, individual freedom and so on. Eventually, it becomes problematic to the less privileged groups since the civic spirits are contrary to

³³² Herman Van Gunsteren, "Four Conceptions of Citizenship," in *The Condition of Citizenship*, ed. Van Steenberg (London: Sage, 1994), p.37.

the traditional Indian value system that made obstacles against civic mindset also silenced the social provisions for long. Nevertheless, these land struggles show the absence of civic mindedness towards the underprivileged sections by the state and civil society because being a citizen is only possible to the people who historically belong to the dominant community. Hence, the efforts for effective citizenship are increasing among the Dalit community that political focus is viewed in these land struggle, confronts the prejudiced attitude and actions of the state and civil society. It has often undervalued the Dalit emancipatory struggles since it is considered as mere assertion for individuality, however, the present land movements have showed the communitarian agendas rather than individualistic freedom and autonomy. Hence, the Dalit assertion for citizenship gathered the attention of the public through its language of self-esteem which briefly explained their dehumanized social position. These land movements placed the question of citizenship as the central concern for Dalit struggles through their consistent articulation about the social inequality, marginalization, and non-implementation of constitutional provisions in the existing social order.

Laha Gopalan points out that ‘the caste minded state does not want to acknowledge the individuality of the untouchables because they do not have any worth in the state’s perspective. Earlier their labor was required for agricultural work, however, the withdrawal of the Dalits from the agrarian sector and the diminishing of agriculture placed certain sections of the Dalits as worthless untouchables. Hence, the state finds this worthlessness as an opportunity to deny their social justice. Therefore, the individual needs to grapple with the state in order to achieve civil status in the society. The state and civil society is appalling about the affirmative attitude of the downtrodden

communities since they demand the constitutional provisions which would actualize the principles of social justice, equal citizenship and other social welfares.³³³ Further, Gopal Guru argued elsewhere that “the denial of moral worth leads to the loss of self-respect. Hence, the state and civil society consciously make obstacles since they do not want to see the untouchables accommodated into the existing social order with equal citizenship since they are fearful about the social transformation that would bring radical changes by throwing out conservative as well as outdated social norms.”³³⁴

The Dalits are often fighting for relative worth rather than equal worth when there is loss of self-respect; however, equal worth is considered as the fondest claim for liberal democracy. Chengara and Arippa land struggles are much focused on equal worth than relative worth, they do not believe in compromised ambitions. Hence, they transgressed the servile body language and speech through their moral capacity by breaking the framework of liberal democracy. These land struggles can be read as exclusive social movements that showed the unequivocal commitment to the marginalized groups further it acted as an altering social agent by breaking the social and cultural taboos which often labeled them as worthless and culturally inferior. The equal worth is connected with the basic concept of equality that gives equal moral significance as well as equal consideration to the individuals according to their goods. Although Chengara and Arippa are demanding properties like land which does not merely lead to the transformation of their socio-economic status and power positions all the more egalitarian in its spirit. Will Kymlicka observes that “there is an abstract and fundamental idea of equality in the political theory that treating people ‘as equals’ leads to the equally acceptance of the

³³³ Laha Gopalan, interviewed and translated by the Researcher, December 2019.

³³⁴ Guru, “Liberal Democracy in India and the Dalit Critique”, p.106.

interest of every individual in the community. Moreover, the egalitarian theories wish that the government treat every individual with equal considerations, further, each citizen is entitled to equal concern and respect.”³³⁵ The basic idea of equality in the libertarian as well as Marxist that the equality of income and wealth are the prerequisite aspects to treat people equally in the society, however, the equal rights over one’s labour and property are the precondition for treating people as equals. Therefore, it is understood that the abstract idea of equality can be interpreted in various forms rather its particularities like income, wealth and other opportunities. Hence, “the abstract idea of treating people as equals requires specific kind equality that may not be identified with every political theory though it is egalitarian in the broad sense.”³³⁶

These movements demand equal worth in the liberal and democratic conceptions; therefore, it universally accepts the abstract idea of treating people equally along with the equal preference to the particularities like income, wealth and properties since the basic concept of equality is often forged in the hierarchical societies. It is observed if any theory claims that people are not entitled for equal consideration from the state would be rejected by the modern world since it treats people superior and inferior respectively. These social movements have been perceived modern political theory and its emancipatory traditions because of its egalitarian aspects attracted the untouchables; therefore, they have been critical to the Dharmasastra theories which created forceful obligations against them as part of the Brahminic social norms.

³³⁵ Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.2-3.

³³⁶ Ibid., 4.

CHAPTER-V

IDENTITY, RECOGNITION AND REDISTRIBUTION: CONTEXTUALIZING DALIT LAND STRUGGLES

The Arippa and Chengara land struggle raised the question of marginality through the assertion of identity by the ex-untouchable communities. Hence the protestors held the view that they were forcefully cornered into the margins due to their caste position in the social hierarchy. The struggle for land is not merely for holding the properties but also an uprising against various kinds of marginalization which is contextualized as alternative political principles in the larger society. Dalit land struggles in Kerala created material space to affirm their identity, which, in turn, challenged the Brahminical discourses. Dalit identity politics turned against the unequal distribution of land and other resources which are historically denied. To put it differently, the land became a focal point that united the untouchables to address the particularities of caste bringing into the universal political realm.

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to understand the contemporary land struggles along with the assertions of identity politics in Kerala. One of the particularities of these struggles is that the protestors openly assert their identity for universal acceptance of their politics in the liberal democratic society. It is noted these extra-political identity assertions were not included in the dominant framework of left or liberal discourses; rather it is viewed as a radical assertion which imbibes the annihilation of caste as a methodology in order to fight against the hierarchies of caste.

Identity struggles and Autonomy:

It is observed that the downtrodden group often evolves as a community in their historical realization of oppression and suffering. Hence their shared notion of suffering underscores the need for a dignified identity that gives internal autonomy to the marginalized caste groups. Theoretically, speaking these land movements problematized the politics of location by critiquing the liberal democratic institutions which also gave visibility to the social locations of Dalit-Bahujan communities. Seleena Prakkanam, former secretary of SVSV observes that “Dalit liberation could be possible through the unification of scattered communities. However, the Dalits need to be identified as a single category, a community, since they do not have the economic as well as a formally recognized cultural base. Dalits have to capture such a material base through land struggles so that they would not be scattered with the influence of dominant ideologies. Caste structure is so prevalent even today in the democratic society, therefore recapturing their forgotten history is necessary to mobilize as well as liberate marginalized caste groups. Moreover, Prakkanam emphasizes that Dalits, as a community need to shape individuals to make changes the society.”³³⁷

Hence her concern for Dalit individuality/identity is quite relevant because they often become the subjects of dominant ideologies that are prevalent in society. In the course of the struggle, there were various allegations raised against Chengara protestors when their movement received wider attention from the media and the public as well. The majority of women in Chengara are Dalits therefore serious moral questions were charged against them during the movement even though they were received enormous solidarity across

³³⁷ O.K.Santhosh and M.B.Manoj, eds., *Seleena Prakkanam: Chengara Samaravum Ente Jeevithavum, (Chengara Land Struggle and My life)*, (Kottayam: D.C.Books, 2013), pp.147-48.

Kerala. In addition to that, the then chief minister of Kerala, V. S. Achuthanandan, said “the government would confront the protestors with police who have ‘thorn and horn.’”³³⁸

These kinds of allegations and comments indicate how the dominant ideology treats the ex-untouchables as mere subjects by denying their autonomy. The Brahminical social system is capable enough to undermine the assertions of rights through transforming the individual into subjects where the ontological presences of Dalits have been often erased. The contemporary land movements try to radically transform the society for an alternative democratic space thus it also articulates the politics of identity to get individual recognition rather than mere caste subjects.

Louis Althusser explains the process of the transformation of the individual into subjects where interpellations happen through the ideological tools that make the individual ‘subjects’ who act in a typical way in the society. He argues “an individual often supports and sustains the structure through the influence of dominant ideology. Hence, ideology often functions as a mediator between the power structure and individuals and uses its hegemonic power to reproduce the repressive elements against the individual in order to incorporate them into the power structure.”³³⁹ He says that “the interpellation process makes the individual the subject of ideology furthering the ideological state apparatuses that keenly constitute various mediums.”³⁴⁰

Thus the individual’s subjectivity is constructed through the various discourses of ideological state apparatuses like cinema, media and literature. He formulates that “all

³³⁸ Praveena K.P, “The lessons from Chengara,” in *Chengara Solidarity Book*, ed. Muhammed Velam (Kozhikode: Solidarity, 2009), p.185.

³³⁹ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards An Investigation)” , in *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, ed. Sharma A, and Gupta A (New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2009), pp.86-98

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

ideology hails or interpellants concrete individuals as concrete subjects. By a precise operation called interpellation or hailing, which can be envisioned along the lines of most regular everyday police, the ideology recruits or turns individuals into subjects.”³⁴¹

The dominant caste ideologies made the Dalits as caste subjects by using the repressive state apparatuses in order to reproduce the caste structure, hence it also worked as an agent of exploitation and repression.

Therefore, Dalit land movements can be interpreted as a productive assertion of identity politics that demands for egalitarian and democratic social order by critiquing the oppressive ideological apparatuses. Hence the ex-untouchable caste groups affirmed their subjectivity by holding an ideological position that demands the social transformation as a political agenda. Further, these land movements are based on the anti-caste ideology which fundamentally awakened the Dalit-Bahujan movements and it articulates the politics of identity in the socio-political spheres of Kerala. The protestors from both Arippa and Chengara observe the Dalit assertion and their struggle for rights began at Kerala in the beginning of the 1990’s. Hence, the marginalized communities searched for new ideological positions in order to expose the casteist nature of Kerala since it was portrayed as a casteless society. The present land movements can be considered as another significant Dalit assertion by which they formed into a new socio-political identity that problematized socio-economic and political power relationships in Kerala. The need for Dalit identity assertion can be observed in the words of Laha Gopalan, the leader of Chengara agitation. He says “for whatever the purpose upper-caste created caste system, the Dalits have to unite since this system made them as

³⁴¹ Ibid.

downtrodden. Moreover, the government and political parties claim the monopoly over Dalits in their hand therefore they are not willing to distribute land to the landless since they are apprehensive about the Dalit's realization that they were no more the slaves of political parties."³⁴² He also emphasized this struggle is not just for getting land but to spread the Ambedkarite ideology among the Dalits to politically mobilize them since they have not gained any equal justice even after the sixtieth years of independence.

