

**Caste and Gender Politics of Representation in Print Media:
A Study of Malayalam News Writing on Violence Against
Dalit Women in Kerala**

**A Thesis Submitted During 2022 to the University of Hyderabad
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by

PRAMEELA K P

Regd. No: 10CWPG04



Centre For Women's Studies

School of Social Sciences

University of Hyderabad

(P.O.) Central University, Gachibowli, Hyderabad – 500 046

Telangana

India

December

2022



CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Caste and Gender Politics of Representation in Print Media: A Study of Malayalam News Writing on Violence Against Dalit Women in Kerala**” submitted by Prameela K P bearing Registration Number 10CWPG04 in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Gender Studies at Centre for Women’s Studies in the School of Social Sciences is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

This thesis is free from Plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for award of any degree or diploma.

Further, the student has the following publication(s) before submission of the thesis for adjudication and has produced evidence for the same in the form of acceptance letter or the reprint in the relevant area of his research:

1. Prameela K P, “Gender and Caste Encounter with Travel Writing: An Analysis of Existing Women’s Writing and Travel Experiences of Dalit Women from Kerala.”” *In Passage: The International Journal of Writing and Mobility*, No. 4 (November 18, 2021): 92–118. ISSN 2676-2056. Chapter 1- Introduction and Theoretical Framework.

She has made presentations in the following conferences:

1. Presented the paper entitled “Gender, Caste Politics of Representation in Print Media in the International Conference and Doctoral Colloquium on Social Science Research: Issues, Challenges and Strategies during 9-11 January 2013, organized by Institute of Public Enterprise, Osmania University, Hyderabad.
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3. Presented research proposal and attended National Workshop on Feminist Research Methodology, organized by the Inter University Centre for Social Science Research and Extension, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala from 26th September to 1st October 2011. Participated in the two months training course on “Researching

the Contemporary” held in July-August 2014 at Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi.

Further, the student was exempted from doing coursework (recommended by Doctoral Committee) on the basis of the following courses passed during her M.Phil. Program and the M.Phil. Degree was awarded:

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CW603	Seminar Course	4	Pass

M. N. Rajesh
Dr. M N Rajesh

Supervisor
Assistant Professor
Dept. of History
University of Hyderabad
Hyderabad-500 046.

K. Suneetha Rani
Prof. K Suneetha Rani *30/12/22*

Head, Centre for Women's Studies

HEAD
Centre for Women's Studies
School of Social Sciences
University of Hyderabad
Hyderabad-500 046

30/12/22

Dean, School of Social Sciences

अध्यक्ष / DEAN
समाज विज्ञान संकाय
School of Social Sciences
हैदराबाद विश्वविद्यालय
University of Hyderabad
हैदराबाद-500 046., भारत
Hyderabad-500 046. INDIA.



DECLARATION

I Prameela K P (Reg. No. 10CWPG04), hereby Declare that this thesis entitled “**Caste and Gender Politics of Representation in Print Media: A Study of Malayalam News Writing on Violence Against Dalit Women in Kerala**”, submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. M N Rajesh, Assistant Professor, Department of History is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

Date: 30.12.2002

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Prameela K P', written over a horizontal line.

Prameela K P

Regd. No. 10CWPG04

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Abbreviations

AIDWA: All India Democratic Women's Association

BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party

CITU: Centre of Indian Trade Unions

CPI: Communist Party of India

CPI(M): Communist Party of India (Marxist)