Hence, these movements basically dignity and autonomous formation of identity, therefore, proposes social transformation since every sphere of social life is inextricably connected to the caste that made the untouchables dependent upon dominant caste communities. Thus the political agenda of social transformation defined by the Dalit movements can be understood as politics of particularity since its demand for the equality of status in the new wave of identity politics. Therefore, land movements, not only search for ownership of resources but they try to problematize their vulnerable citizenship position by affirming their identity, which confronts the citizenship discourses in the liberal democratic society.

Hunt and Purvis explain that "the tension between identity and citizenship is not a new phenomenon and therefore this tension cannot be resolved through avoiding one concept. However, it may be fixed by condensing certain transcending priorities into one concept. Hence they argue this productive tension is required in order to mark the crucial conditions of possibilities to sustain democratic politics. Moreover, citizenship can be seen as the finest endeavor through which alternative identities compete for expression in society's political institutions and debates. Hence this tension is never complete but

³⁴² Laha Gopalan interviewed by T. Muhammed Velam and K.Ashraf, in *Chengara Solidarity Book*, ed. Muhammed Velam (Kozhikode: Solidarity Youth Movement, 2009), p.32.

remains for open contestation that may bring a democratic response to the problem of the constitution of political community.”³⁴³ The Dalit land struggles try to build the political community since it merges with citizenship discourses through the politics of identity.

For instance, these protestors do not limit their focus, particularly on the land. They imagine a political community that fundamentally challenges the established belief system of society. Althusserian sense “both the oppressors and oppressed acculturated in the society in their proper roles hence their reproduction of the submission to the ruling ideology can be understood as the reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly since they are the agents of exploitation and repression.”³⁴⁴

Chengara and Arippa land movements dramatically shifted their social definitions through asserting their identity to acquire their sense of place since they have been hailed by the dominant ideology that made them as subjected being unwitting. It is a shifting of social definition that gives visibility to the social locations of marginalized caste which contests hegemonic ideologies. It leads to new politics that would help them to claim their rights and benefits as a citizen legitimately.

The politics of identity is relevant since it brings a new model which confronts the caste-based obligation by critically intervening in the citizenship discourses as well as the liberal democratic process. It can be argued the politics of the present movements proposes the need of a political community therefore it unites the fragmented identities and redirects the attention towards the crisis of a subjected being in the political sphere. It is believed that the Dalits as a community often failed to articulate their rights and

³⁴³ T. Purvis and A. Hunt, "Citizenship versus Identity: Transformations in the Discourses and Practices of Citizenship," *Social and Legal Studies*, Vol.8, (1999), p.457.

³⁴⁴ Donald E Hall, *Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.143.

does not much awaken about their circumstances due to various historical reasons. Hence, the present assertion helped them to transform their subjected being into political identity in order to secure social recognition by which they have achieved a new language of rights to confront restrictive ideology and other established social and political order.

The Politics of Identity and Recognition:

Indeed, the term recognition is a well debated and core theme of Hegel's political philosophy. "The individual tries for recognition of their person by others hence the struggle for recognition understood as part of the self, therefore it can be achieved through self-assertion, self-negation and re-definition of oneself in relation to another since it is an inter-subjective phenomenon based in mutual 'give and take' actions."³⁴⁵ He observes "human beings constituted as a self through recognition therefore, the social and political institutions explicate the interpersonal relationships thus the absence of mutual recognition human being cannot understand themselves are free individuals. The existence of self-consciousness that it exists in itself, and for itself, factually that exist for another self-consciousness, it indicates that one has to recognized oneself through the mediation of the other. The 'self-consciousness is in fact the reflection out of the being of the sensuous and perceived world and is essentially the return from out of otherness. As self-consciousness only distinguishes itself from itself as oneself, that difference as

³⁴⁵ Evangelia Sembou, "Hegel's Idea of A 'Struggle for Recognition': The Phenomenology of Spirit," *History of Political Thought*, Vol.24, no. 2 (2003), pp.262-281.

otherness is instantaneously sublated by self-consciousness. There is no distinction, and self-consciousness is nothing more than the unmoving tautology of "I am I."³⁴⁶

Thus it can be argued the Dalit political assertion for recognition is an attempt to constitute the self hence they redefine themselves in relation to others. They seek mutual recognition in order to organize their free individual status therefore this inter-subjective process provides an opportunity to express freedom and self-understandings ontologically. It is an attempt to understand their self-consciousness through the recognition of the other therefore the realization of self-knowledge and sense of freedom receive once the mutual recognition exists in the society. Cultural politics transforms into identity politics on the basis of particular reason and the same one excluded, contempt, branded as wretched by other dominant social groups. In the new wave of identity politics, the Women, Dalits, Muslims, and Transgender began to talk about their existence. In a way identity politics resists the dominant culture hence it maintains the relevance of life besides it confronts the interest of dominant class. Accordingly, "The identity movements emerged from the USA to India enlighten the complex and problematic spheres of social life which also problematizes the elite cultural space in order to raise their own culture."³⁴⁷ It is observed that the Dalits, historically, in India have been socially, culturally, and economically oppressed, excluded from all spheres of political life and subjugated. The pyramidal social structure of caste branded and condemned them wretched. Moreover, the caste system prevented them from all sorts of recognition since the dominant ideology legitimized the caste system.

³⁴⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. and ed. Terry Pinkard (London: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

³⁴⁷ P. K. Pokker, *Identity Politics* (Calicut: Progress Publication, 2005), p.11.

The present land movements of Chengara and Arippa used their excluded caste identity to fight against discrimination that indicates the new aspiration among the ex-untouchable caste groups which, leads them towards the quest for a new socio-political order by upholding social justice. Through these movements the protestors narrated their dissatisfaction against the Brahminical social order by capturing a potential language of rights which predominantly challenged two exiting notions in Kerala that there is no land available for distribution and the Dalits are not capable enough to articulate substantiate questions for civil and political rights. It is observed there are no radical changes that happened to the traditional feudal attitude towards Dalits though landlordism was legally abolished in Kerala thus the society's mentality never accepted the rights of untouchables over resources both in pre-independent as well as post-independent times. Further, various ideological apparatuses in the society categorized Dalit's identity as mere coolies hence they were not allowed to speak for themselves instead they have been represented by the privileged social and political groups that often erase their claims for universal acceptance.

Hence, the present movements made the untouchable community speak for themselves by which they try to communicate the necessity of social change to the public. Punjala Kumaran an activist from the Arippa struggle expressed 'both the state and society never considered the Dalits as dignified humans, they always want to see them as depending individual for various reasons, therefore they have been continuing traditional attitude in order to maintain caste hierarchy. Hence the present radical movements provided meaningful perspective on our identity and agency that growing trends leads to the aggressive social and political assertions which would also democratize the existing

notions. However, the preoccupied notion of society does not accept their distinctive identity that often prevents the Dalits to secure equal recognition.’³⁴⁸ Hunt and Purvis noted “various minority groups in the liberal democracies seek secure recognition for their specificity hence some of the groups try to integrate into the political communities in which they live. However, such integration does not consider as equal recognition since it undermines their specificities rather it is constrained by the particular hegemonic ideas existing in the society besides some other expressions of the struggle for identity explicitly hostile to any incorporation and assimilations.”³⁴⁹

The present land movements do not want to incorporate with dominant political struggles rather it proclaims their need for equal recognition for a privileged position. Hence the struggle for identity and recognition is radically relevant since the untouchables were categorized as powerless wretched groups in every sphere of social and political life. It is observed that the land movements pose stern critique against the inexorable and unchanging nature of social structure through the individual as well as collective assertions. It is assumed that the dominant ideologies receive the signals of threat by these self-assertions because they have been fearful of loose people for their servile duties. Moreover, the dominant ideological discourses are often apprehensive towards the emergence of the Dalits as a social force since it dreams their own liberation by denying servility and demeaning subjectivities. Thus the movements can be interpreted as an open challenge to the existing social order through political negotiation to achieve dignified recognition for a better socio-political life same as other privileged groups which would also transform their material conditions towards new possibilities.

³⁴⁸ Punjala Kumaran. (Activist, Aripa Land Struggle), interviewed and translated by the Researcher, June 2019.

³⁴⁹ Purvis and Hunt, “Identity versus Citizenship”, p.6.

Joel Anderson observes that “the social struggle in last few decades clearly stated the justice demands more than fair distribution of material goods. If members of the society systematically denied recognition such society would remain as deficient. The worth of their culture or way of life, the dignity of their standing as a person, and the inviolability of their physical integrity have all been routinely denied to members of marginalized and subaltern groups. Their struggles for recognition have come to dominate the political scene, particularly in the politics of identity.”³⁵⁰ It can be argued the Aripa and Chengara struggle attempts to dominate the political space by denying the parental consciousness of liberal democratic state and other dominant social groups as well. Hence the claims for material goods can be considered as a unique expression of particular social groups which makes a distinctive declaration about their own life. Thus the radical demand for material goods fundamentally changed the agendas of Dalit movements, further; it problematized the disparities over resource ownership tenaciously in an unequal hierarchical society in Kerala.

Anderson summarized the idea of Honneth in short that “the possibility of identity formation depends crucially on the developments of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. Hence, it can be acquired through inter-subjectivity which grants recognition by others whom one also recognizes. Hence the inter-subjective connections and self-realization would lead to the respect for the autonomy and dignity of a person finally the particular worth of the individual members of a community can be acknowledged. However, it has to establish through social struggle which cannot be

³⁵⁰ Joel Anderson, “Translators Introduction,” in *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, ed. Axel Honneth (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), p.11.

exclusively understood as conflicts over interests.”³⁵¹ Therefore, these historical struggles for recognition characterized as a necessary step for a normative ideal of just society which would discard the biased judgments against recognition further it leads to mutual recognition. The social struggles often emerge whenever the self-experience being denied hence it makes the individual as responsible agent to receive recognition that transformation would happens through numerous inter-subjective process.

The process for inter-subjective interaction was taken place through the present land movements since it firmly articulated the multiple forms of domination by the ideological state apparatuses. Hence the protestors consider that the caste is the primordial reason for their resourceless situation which constantly denied their social agency to acquire mutual recognition besides the aberrant nature of caste made the liberal democratic institutions static and conservative as well. Moreover, the struggle has provided self-expressive freedom to Dalits in order to challenge the hierarchies of caste and the power of authoritative institutions through the appropriate language of rights which also provided the inevitable self-consciousness to make potential claims for their identity systematically. In addition, to that, the present land struggles explained the realities of caste oppression thoroughly moreover it also addressed the prejudiced ill-treatment of dominant social groups through the ‘language of subjective rights.’

Charles Taylor observes that ‘our identity is created in part by acknowledgment or lack thereof, and sometimes by misrecognition by others, and as a result, a person or group of people can suffer genuine harm, real distortion, if the others in their society reflect them

³⁵¹ Ibid., 12.

a restricting or degrading or negative image of themselves.’³⁵² It is observed that the misrecognition often happened to the untouchable community since their caste identity confined them into limited a space that reduces their moral position. In addition to that the demeaning nature of the society creating real damage against marginalized groups by putting them into self-enclosure that often minimizes their individuality. Charles Taylor further argues that, the “non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm; can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.”³⁵³

For the Dalits the misrecognition means rejection of their autonomous agency through forcing social obligations, therefore, they do not be treated as equal individuals since it violates the political questions on identity. Hence the political slogan of land struggles fundamentally problematizes the misrecognition of their identity through various social exclusions both by the state and civil society further it also denies the free choice of liberty. The non-recognition makes the vulnerable people are incapable individuals that create certain obstacles against opportunities in the society beyond it they have to suffer the pain of low self-esteem.

It can be argued the present land movements are the struggle for recognition since they indicate the mechanisms of social and political resistance. Moreover, this political resistance can be considered as an affirmation of their individuality by addressing the politics of difference though it talks about the redistribution of resources. Sanal, an activist from Chengara says ‘this movement would not end even if all protestors receive

³⁵² Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p.42.

³⁵³ Ibid.

land because it is for our political emancipation which would give equal rights and representations. We have the confidence that the Dalits are going to rule this nation therefore we affirm our identity to highlight various dimensions of non-recognition in the contemporary society.’³⁵⁴

Explaining further, Sanal says that, ‘this political affirmation primarily challenges the societal norms at the same time it expresses the need of resources therefore, the struggle for recognition is inevitable in any political resistance.’³⁵⁵ Hence these political affirmations fundamentally try to bring social justice to the marginalized groups in order to undermine their caste oppression through addressing their differences. It is observed the social groups differences often structure the social relations therefore it differentiates some groups are privileged and while others are oppressed. Hence “social justice requires explicitly acknowledging and attending those group differences in order to undermine various forms oppression.”³⁵⁶

Hence recognition is vitally important for humans therefore if it is absent in any society the misrecognized groups would struggle for equal recognition since it defines the life above the slave existence. The structural gradations of caste and slavery denied the natural choice of liberty and resources to the Dalits therefore they have been positioned to the non-recognized categories which affected their socio-economic and cultural situations. Seleena Prakkanam pointed out that “every place in Kerala confined with caste nature that often affected the unity of untouchables in the colonies. Hence the lives in the colonies made them are accessible as well as easily influenced by the dominant

³⁵⁴ Sanal, (Activist Chengara Land Struggle) interviewed and translated by the Researcher, December, 2019.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ I.M.Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.3.

political parties due to socio-cultural gradations further the cultural conditions of caste break internal solidarities among them. The lack of recognition, respect, and internal solidarities made them as destructive identities therefore the land movements convinced the importance of resources, the reason for the misrecognition, and the importance of political power to the Dalits.”³⁵⁷

She affirms that the Dalits have been continued as non-recognized groups, lack political power, therefore, these resistance demand land in order to unify the destructed identities. It is observed that, if a person not being recognized by others does not have full status as a person in their own eyes, it also harms and it would lead to limitation. “In the absence of proper recognition the interpersonal relations would happen like slavery where the activities that fill the life of a slave are unfree, also their well-being has an instrumental value for the master and their work also considered as unfree which does not convey any forms of gratitude like others.”³⁵⁸ Dalits, it can be argued, were the property of their masters hence the slave caste fundamentally lacked ownership over resources primarily denying their social agency as a community. Hence the land movements underscore that it is an effort to being a resourceful agent in the eyes of others and themselves in order to achieve full status and recognition from the slave status. According to the protestors being a resourceful agent or acquiring assets is also a social movement against caste which would discard their mere instrumental value and it potentially denies the precarious circumstances as well as trivial caste practices.

Charles Taylor well stated “misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect, it can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due

³⁵⁷ Santhosh and Manoj, *Chengara Samaravum Ente Jeevithavum*, p.36.

³⁵⁸ Heikki Ikäheimo, “A Vital Human Need: Recognition as Inclusion in Personhood,” *European Journal of Political Theory*, Vol.8, no.1 (2009), pp.31-45.

recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need.”³⁵⁹ It is observed the Dalits had to accept this misrecognition as natural since the caste trap defines their interpersonal relationship by reducing them into a subordinate position in the existing social system. Secondly, the recognition does not debate as a vital human need in the Brahminical social structure because of caste antagonism therefore the social fragmentation and collective violence are conveniently ignored often. These social movements emphasize the importance of recognition as a vital human need to the Kerala public through their political affirmations. Further, it addressed the negative descriptions about the movement like it is divisive and destructive. It is noted the movement essentially helped them to transform their self-hatred identity to self-respect mode through nurturing a counter-discourse on social conflicts that fundamentally challenge the left-liberal ideologies. Moreover, the present political resistance tries to undermine social hierarchy in order to acquire honor in the society since it is inevitable for equal recognition. Therefore, this political affirmation is part of self-recovery from the caste characteristics also it demands equal status to reach individualized identity.

The protestors observed that the state and civil society in Kerala deliberate that the Dalits are the most fearful community because of resourceless and caste inferiorities therefore they hardly respond against the inhuman treatments by the state and society. However, contrary, such people have politically transformed to take any challenges against various existing power structures through affirming the identity that helped them to flourish the politics of differences in the prevailing social structure. Caste colonialism pushes aside the untouchables into isolation, non-acceptance, and misrecognition for a long period of time. The internalization of caste produced inferiorities among untouchables

³⁵⁹ Taylor, *The Politics of Recognition*, p.43.

psychologically reduced their subjective freedom further leading to fearful non-human status by restraining self-respect consciousness. Land struggles, thus, are identified as political resistance to retrieve their human status and social equity for universal acceptance of the politics of identity.

Hence, the inflicted non-human identity of Dalits in India is somewhat similar to the colonized people in Africa. Frantz Fanon analyzed the colonized individual becomes transformed into a non-human identity through the explicit authority of the colonizer. He proposes the liberation of the colonized is linked to contesting the subjectivity imposed by the colonizer and writing one's own identity since their subjectivity defined by the differentiation of the other. He argues that "the systematic form of alienation inherent in the colonial condition is so intense that it reduces the colonized to a non-human. Therefore, the identity is often only recognizable or conceivable when confronted with difference. Hence the colonized often dehumanized by the colonial system which has given the privileges to the colonizer with a hegemonic authority in valuation, through the cultivation of norms, culture and ideas of progress, civilization and barbarism."³⁶⁰

Similarly, the Brahminical social system created a kind of caste colonialism where the Dalits were considered as *outcastes* since they were not to fit to be included in the four-fold graded caste structure. "The authoritarian caste structure dehumanized their identity therefore they had to bear extreme forms of oppressions for centuries further it made them lose their humanness finally they reached the state of 'being no people.'³⁶¹ It is observed for dominant caste groups considered their birth in higher caste as an essential capital that gives enormous value to their life. Therefore, the annihilation of caste is

³⁶⁰ Anthony Peter Spanakos, "The Canvas of the Other: Fanon and Recognition," *Disclosure: A Journal of Social Theory*, Vol.7, no.1 (1998), p.11.

³⁶¹ Bhagwan Das and James Massey eds. *Dalit Solidarity* (New Delhi: ISPCCK, 1995), p.26.

nothing but the destruction of the caste capital hence the dominant groups exchange this capital in every socio-political and cultural sphere of life. Indeed, the Brahminical superiority maintains the hierarchies of humanity that very systematically alienates certain groups to acquire any capital and forced them to accept their inferior status as the part of the natural order of the caste system. However, the struggle for land and other capital can be considered as a liberation movement in order to regain a fuller human identity that exterminates the inscribed caste impositions. It is observed the non-human status made the untouchables forcefully dependent on the dominant groups for their existence hence the movement for resources elevated their social status by declaring themselves as ‘autonomous bodies’ further it largely helped them to politically organize to fight against the servile duties imposed by the caste colonialism.

Hence Fanon also argued in the same way that if the colonized want to achieve the human status they must be necessarily aware of dependent structures through a conscious effort also they have to break it. He defines that “the dependency both in classical as well as corporeal sense, for classical it is economic dependency where the center-periphery relations matters, for corporeal the body of the colonized is dependent on the definitions and norms created by the colonizer. Moreover, colonized become a non-human entity through the otherization of the colonizer that placed them in the margins of the society therefore the colonized only ‘reacts’ to the events which are generated, contextualized, defined, and determined by the colonizer. In reality, the non-human body becomes a site that is objectified and dependent upon the colonizer for its characterization.”³⁶²

The Chengara and Arippa land struggles can be considered as the conscious effort done by the marginalized caste groups for an independent social structure that fundamentally

³⁶² Spanakos, “The Canvas of the Other: Fanon and Recognition”, p.3.

challenges the *Varna dharma* of the Brahminical system since it produces violence and social exclusion on daily basis. Secondly, major causes of atrocities against Dalits are related to land and property, wage payments, bonded labor and so on. These matters can be categorized as part of economic dependency which gives more power to the oppressors to hold dominance over Dalits further it denies any attempt to transform the non-human status into a fuller humanity.