DHRM: Dalit Human Rights Movement

DYFI: Democratic Youth Federation of India

IHRD (Engineering College): Institute of Human Resources Development

IOB: Indian Overseas Bank

LDF: Left Democratic Front

NSS: Nair Service Society

SC: Scheduled Caste

SFI: Students' Federation of India

SNDP: Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam

ST: Scheduled Tribe

UDF: United Democratic Front

Chapter I

Introduction & Conceptual Framework

This chapter introduces the significance of the study, its methodology, research questions and subsequent chapterisation. The chapter also lays down the conceptual framework that forms the basis of the analysis of the subject of study. The dissertation is presented in five chapters. The first chapter gives the “Introduction and Conceptual Framework” of the research, the second chapter titled “Feminist Politics and Dalit Women Question in Kerala” will give the background of feminist movements in Kerala and Dalit women experience, The third chapter titled “Making of Print and its Culture in Kerala” will discuss history and politics of Malayalam news writing as well as production, the fourth chapter titled “Caste and Gender Politics of Representation in Print Media: Analysis of Malayalam News writings on Violence against Dalit Women” will focus on analysing representation of caste and gender violence against Dalit women in Malayalam news writing. The central question of this research is to understand how the discourse of caste and gender violence against Dalit women have been brought in the public sphere. The primary source of this study is collected from selected Newspaper archival data and the secondary source is based on feminist theories and Dalit writings on Caste and Gender.

Introduction

This dissertation intends to explore how gender and caste act in Kerala’s public sphere through an analysis of how the violence against Dalit women has been historically

represented in Malayalam newspapers. This research focuses on the gender and caste politics of representation through language and its meanings. It also attempts to initiate a much-needed critical enquiry in the study of gender, caste and representation in the public sphere of Kerala. As Gender Studies research the study specifically look at the news writings on violence against Dalit women in Kerala, and enquire how caste and gender hierarchies play a role in determining Dalit women's position and representation in contemporary Indian society in general, and Kerala society in specific.

The study focuses on textual representations of gender and caste in Malayalam news writing to understand the images of Dalit women and where they situate in gender and caste relations. Such an analysis is central to the contemporary Dalit feminist discourse. The study will involve critically looking at the descriptions of Dalit women in the news writing within the Malayalam/local context. The complex relationship between gender and caste are investigated in this study as the ways in which these descriptions of Dalit women were formulated and constrained by pre-existing notions of gender and caste in Kerala.

While interpreting the textual representation of Dalit women in Malayalam language newspapers, the thesis would be historically mapping the nature of violence against Dalit women and examine how they are reproduced in news writing. The intersection of caste and gender is a significant framework in gender studies discourse; in this sense the research is concerned with the traces of interactions between caste and gender which mark Dalit women's question and representation in the context of Kerala. The study will also focus on the interaction between the news and the people who read the newspaper. This dissertation aims to link the contemporary feminist debates within the emerging understanding of politics of gender and caste in Kerala. However, the study also exploring the issues of violence against Dalit women and how we can locate them

socially and politically. The study invoke Dalit feminist inquiry to produce a relevant research rather than “researching on them”. This would certainly connect very directly with an exploration of my own subjectivity, representation and location.

Significance of the study

This study will discuss the news writing on collective violence against Dalit women in Kerala. Journalism or fourth estate as it has been called, has an important role in constructing both the public sphere and shaping people’s orientation and attitudes. It is commonly understood that Kerala has a vibrant print culture and a rich density of publications in the regional language, and it plays a key role in the making people’s perception and in forming public opinion in Kerala. This study will therefore enquire how the Malayalam newspapers “produce” Dalit women to the public. The study will also engage with how the news and media create awareness on Dalit women’s issues as Kerala women’s question, thereby erasing the specificity of Dalit women’s identity and the nature of violence faced by them. The subsumption of the Dalit women’s identity within that of the “Kerala women” also erases the dynamics of power and hierarchy that shapes the relationship between women of different castes.

A significant question for this study is this: is there a need to study the representation of Dalit women separately? Dalit women experience intersecting forms of caste, and gender oppression. Being different from other groups through such multiple oppression makes it an issue of separate concern for feminist politics and academics.¹ Thus, the position of Dalit women differs from that of other women in the caste system. The study engage in research on Dalit women to produce knowledge on Caste and Gender

¹ Prameela K Prabhakaran, “Gender and Caste Encounter with Travel Writing: An Analysis of Existing Women’s Writing and Travel Experiences of Dalit Women from Kerala,” *In Passage: The International Journal of Writing and Mobility*, no. 4 (November 18, 2021): pp. 92-93, <https://doi.org/ISSN 2676-2056>.

intersectionality in this dissertation. In this study, the researcher look at the historical positioning of Dalit women in Kerala's public sphere.