Moreover, “the compulsion to perform certain jobs like manual scavenging is a corporeal dependency where the system defines the caste norms over the body of the untouchables.”³⁶³ Hence, the present political resistance primarily addresses the issues of land and property by highlighting the harmful subordination of the Dalits by receiving political enlightenment therefore the attack against the movements can be read as the anxiety of losing the power of dominant caste groups on marginalized communities. Similarly, like colonized, the corporeal dependency characterized the untouchables as mere objects to perform dehumanizing caste duties however the political affirmations transformed them from caste colonialism to a subject to own liberal democratic system proposed by the constitution.

The Dalits have been placed in the margins of the society therefore they often ‘react’ to every event through reactionary politics that breaks their transformation into an active political agent further they have been criticized as well as branded as destructive groups. Furthermore, their reactionary political approach is considered as an inability to acquire the right to live as perfect humans since it is a mere reaction of miserable life that is defined and determined by the caste system. Thus the characterization of Dalits like an object pushed their space into margins both in urban and rural areas. Gopal Guru

³⁶³ *Organizing Dalits: Experience from the Grass-roots* (Ahmedabad: Unnati, 2006), p.3.

observes that “the physical location of common Dalits in India invariably located near the drainage, railway tracks, garbage, graveyards, and slaughterhouses or on the pavements. Hence in the villages, the Dalit huts have been located near the open space which is used for the toilets. The very location of the Dalits becomes an object of contempt and condemnation by the urban-based upper-caste elite. These locations are also stigmatized as they are segregated on the principles of purity and pollution.”³⁶⁴

Chengara and Arippa land struggles are considered as standard political resistance which completely withdrawn from the reactionary politics since it became an ‘event’ itself. Hence, these movements created a paradigm shift from the characterization of ‘object’ to ‘subject’ where the non-human status of the Dalits transformed into fuller humanity by which they acquired the capacity to demonstrate the asymmetrical socio-economic and political alienations of the state and society. Moreover, they were compelled to lead a miserable life of economic as well as corporeal dependencies hence the movement helped them to overthrow the structural dependencies for being a capable subjective agent that made them more active rather than reactive. The motto of these land struggles is ‘from the colony to the agricultural land’ thus it aims to not just landed property but a conscious effort to shift their social locations since the Dalit colonies were stigmatized as a polluted space also the people in the colonies were segregated from the socio-cultural life of the mainstream society. Further, it encountered the alienation of democratic governments since it denied social justice for a long.

Subsequently, they demand an equal share of the state’s resources as moral reparation to eliminate their subordinations and moral degradations. Moreover, Chengara and Arippa

³⁶⁴ Gopal Guru, "Dalits from Margin to Margin," *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol.27, no. 2 (2000), pp.111-116.

introduced new democratic politics of unifying the scattered groups that made them as conscious vote banks in order to actively bargain with political parties and it re-drew the political map of Kerala as well. Protestors observed that the left-right governments were kept on satisfying the monopolistic interest of the predominant social groups which often caused discrimination on landed property, alienation and social tensions thus the political mobilizations of the Dalits would destabilize the existing pattern of social and cultural dominance.

Homi K Bhabha explains that “Fanon’s demands for redistribution of wealth and other resources are beyond the pieties of mere moral reparations. Hence, it’s a timely intervention in a decade-long struggle for social equity which is exclusively focused on the politics of identity and the politics of recognition. It is noted the oppressed groups were forced to demand the equal distribution of wealth without bothering the devastating consequences since it blocks the horizon therefore humanity needs to address it. However, Fanon’s call for resources has been heard by the popular movements and social institutions since the need for equitable distribution as part of a humanistic project. Fanon places the problem of the development in the context of ‘psycho-affective’ realm by which he frames his reflections on violence, experience and their political desire for freedom.”³⁶⁵ Thus, the psycho-affective relations have the semblance of universality since it involves emotions. The embodied actions and resistance through a performative agency can lead to political agitation that can decompose the compartmentalized colonialism and metropolitan racism. The Chengara and Arippa demand for the redistribution of land and other resources not as moral reparation but constitutionally mandated recognitions. These struggles held the view that this would transform their

³⁶⁵ Homi K Bhabha, “Framing Fanon,” in *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2007), p.9.

subaltern position which again would give moral legitimacy for their political affirmations of the Dalits.

These struggles posed stern questions on land reforms as well as the ownership rights of agricultural land against the dominant political parties without considering the consequences since they knew the societal contradictions that inducted them to form as a revolutionary force to fight for constitutional provisions. Hence, the 'psycho-affective' realm of caste has given privileges as well as consolation to certain groups to take its pride against other groups where some others lose their prestige and power in the graded system therefore the political desire for freedom aims to reimagining their material and psychic life as well. However, these land struggles acted as a 'performative agency', since politically agitated against the pernicious system that subjugated large number of people historically. Further, politically mobilized fragmented identities are against the structural-cultural alienations of caste. These struggles challenged the Brahminical textual law by upholding the morality of modern constitutional law.

The peoples' autonomous identity received respect and recognition in the society; however, it also creates new systematic subordination to the groups who lacks autonomous individuality. Hence, the struggle for recognition is a political agenda for the subalterns often combat with the deep rooted forms of injustice in relation with identity. Thus, "the people ought to recognize certain individual on the basis of their ability and self-determination since they possess certain features like rational autonomy further the demand for recognition justified through the pre-existing characteristics of a person."³⁶⁶ The imposed caste identities made the untouchables as irrational agents that

³⁶⁶ Patchen Markell, "The Recognition of Politics: A Comment on Emcke and Tully," *Constellations*, Vol.7, no.4 (2000), pp.496-506.

reproduced a negative image of their identity since it does not carry any so-called pre-existing characteristics and social goods for humans.

However, the present political resistance gave ceaseless changes in the notion of their identity because it challenges the discriminatory-exclusivist nature of caste structure. For the Dalits, the particularities of caste defined their social relations also created a fear of instability in their personhood that caused for lowest self-esteem since the stigma of untouchability made them as the sufferers of tradition further it prevents the critical questions on hierarchized humanity.³⁶⁷ Patchen Markell notes that “the countless acts for recognition leads to far-reaching deliberation and everyday interactions made the people to ask certain sensible as well as interconnected questions like Who are you?, Who am I? Who are we?” Hence, there is a need for relocate the social space to respond such questions in addition to that it also reproduces the relations of identity and difference. He, critically engages with the word recognition, and argues that though it makes the social world intelligible but it often stratifies it therefore it subordinates some people and elevating others to the positions of privileges. “Democracy is a matter of recognition thus identity based inequality persistent in it therefore it make more difficult for the subordinated social groups to understand themselves as full members or ‘sovereign people’ since they do not experience political decisions in their own doings.”³⁶⁸

Further, argued that these social movements for resources are one of the countless acts for recognition since they powerfully addressed the systematic failures of democratic governments and the political subordination of marginalized castes. T. M. Sathyan an activist detected that ‘1495 families received land from the left government as part of the

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton: University Press, 2009), p.203.

first Chengara package, however, out of it, only 200 families received cultivable land, majority of them had to receive non-cultivable land since it is located red stone as well as hilly regions.’ He underscores that ‘the discriminatory nature has been prevailing even in the distribution of land because the government does not want to recognize them as full members even in the democratic system.’³⁶⁹ It is perceived that these disparities are identity-based inequality in the democratic setup which subordinates certain groups, thus, the ideology of democracy does not consider the Dalits as sovereign people.

Incontestably, the democratic governments are unwilling to understand the interest of the Dalits in a transparent manner therefore the democratic system often acts as superficial which refuses to recognize certain experiences differently. Hence the biased recognition can be understood as more problematic since it reduces the Dalits as subservient to the dominant system which makes certain groups more vulnerable. The recognition cannot be solace unless it respects the particularities of a certain identity; therefore, the struggle for recognition tries to bring out the hidden, unheard, ignored, and forgotten voices to the public. Land struggles aimed politically to eliminate the dominance of certain groups by gathering the attention of the public sphere and it works as a struggle for solace where their identity is respected and recognized.

It is viewed that “recognition is sometimes used to name a distinctive kind of respect-respect grounded in the knowledge or understanding of some person’s or group’s identity in all its particularity. The term recognition involves in a kind of cognition then the identities of people or group are the object of recognition’s knowledge.”³⁷⁰ The specificity of Dalit identity hardly becomes an object for recognition’s knowledge both

³⁶⁹ T.M.Sathyan (Activist Chengara Land Struggle) interviewed and translated by the Researcher, December 2019.

³⁷⁰ Markell, “The Recognition of Politics”, p.504.

in public and private spheres; historically it is distorted by the state and society and does not consider for the pursuit for recognition.

Thus the deep rooted caste structure made the Dalit identity invisible and denied any transformations of their agency, as a result, the universal recognition does not simply cognize the particularities eventually it often treated them as ordinary individuals. One of the major phenomenon that occurred in the land movement is the politicization of Dalit identity through its subtle attempts hence they seek affirmative recognition by rejecting the pejorative identities imposed by the ideologies of caste. Anthony Appiah pointed “out the politics of recognition asserts that people have a right not just to be respected in their humanity but they have to get acknowledgment in the public realm as what they already really are.”³⁷¹ For the Dalits, their human beingness was neither respected nor recognized since it was branded as a pejorative identity in relation to purity and pollution by the non-transformed Brahminical social system. Hence, they never experienced the public acknowledgment collectively as what they really are. Interestingly, the dominant discourse wanted to see them as ‘non-sovereign’ social identity even in the liberal democratic setup.

The structural dominations often reproduce the demeaning/negative images against the less privileged identities that deny all possibilities to seek respect and public acknowledgment. Protestors observed the state and society were forced to acknowledge our demands publically however it does not consider a proper recognition since our humanity has not been respected collectively hence the movements try to change the unjust social arrangements for respected humanity. Anthony Appiah further argues “the

³⁷¹ K. Anthony Appiah, “Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction,” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p.149.

life-scripts associated with certain collective identity often been negative that also create more obstacles rather than opportunities for socially dignified life and equal treatment by other members of the society. Thus women, homosexuals, Jews, Blacks, Catholics carry the negative life-scripts as a collective identity therefore the demand for political recognition can be viewed as a way of revising the inherited social meaning of their identities that also construct the positive life scripts once it was primarily negative. Hence the revising inherited social meaning of each identity is historically strategically necessary.’³⁷²

Caste has been inscribed demeaning life-script on Dalits as a collective identity that creates hurdles to reach certain possibilities moreover they have to undergo countless efforts to transform the inherited meaning in order to receive recognition. Hence the negative life script makes their social position more restrainable that fundamentally distorts their identity also demands dependency, obedience, and humility to the dominant discourse in every social situation.

Thus Dalits often hide their identity due to this negative life-script imposed by the graded caste system further it does not carry capital for acknowledgement. Consequently, they are forced to hide themselves and their social conditions in order to secure from alienation. Indeed, the voice of the individual autonomy always has an uneasy relationship with the collective identity that can be noticed in the Dalit political assertion as well. The Dalit individual may receive an acknowledgement to a certain extent based on personal capacity nevertheless as collective identity subordination always persists.

³⁷² Ibid.

The negative life script also works as 'psycho-affective' predicament since it nurtures the paternalistic attitude against the marginalized groups by the dominant social force that often nourishes the peculiarities of caste regime and social hierarchies further it puts the powerless people to the subject of violence. That is the reason the Chengara and Arippa land movements are historically and strategically necessary for the Dalits; however it does not limit the agenda of political affirmation merely on equitable distribution of resources rather it vehemently tries to remove imposed demeaning in order to get respect and recognition as a collective identity. Further, it deliberately rejects the paternal savior consciousness of social elites through staunch convictions on their identity that is based on subjective experience. Therefore, it even goes beyond group recognition since it demands political acknowledgment for every personal dimension which includes the color, body, and so on.

The people of Chengara and Arippa argued that the lack of resources leads to the denial of various opportunities and marginalization in which they are helpless and frustrated to fight against marginalization since they have been fighting for their day- to-day existence. It is noted, "the people who have experienced historical exclusion, oppression, obloquy, and contempt, demand new social practices to seek recognition, for example, the Black women in the United States campaigned for the vote, however they were not asking recognition for their identity directly but precisely focused on voting right this act may presuppose the recognition for identity that entails a good deals."³⁷³ Similarly, people in Chengara and Arippa claim for resources that presuppose the recognition for identity because mere economic transformation does not provide acknowledgement

³⁷³ K.Anthony Appiah, "The politics of identity," *Daedalus*, Vol.135, no.4 (2006), pp.15-22.

therefore they pursue full recognition to liberate themselves from the strong oppressive social norms.

The Dalit political assertion tries to inter-subjective recognition to actualize their rights and freedom to maintain ethical life. In the Hegelian, senses people cannot realize freedom without recognition hence it gives rise to the right since rights are understood as the concrete expression of freedom. The bondage of caste ascribed certain defined status to the untouchables, it does not ensure any privilege and prestige to the lower caste consequently they were not recognized as humans that curtailed their freedom, in the absence of it, the claims for rights has been distorted. It is perceived that the people who have been suffered from graded inequality could not unite and fight against dominant discourse moreover the destitution and deprivation curtailed inter-personal relations which also prevented them from mutual recognition that caused the lack of self-knowledge and sense of freedom among the untouchable castes. For the Dalits Chengara and Arippa movements are a paradigm shift from destitution since it is a struggle for recognition that negates the demeaning self through positive self-assertion that redefines their imposed caste identity and the sense of self in relation with the other. The present political assertions of the Dalits can be interpreted as a mechanism for recognition by which their existence as a social being is engendered further it helped them to integrate within a community as ethical and political subjects since the movements have received certain recognition from the other dominant discourse rather than mere attention to their questions.

Indeed, Axel Honneth interpreted Hegel's idea of the struggle for recognition is the struggle between the people for the mutual recognition for their identity. He observed the

“struggle for recognition by the subjects often creates internal societal pressure against the political establishment since they guarantee freedom.”³⁷⁴ Thus individual claims for inter-subjective recognition to transcend the social progress would also be helpful for ethical life. The denial of rights through legal and social exclusion is a threat against the equal and respected existence in the society, further; it denies the sense of being a fully active agent in the society. Thus, “the recognition termed ‘love’ which refers to the emotional and physical needs from others that considered as the primary relationship that provides self-confidence to the individual hence the physical abuse shatters it.”³⁷⁵ He says that “another mode of recognition termed ‘rights’ that refers to the moral responsibility which evolved through the moral relationship with other therefore it leads to mutual recognition by which the individual learns to consider another person is also the bearer of equal rights.”³⁷⁶ Continuing that, “recognition also termed ‘solidarity’ that helps the individual to understand the personal traits and abilities that make people to define their personal difference which it is inevitable for an individualized perspective by developing self-esteem.”³⁷⁷

Moreover, self-esteem is expressed through the characteristic difference with the other human subject particularly an inter-subjective way hence it constitutes a positive attitude to each self. Therefore, recognition is extremely important in every spheres of life. If the recognition is being denied to human subjects would cause social struggle subsequently the denial of recognition provide a justificatory base to it.

³⁷⁴ Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), p.163.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 122.

It is apparent that as communities like Dalits have been denied recognition for many years, they were not categorized as human subjects for recognition which caused social struggles like Chengara and Arippa where they have been fighting for mutual recognition for their identity. Secondly, the societal pressure of the movement often trembles the political establishment like state later they offer freedom to the political assertion, further the social and political institution was forced to address their particular claims in relation to the difference. Moreover, the land movements of the Dalits can be identified as the result of legal and social exclusion by the political establishment since it denied their right over resources and it also abandoned the marginalized community's respectful existence and the sense of freedom.

Arundhati Roy notes that the “Dalits have been denied rights and they were socially excluded and no other society in the world has such a shameful system which keeps certain people are untouched. Thus, Kerala identifies the movement like Chengara as a forgotten nation. Further, they do not want to see such a nation and its people therefore they would not give any space to these people even in their imagination. The Malayali society maintains untouchability with Chengara and makes sure that they do not get any chances in the political engagements.”³⁷⁸ However, these movements are one of the radical movements in India besides it is not a mere struggle for land but a new imagination of their rights developed by the forgotten community. The struggle itself success because it helped the people to protest for their dignified imaginations therefore they fought for their basic rights by which certain impossible questions have been posed against the political establishments.

³⁷⁸ Arundhati Roy, “A Struggle for the Right to a Dignified Dream,” in *Chengara Solidarity Book*, ed. Muhammed Velam (Kozhikode: Solidarity Youth Movement, 2009), p.52.

Another important dimension of the struggle is fronting with the physical attack and intimidation on these movements, an attempt to abandon certain individuals from the primary relationship and to destroy their self-confidence as well. It is observed the movements have acquired mutual recognition from other individuals by establishing a moral relationship that enforced the state and civil society to consider the protestors are the bearer of equal rights. Moreover, the struggles have provided autonomous and individuated status to the Dalits in relation to recognition also it achieved through another mode of recognition called solidarity which developed self-esteem that defined their personal differences with others.

In short, Honneth reflects that the social struggles can be evaluated through a normative sense by the extent to which the individual expresses the preconditions of self-realization in the form of three distinct recognition love, respect, and social esteem. Indeed, “individuals only become who they are as a result of mutual recognition relationships with others. Persons gain subjectivity inter-subjectively, which is more crucial. Individuals can only begin to view themselves as others see them, and thus acquire an effective sense of self if they receive a favorable acknowledgment from others of their traits, standing, and abilities.”³⁷⁹ Truly, mutual recognition means a whole range of inter-subjective relations, between fellow citizens, of different ethnicities and races, of various civil society organizations, legal subjects, and so on. Moreover, individuals fundamentally depend on such recognition in order to construct and maintain their very identity and there is a moral demand from each individual is the eagerness to be recognized by others and fundamental moral obligation to recognize others that built the structures of inter-subjectivity.

³⁷⁹ Christopher F Zurn, *Axel Honneth: A Critical Theory of the Social* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), p.6.

If Honneth's theory applies to the political assertion of the Dalits, one can realize that the lack of the three distinct forms of recognition love, respect, and social esteem. Hence, the struggle for recognition helped the people to get positive acknowledgment from other social groups even though the exclusion prevailed in the initial days of the struggle. Moreover, the positive acknowledgement provides an opportunity to identify their personal potential traits by which they gain a sense of self. Thus the wide range of inter-subjective relations occurred as part of these movements where the protestors actively engaged between the fellow citizens, other caste groups, civil society organizations, democratic actors so on.

It is contended that the social struggles like Chengara and Arippa were tried to conceptualize 'ethical life' in order to become an autonomous agent that maintains inter-subjective relations for emotional-legal recognitions and solidarity (a kind of accomplishment) as well. However, the emotional, legal recognitions and solidarity promoted the development of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem among the individuals. Sarada a women activist from the Arippa land struggle expresses cogently that, 'as Dalit women, I was fearful to express my right in public. Our community used to obey the words of political parties and other dominant castes. They never recognized or acknowledged our independent opinions. Hence, the present struggle has provided the courage to speak out our rights loudly besides we were able to communicate our particular issues to the government and our neighbors as well. In fact, the political parties and other higher caste groups realized the significance of the struggles; therefore, they often visit us which give confidence among us. However, they do not settle our problems

yet’.³⁸⁰ It is one of the examples of inter-subjective relations where the Dalit individual gains their subjectivity.

Thus the social struggles provide an opportunity, to be recognized by others and to recognize others that mutual recognition helps people to identify their personal traits. The social movements like Chengara and Arippa, indeed, provided the space to the Dalits for a cumulative acquisition of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem by which they recognize themselves as autonomous agents to work for their goals and aims actively with an individuated status. There are two key measures of progress that is inclusion and individualization. The “society would reach to a better position when the recognition regimes reduce the discrimination and exclusion and it acknowledges the distinctiveness of individuals across the dimensions of the personality on the other. In order to formulate the ‘formal conception of ethical life, these criteria need to be followed, it can also be used to evaluate the claims of various social and political movements.”³⁸¹ Recognition orients social actors and movements to project human emancipation and individual self-realization. As a community, the ex-untouchable castes attempts for inclusion and individualization through various act for recognition as part of social struggle that caused the society to gradually acknowledge their distinctive individuality. It is perceived that the various claims of the Dalit movements were evaluated because the society gradually formulating the ‘formal conception of ethical life’ through reducing discrimination and exclusions.

³⁸⁰ Sarada (Activist Arippa Land Struggle) interviewed and translated by the Researcher, June 2019.

³⁸¹ Zurn, *Axel Honneth: A Critical Theory of the Social*, p.8.

Identity Struggle: Redistribution and Recognition

Redistribution and recognition are two important factors in relation to justice. The present world experiences the subaltern political movements particularly focused on two distinctive claims of social justice: redistribution and recognition. Thus redistribution claims the distribution of resources and wealth where the recognition demands equal respect for the identity and difference. Nancy Fraser observes “today, redistribution claims are made for wealth distribution from the north to the south, from the rich to the poor, and from owners to workers. The recent rise of free-market thought, on the other hand, has put proponents of redistribution on the defensive. The second form of social justice claims is based on recognition politics, which aspires for a society where assimilation to the majority or dominant cultural norms is no longer a prerequisite for equal respect.”³⁸² Fraser, further, argues that “there is a contradiction with a new constellation; once oriented on distribution, the discourse on social justice is now more divided between claims for redistribution on the one hand and claims for acknowledgment on the other.”³⁸³

Fraser problematizes the increasing trends and the predominance of recognition because the rise of ‘identity politics’ decentered as well as extinguished the claims for egalitarian redistribution due to the demise of communism and the surge of free market-ideology. However, she proposes a different thesis, justice today requires both redistribution and recognition neither alone sufficient. She differentiates herself from Taylor and Honneth, on the concepts of redistribution and recognition. For them, being recognized by another

³⁸² Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003), p.7.

³⁸³ Ibid., 8.

subject is a necessary condition for attaining full undistorted subjectivity. Indeed, the denial of recognition is to deprive her or him of a basic prerequisite for human flourishing. They defined the misrecognition in terms of impaired subjectivity and damaged self-identity also it is an injury in ethical terms that stunts the subject's capacity to achieve a good life. However, Fraser conceives the recognition as a matter of justice, in the sense that, the matter of justice is to treat it is an issue of social status because the institutionalized pattern of cultural value denied the status of full partners in social interaction to some individuals.

Dalit political assertion of Chengara and Arippa movements demanded redistribution of resources and recognition too, these struggles fundamentally raised the question of justice by problematizing certain particular experiences therefore it demanded equal distribution of resources from the political establishments and the recognition intersubjectively. The institutionalized cultural values of the caste system denied equal participation to the ex-untouchable castes in the society. The self-realizations about the non-privileged social status made the protestors not assimilate into the dominant majority instead the movements radically articulated the particularities of alienations through problematizing cultural norms. The land movements put the redistribution and recognition as mutually exclusive alternatives that integrated approach may bring social justice.

However, either one of these is not sufficient to address the differences properly. For the Dalits, land reforms were merely an economic redistribution that does not give recognition to the ex-untouchables. In a caste, norms practiced society the land reforms law benefited the higher and middle caste groups who possessed land for lease. The

Dalits, as a community, have no right to lease over land since they were remained untouchable in the graded caste system. As a result, they did not receive agricultural land in the radical land reforms law of Kerala, besides the law emphasized the retrieval of land from the landlords and the permanent ownership for the tenants in the agricultural land. 'Indeed the Dalit were not the tenants therefore they were not benefitted by this law of redistribution.'³⁸⁴

According to Fraser's theory, the identity politics contradicts with redistribution, in the same parlance, the Chengara and Arippa land movements transcended the stigmatized framework of identity politics through integrating recognition and redistribution in relation to justice. The Chengara and Arippa protestors observed the institutionalized patterns of caste values retained the Dalits are invisible and inferior eventually led to misrecognition, besides the economic disparities reduced their status into subordinate class position. Apart from the deprecatory attitude of the dominant caste, the cultural values of the caste have prevented the untouchable to participate as a peer in social life consequently the cultural norms of the caste structure often impede the parity of participation. Thus, the present land movements transgressed the boundaries of social structures and cultural norms through their ideological positions and sensible questions which influenced the others to a certain extent therefore interaction endorsed the participation of the Dalits as a peer in social life.

It is apparent that these land movements were stigmatized as the movement of Maoists as well as criminal groups in the initial days that prevented their particular claims for redistribution and recognition through the conscious engagements of social institutions.

³⁸⁴ Sunny M Kapikkadu, *Janathayaum Janadhipathyavum: Dalit Vigjanathinte Rashtreeya Padangal*, (Kozhikode: Vidyarthi Publications, 2017), p.62.

This happened, precisely, because the caste institutions often constitute certain categories of social actors that are normative and others are deficient by which it creates a class of devalued individuals who are always denied the full partnership in social life. Chengara and Arippa movements politically transgressed the boundaries of deficient categorization through justifying their claims for recognition and redistribution radically aimed to repair their impaired subjectivity and subordinate social status.

Actually, Fraser proposes a 'status model which deinstitutionalizes the pattern of cultural values therefore it seeks to establish the subordinate party as a full partner in social life further they interact with others.'³⁸⁵ In this context, the aim of the Dalit land struggles is to deinstitutionalize the cultural values of caste which is the stumbling impede for the parity of participation. Further, these struggles redefined the patterns in order to establish the full partners in social life. Fraser's intellectual conceptualization of 'participatory parity' has been clearly visible in these movements as these movements give equal importance to redistribution and recognition. The institutionalized patterns of caste reinforced injustice therefore the Dalits had to suffer multiple forms of degradations since the norms produced cultural disrespect and economic exploitations. The Dalits constituted these struggles through the self-realization that they have been exploited by the socio-economic patterns of institutions therefore the struggles have comprehended the recognition and redistribution in a single paradigm to makes claim for social equality. However, both Honneth and Fraser bring various philosophical dimensions to address the particularities of recognition and redistribution differently. Fraser fundamentally holds the argument that recognition promotes differentiation where redistribution tries to eliminate it. The recognition discourse target cultural injustice that is rooted in people's

³⁸⁵ Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, p.30.

identities by the influence of cultural norms besides the redistribution address the economic injustice that is based on the individual's relation to the means of production. Indeed, the majority class remains in the society with the lack of resources in the hierarchically-differentiated class system. Both cultural and economic injustice is primarily co-original therefore economic inequality cannot be reduced to cultural misrecognition, and vice versa. "Injustices against the downtrodden or subjugated are traceable to both political economy and culture at the same time. In summary, 'bivalent collectivities' may experience both socioeconomic and cultural misrecognition in forms where none of these injustices is a secondary outcome of the other, but when both are primary and co-original. In that circumstance, neither distributive nor recognition remedies will be sufficient on their own. Both are required by bivalent collectivities."³⁸⁶

In order to elaborate on the 'bivalent collectivities,' Fraser explains the political and economic situation of Lesbian and Gay identities. They suffer from heterosexism through the cultural norms of privileged heterosexuality and homophobia which devalued homosexuality. Due to the cultural norms they have been faces shaming, harassment, discrimination and violence also being denied legal rights consequently misrecognized. On the other hand, they suffered serious economic injustices through the denial of social welfare benefits. Truly, these groups required redistributive remedies since they were faced distributive injustice as working class besides as a despised sexuality they faced the injustice of misrecognition hence they required remedies for recognition. In order to transcend the redistribution-recognition divide Fraser, proposes two remedies: affirmation and transformation. Thus affirmation tries to correct the

³⁸⁶ Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interrupts: Critical Reflections on the "Post-Socialist" Condition* (London: Routledge, 2014), p.68.

inequitable outcomes of social arrangements through certain actions but it does not disturb the basic framework which generates it, in addition to that the transformation corrects inequitable outcomes by referring some remedies that also tries to restrict the underlying generative framework.³⁸⁷

The Dalits are ‘bivalent collectivities’ they have faced harassment, violence, discrimination from the dominant social groups through the caste norms that led to misrecognition too. Secondly, they suffered economic injustice due to the denial of access to resources. It can be contended that the Chengara and Aripa land struggles try to integrate recognition-redistribution discourses for a radical restructuring of the society and to register their independent voice as well. These movements also try for affirmations and transformations to overcome the inequitable outcome through the democratic rearrangements of society and the elimination of unequal social structure. Hence the movements have realized the importance of affirmations as well as transformations since they have suffered by the distributive injustice due to the framework of working-class, besides being disrespected, misrecognized on the basis of cultural valuations. It can be argued the demand for the distribution of land is an attempt to transform their material condition which would eliminate the distributive injustice and structural exploitation. Thus along with the demand for distribution they are politically affirming the need for social rearrangements because they believe that the misrecognition may persist even after the redistribution therefore, the affirmation tries for a radical change in the institutionalized patterns of the cultural system the injustice ingrained with it.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

Honneth contends the idea of Fraser by saying the matter of distribution has to be explained and justified through the issue of recognition. The question of distributive justice is better understood in terms of normative categories that come from sufficiently differentiated theories of recognition. Honneth further argues that the Marxist scholars had a historical-philosophical tendency to see the proletariat alone as the stand-in for all social discontent. In a changed context, different social sufferings derived to the center of the political public sphere, which posed new voices and formed into struggles.

Accordingly, “the complicity with political domination can be undone by introducing a normative terminology for identifying social discontent independently of public recognition which needs moral-psychological consideration.”³⁸⁸ Contemporary world witnesses the politically organized efforts of cultural groups to find social recognition for their own value convictions and lifestyles. Despite all the focus on legal equality the struggle for recognition of cultural difference currently focuses on demanding social recognition for one’s values and way of life which had been completely alien to the traditional social movements.

Honneth thus, firmly believes that today’s identity political movements cannot be reduced to their cultural objectives than the traditional resistance movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which pinned down to material and legal goals. Indeed, the matter of justice and injustice are related to the society’s significations on the individual’s abilities and characteristics, and then only the socially recognized collective subjectivities can address it.

Therefore, if the society does not signify the subject’s ability the injustice may persist. For the matter of justice, Honneth gives preference to the ability to understand the social

³⁸⁸ Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, p.124.

discontent where Fraser tries to look at how the subject's socially-situated in the existing value structure. Moreover, "new social movements arise out of the individual's expectation for recognition that overcomes the pre-existing pattern of social movements which hierarchically positioned the subjects."³⁸⁹

Hence, the Dalit land struggles are mainly concerned demands, the explanation, and justification for any distribution through the matter of recognition. Unless the distribution is justified through the recognition it may exclude certain categories with bureaucratic labeling. Kerala land reforms experienced such exclusion where the particularities of certain communities were entirely ignored in the distributive justice process. In the bureaucratic terms land reforms are explained as 'land to the tenants' beside it labeled the large group of ex-untouchables as 'homestead-dwellers' (The people who live in landlord's land without any right).

Consequently, this collective labeling misrecognized a large amount of people and their caste specificities. Moreover, this misrecognition in the distribution process considered the Dalits are the mere recipients of land reforms further they pushed them into the colonies. It is proven that, if the distribution does not explain or justified through recognition, it may be a backlash to its real purpose, which would marginalize and discriminate the misrecognized categories. The normative categories of distribution cannot be better understood if it does not address the sufficiently differentiated theories of recognition.

Thus, the Chengara and Arippa transgressed the proletariat labeling by bringing their peculiar social suffering into the center of the political public sphere in order to receive

³⁸⁹ *Internet encyclopedia of philosophy*, by James Feiser and Bradley Dowden, accessed March 4, 2021. https://iep.utm.edu/recog_sp

moral-psychological considerations. Through the anti-caste movements and affirmative action, policies influenced the society to admit the abilities and characteristics of the Dalit subjects by which they pose the question of justice that has been witnessed in the land struggle movements. The present land movements are the result of long-term social discontent, bringing new expectations and social imagination further, they negating the hierarchical social positioning of earlier social movements. In an interview, Honneth expressed his difference with Fraser that “any bureaucratic labeling of group characteristics not a kind of recognition but a kind of false recognition, a kind of misrecognition. So any form of social recognition which fixes the people into certain categories is somewhat an unjustified form of recognition.”³⁹⁰ Hence, people have the freedom to revolt against the paradigm of recognition if they are misrecognized by it. It can be read that the fight against bureaucratic labeling itself, a fight for better recognition.

Honneth summarizes that the honor and dignity of the lower classes were not being adequately respected, therefore, the individual often see the institutional procedure as social injustice since their personality is being disrespected and they believe they have the right for recognition. Hence, present land movements are the classic examples for recognition because they were misrecognized in the paradigm of recognition even in the democratic structure. Certainly, respect and esteem are the fundamental concern for recognition therefore it has to differentiate from the questions of distributive justice.

Historically, it is perceived that identity politics has activist as well as academic existence. Hence, the “activist engages in successful social movements such as civil

³⁹⁰ Axel Honneth and Gwynn Markle, "From struggles for Recognition to a Plural Concept of Justice: An Interview with Axel Honneth," *Acta Sociologica*, Vol.47, no.4 (2004), pp.383-391.

rights movements are women's movement where they self-consciously invoke the concept of social justice by following two beliefs. One among those beliefs is identity; the resource for knowledge particularly for social changes another is oppressed groups needs to be at the forefront of their own liberation. Moreover, these successful social movements led, primarily, by the oppressed groups but not exclusively by them. For academics, the academics try to become more inclusive and diverse by bringing the experience of marginalized identity groups for more truthful and less distorted scholarship. However, the social movements associated with identity politics have been castigated by the left, right, and center no longer enjoying their previous wide support.”³⁹¹

Definitely, the Chengara and Arippa struggles are identity-based liberation movements since they affirmed their rights in the liberal democratic system same as any other social movement. Compare to other political resistance they used their identity as a source of knowledge to change institutionalized patterns hence they placed themselves at the forefront of liberation. Indeed, these movements brought out the subjective experience of Dalits in the political public sphere by problematizing the dominant discourses.

³⁹¹ Linda Martan Alcoff, Michael Hames-Garcia, Satya Mohanty, and Paula M.L Moya eds. *Identity Politics Reconsidered* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.2.

CONCLUSION

The present study primarily understands the land struggles of Chengara and Arippe led by the Dalits and Adivasis in modern Kerala. These struggles raised debate not only on the character and nature of the modern state and society in modern Kerala, but they also questioned the much-acclaimed model of Kerala development and the progressive nature of land reforms which were implemented in Kerala state. Thus the current movements have exposed to the general public that the number of landless people in Kerala is steadily increasing. These movements underscore the relevance of emerging identity, recognition, and resource ownership of the Dalits and Adivasis who were alienated and oppressed by the caste system, thus bringing the numerous hidden caste dynamics of Kerala's development model to the forefront. In present-day Kerala, the Dalits and Dalit Christians are battling for ownership of a piece of landed property, indicating that these communities have not benefited agricultural land which they expected minimum from the land reforms.

More crucially, the current protests highlighted the strong nexus between the caste and land, which is responsible for unequal property relations in Kerala. To put it another way, a community's landlessness is coupled with their social status within the graded caste system. Graded inequality has denied both individual property and collective property of the untouchable castes. This makes them further excluding from the modern society. Further, the slave position of untouchables cannot be attributed to surplus production and labour alienation alone, rather the Brahminic socio/religious system that played a significant role in property relations of Kerala society.

Modern Kerala when it adopted progressive land reforms, the Dalits faced structural exclusion; as a result, they were forced to fight as a community since they were disadvantaged under the state and society. Furthermore, these struggles strongly feel that they were marginalized as a result of their caste status, which isolated them from the socio-economic and cultural realms of civic life. Even after the formation of modern Kerala, there were no structural improvements in the position of slave castes in terms of landed property. Hence, they started an autonomous movement to revisit the 'settled problems' of land reforms. Furthermore, because of their slave caste status, the Dalits were unable to claim the land, and as a result, they were kept as servile bodies. These oppressed caste groups, on the other hand, regained social agency as a result of current movements that enabled them to speak openly about 'respectability' and 'honor'. The land has been used as means of acquiring education, power, status, dignity, respect, and honor as the citizen, and those who do not possess the land, are look down and considered as the slave. Thus, it should be underlined that persons with land enjoy the benefits of modern society as complete citizens, whereas landlessness negated the modern state's privileges for Dalits, hence, landlessness, is more than just a lack of land, it also limits the contemporary individual's potential.

One of the most drastic attempts of the land reforms, one can be considered is the transfer of agricultural land to the tenants. As a result of the tenant classification, the lower castes' chance of obtaining agricultural land was almost ruled out, that is the reason they were remain confined to performing agricultural and other menial tasks for the landlords and dominant tenants. The unbreakable caste and feudal relations have made the impossibility of the lower castes to participate in the tenancy system and

reduced them to mere landless laborers. However, the *Kudikidappukar* (hutment dwellers) had the right to purchase *Kudikidappu* (house site) in the rural areas with the help of the government hence it was not possible for every family due to their poor economic conditions in the exploitative agrarian system.

As part of the land reform process, the Dalits who had previously worked in agricultural land were relocated to the colonies, and their habitus became the target of new discriminations. Therefore, the land reforms have been scrutinized as they declared landlordism to be ended in Kerala through the abolition of feudal caste ties. Land is a valuable capital that redefines caste, identity and citizenship status of a community; it can be used as a powerful instrument for social emancipation. However, through spatial segregation, the ex-untouchable castes were assigned to the *Harijan* and *Lakshamveedu* (one lakh dwellings) colonies, and reinforcing its identity with a set of preconceived assumptions. Dalit discourses are outspoken critics of democratic land reforms, elaborating on the oppressive components that have arisen as a result of the process. These identity movements, on the other hand, confront their caste position in conjunction with a variety of other social interactions in order to achieve the liberal democratic principles of liberty and equality. The current land movements, it could be said, run counter to the broad assumptions presented by the prevalent discourse on the Kerala model of development based on land reforms.

The present study finds that the Aripa and Chengara movements want agricultural land redistribution, but they are not seeking to return to a traditional agrarian society, rather, they are attempting to become resourceful agents who can assist them transcend the constraints of their social position. These movements do not seek to resolve Kerala's

agrarian crisis, rather, they demand equal land redistribution, as the Dalits in Kerala were limited to *Kudikidappu* land (hutment habitation) and ‘colonies’ after land reforms. These marginalized groups want a share of the state’s wealth in order to get assets, as they recognize that property is a necessary component of a decent living. Furthermore, the Dalits recognized the value of the landed property as they transitioned into such a globalized era in which social status is based not just on identity but also on assets.

The present study finds that the land movements are attempting to alter Kerala’s political economy by addressing the unequal allocation of land, which frequently reproduces social inequality, particularly in terms of economic capital. These Land movements are significant in this context since capitalists control land and other resources, implying the importance of having assets and resources for underprivileged caste groups. Life in the ‘Kudikidappu’ land and colonies is seen to be unchanged; therefore, they chose land protest as a radical way to reform their ‘subjective agency’, as the varna-caste social order constantly undermined their autonomy. The movement echoes that the Dalits can have a better existence by breaking their degraded social positions, and in that course, it has also succeeded in producing an original outlook on their habits by establishing a casteless social order.

The Chengara and Arippa struggles exposed the role of caste in Kerala’s land relations in public-debate, prompting Dalits to creatively address issues of social justice. Theoretically, these groups assert that social justice cannot be achieved by simply moving people’s social positions; every social relationship is based on caste hierarchy. Social capital is the sum of resources; it necessitates a part of national capital to address multilayered inequity. Because ‘accumulated labor’ often turns into capital and plays a

role in production, the movements accepted the idea that the transformation of material life is attainable via the equal distribution of each capital. These movements, on the other hand, do not confine the topic of resources to a purely economic concern; rather, they link resourcelessness to a person's identity.

The Chengara and Arippa land struggles, were framed by identity politics, with the protestors realizing that their lack of resource ownership was associated with their identity. In other words, the cause of their landlessness is their lower caste identity; hence the movements strive to break the popular image of social protest by effectively bringing intersectional issues to the fore. Demands for land and property, it is presumed, are common in left-wing movements, but Chengara and Arippa defend their activities by claiming their identity, "We are Dalits."

Furthermore, it is found in the course of the study that the Chengara and Arippa movements highlighted Kerala about the role of "resource capital" by bringing identity politics against mainstream ideologies. Besides, their political protest produced an intellectual critique of Kerala land reforms, which problematized the coercive state apparatuses that frequently consider the Dalits as simply caste objects. The movement productively affirmed its identity as an anti-caste movement that attempted to alter social relations by expressing its subjectivity. It also altered the tight caste social interactions into an egalitarian social order, which partially destabilized caste and hierarchy in inter-caste exchanges in the society.

Chengara and Arippa compellingly urged that the Dalits be granted dignified citizenship so that they may participate in the civil society's prominence. The study also found that the movements seek to transform their status as mere subjects into complete citizens,

allowing them to claim all of the benefits of a liberal democratic state. It should be underlined that the demonstrators feel that dignified citizenship is inevitable in order to modify the preconceived beliefs about them in the caste-ridden social system. As a result, the movements cannot be dismissed as a pursuit for only property/financial gains; rather, they have reignited debates about dignity in the political and economic arenas.

It is observed in the study that the land movements tackled the political economy of caste, as a result of which the landlessness issue of the Dalits was brought to the attention of the public, forcing the public intelligentsia to speak out about the injustice done to the former untouchables. However, due to ideological differences, the activities of the Dalit organizations, in Kerala, have not been given considerable priority.

Some observations on the course of the Land Struggles:

- Although the Chengara and Arippa land movements philosophically based on Ambedkarism, however, it does not provide much adhesion to the Ambedkarite politics in Kerala.
- Three tactics, leadership, ideological, and mass, must be implemented to build and organize the growing Dalit Land movements in Kerala. A strong vision is critical to bringing dreams to life. Instead of having a fractured vision, the leadership should open their eyes to see the Dalit community's peculiar circumstances. The land movement's leadership must be imaginative on both an intellectual and practical level.
- The movement adopted caste annihilation as an ideology for its fights to eliminate graded hierarchies and other social exclusions, but it was unable to

create an alternative democratic arena alongside other political movements because it was limited to caste assertion.

- The Dalits' movement quest for land ownership was successful; it failed to persuade other Dalit organizations to fight for landed properties. Because the public sphere in Kerala is shaped by the dominant and popular ideologies of mainly class based, hence the land movements were unable to counter much on such populist ideologies due to a lack of epistemic formulations.
- While Kerala's civil society is brimming with compelling narratives for redistribution and recognition, the new social movement will need to establish an ethical vocabulary to sway the ruling class. Organizing mass strategies such as the "Dalit Hartal" could be one way to draw the concerns to the public's attention while simultaneously challenging the caste and class character of the society and the state's indifference towards the Dalit question.
- It might be argued that identity movements need a new political language to persuade society of their special concerns, because society is more prejudiced against Dalit political acts. However, land has become a primary priority for Dalits in order to overcome caste differences, and the ideological rigidities of the organizations hinder them from joining forces with wider political arguments.
- Through their ongoing battle, Arippa and Chengara complicated the issue of caste. They've sparked new debates about Kerala's social development from a caste perspective, questioning the privileges and social capital that disproportionately benefit some communities.

- The movements exposed the hidden caste dimensions by claiming that because caste was not taken into account in the land reform process, they were forced to continue working as landless workers even today. The movement resurrected the caste issue in order to complicate the already-solved issues of land reform.
- Interestingly, the movements drew the attention of public intellectuals and civic society by their political acts and methodological criticism. This movement also addressed Dalit citizenship, as the caste social system considered them as second-class citizens. As a result, the movements have a critical understanding of citizenship because they have yet to experience the full benefits of citizenship in the liberal democratic system.
- Furthermore, the movements highlighted the particularities of caste, which hinder underprivileged groups from having a universal perspective. To abolish hierarchical social interactions, the Arippa and Chengara movements politicized their unique identity by combining redistributive/recognition ideologies.
- The Chengara and Arippa land movements addressed social discrimination as well as resource drawbacks faced by Dalits in Kerala by highlighting the lack of proper implementation of constitutional provisions. As a result, these movements demanded agricultural land but also raised questions about caste dynamics and power ties in the Kerala society.
- Identity has been the source of knowledge to challenge existing patterns, putting them at the forefront of emancipation, unlike other forms of political opposition. Indeed, by challenging prevailing conceptions, these movements brought Dalit experience into the political public sphere.

- The Chengara and Arippa movements, unlike many other Dalit political movements, sought both resource redistribution and recognition. Because the caste system's embedded cultural beliefs denied ex-untouchable castes fair involvement in society, demanding equal allocation of resources from governmental structures, as well as inter-subjective recognition in the society is the hall mark of these struggles.
- Women play a significant role in land struggles. They have contributed their money, time, and effort to the movement's expansion. However, they remained excluded from decision-making and leadership as well. Seleena Prakkann's (former secretary of SVSV) resignation from the Chengara movement is an example of it. Women's voices still are unheard among Dalit communities in the outset. Despite the fact that Dalit women are becoming more involved in current movements, however, their role as leaders is almost none, with a few exceptions.
- Hence the question of land and women's freedom must be seen in a holistic vision of emancipation because the subjective liberation often interlinked with the resources and other capitals. Land provides Dalits with such a sense of self-identity and dignity, and an economic resource in their quest for meaningful human life. Although the land question of Dalits is a cross-cutting issue, it was never conceived as a critical issue in Kerala's public consciousness. The Dalit women are the actual subjects of resourcelessness, hence Dalit land question could also be seen as a women's issue. Women living in Dalit colonies are still unable to seek a space for their privacy and safety.

- Dalits are socially, economically, politically, regionally, and culturally fractured, as the word Dalit implies. Since Dalit movements are made up of several regional factions, fragmentation is a major impediment to emancipation. As a result, bringing these disparate groups together is a major challenge that must be addressed through an effective leadership strategy.
- To alleviate their marginalization, Dalit land movements must include other Dalit communities and like-minded groups by locating the landless families in the state, regional coordination is required.
- One of the most valuable resources is younger generation therefore the Dalit movements may appeal to them to carry on the struggle with a new perspective. The land issue has to be made as a central concern in the Kerala Dalit movement. The main slogan that evolved from the Chengara and Arippa land struggles was gaining access to resources.
- Furthermore, the Dalits have to produce multiple credible literatures in order to provide an intellectual and constructive critique of the mainstream political position on land reforms and the Kerala model of development by consolidating its critical ideological and several creative art forms too.

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Reimagining Resources : A Note on Dalit Land Movements in Kerala

- *Joby Mathew*, Research Scholar, Centre for Human Rights, University of Hyderabad.

Abstract :

The first and the foremost part of a nation building is the welfare of its people. For a country like India, distribution of land resources among the landless may achieve this goal. After seventy five years of independence we seldom see such a genuine venture in this regard yet prevents such moves. If there is no equal distribution of resources like land, a forceful demand would arise. The state of Kerala witnessed series of such struggles demanding land for the landless. This paper tries to understand how the Chengara and Arippa movements questioned this injustice towards marginal communities. Further, it analyzes that how a community having long history of defamation and torture that resulted to interrogate the oppressor for their deserved social dignity and capital.

Keywords: - *Land, Dalit, Resource, Dignity, Chengara, Arippa*

The land resource is always a living subject in India. It is equated with social dignity. Own a piece of land escalate one's social status in India. Because of the same reason, not all individuals are allowed to hold it. The beneficiary feudal community in India never thought of sharing their land ownership with anyone out of their caste. In such a way, an essential form of wealth and status remained exclusive to the upper castes, pulling a civic life away.

An upside down triangular representation of feudalism clearly shows that how unethical is this land holdings in India. The pointed narrow

sharpness of such a reverse image is nothing but an emaciated low caste people and their breadth of land holdings in India. They could barely balance on such a needle point. Whereas the flat top cite the vastness of land acquired by landlords. Moreover, an individual born into a particular caste is given all the privileges of the society and a similar labour provides another a barren life. What makes a human birth to reject a possible egalitarian life?

The Struggles for Land : A Subaltern Reading :

How an egalitarian life is possible in India? Break what is unequally distributed. It is basically nothing but the land. The last few decades witnessed *Dalit* holding protests to shatter the locked landed property in Kerala. These struggles raised certain fundamental questions on social justice and so called 'civic life' in Kerala. Protestors of such struggles consider it as a revolt against government that never treated them at par with upper castes even after fiftieth year of Indian independence. They were evicted from land reforms to the margins of the Kerala society. Series of such critical encounters on public space signifies that the issue still persist. In reality the society is still highly undemocratic and hardly considers this unequal distribution of land need to be rectified.

Protests on land issue disclose the folly of technical adjustments of land reforms that the land transferred to the tenants but not to the labours attached with soil. Since most of the labours are of low castes, they are left with no housing or agrarian land but choose to fight.



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Dear Joby Mathew,

It is with pleasure that we invite you to attend the Global History of Political Thought conference sponsored by Brown University and the Academy of Global Humanities and Critical Theory based at the University of Bologna. The conference will take place at Brown University, in Providence Rhode Island on April 6/7th, 2018. We have accepted your paper and look forward to hearing it. The conference will cover your accommodations and meals while you are here at Brown. Enclosed is a draft itinerary for the conference, as well as accommodation details. We look forward to seeing you.

Best,

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