There are many academic and non-academic studies and writings that have come up on the theme of the 'Dalit question in Kerala'. But the question of patriarchy has been sidelined in these "many" writings. Therefore, this study questions the patriarchal values of Dalit politics as well. The women's movements in Kerala have been addressing the issues of gender and violence against women. The caste and gender question still remains a untouched area by many women's organisations in Kerala. Here, they see women as one category which consciously maintains silence on the question of caste. Such silence within the women's movement further necessitates the need for studies that specifically focus on Dalit women. The difference in the plight of the Dalit women from that of women belonging to other segments is based on the specific experience² and theorisation of the former. The experience and the nature of oppression is bound to be different to each social category. Hence, this study firmly bases itself on the argument that Dalit women's issues are in many ways different³ from those of the Kerala women whose voice and representation dominate the mainstream of Kerala society and politics.

Research Questions

This research is built on the redressal of four major questions about the specific nature of caste-based gender violence, identity and representation. These are as follows:

- How collective violence acts on Dalit women in Kerala?
- How Dalit women defended caste hatred?

² Prameela K Prabhakaran, "Gender and Caste Encounter with Travel Writing: An Analysis of Existing Women's Writing and Travel Experiences of Dalit Women from Kerala," 102.

³ Ibid., 102

- How to understand the caste and gender violence against Dalit women?
- How gender and caste paradoxes operate in Kerala society?
- How can we characterise the news writing on Dalit women in Malayalam newspapers?
- Where are Dalit women's movements located in the Kerala's public sphere?

Research Methodology

The methodology of this study focusses upon historical and feminist enquiries into politics of representation of caste and gender in Malayalam news writing. A combination of methods including feminist theoretical analysis, textual/ content analysis, discourse analysis, archival methods, historiography, published interviews of the survivors and their families, oral histories and analysis of popular textual and visual media. The primary data will include newspaper archives to understand the history of news writing, Kerala's print history Dalit discourse in Kerala's public sphere, history of anti-caste movement in Kerala, history of violence against Dalit women who questioned caste-based gender violence and discrimination. Published interviews with Dalit women survivors and Dalit activists have been used as a primary source for the study.

Qualitative analysis has been conducted on selected news writings on caste based gender violence against Dalit women. There are four cases selected for the content analysis in the dissertation;

1. Case of Rajani S Anand, a Dalit woman student from Thiruvananthapuram district who died of suicide at the premises of the Higher Education Entrance Commissioner's Office of her institute on July 22, 2004.

2. Caste and gender-based violence against a Dalit woman Chithralekha, an Auto Rickshaw driver from Kannur district. She was subjected to caste based sexual harassment at work place by the dominant caste men and CPIM's trade union CITU members since 2006.
3. Case of Dalit women who participated in the Chengara Land struggle (since 2006) and were kidnapped and gangraped by the CITU trade union members in the plantation's godown at Chengara, Pathanamthitta district in 2009
4. Case of violence against Dalit women who were part of the Dalit Human Rights Movement in Kollam District in 2009

Intersectional feminist analysis has been used to understand how caste and gender has played specifically in the violence and the reported news writings has been taken for critical analysis to see how Malayalam news writing is addressing the caste and gender violence and its absence as well.

The primary data for this research is Newspaper archives. The study focused on the analysis of the above-mentioned four cases of caste and gender-based violence against Dalit women. Five major popular newspapers were selected for the analysis including "Malayala Manorama", "Mathrubhumi", "Kerala Kaumudi", "Deshabhimani" and "Madhyamam". The secondary data for the study is intersectional feminist theories and Dalit writings.

Understanding Gender, Caste and Representation

Indian society has been structured by the caste system; therefore, the understanding of caste underlies the hierarchy of Indian society which is based on the *Varna* system. Caste plays a vital role in the social and cultural life of women in India across their

caste and class⁴ locations. However, Women from the dominant caste communities enjoy the privilege of the caste system where as Dalit women get oppressed by the women from dominant castes as well. Therefore, Dalit women are the most oppressed women in the caste system. The origin of Indian caste has been debated by many scholars. Dr. B R Ambedkar states that , many scholars had studied the origin of caste as a “labour of love”⁵. He argues that “Caste is a parcelling of an already homogenous unit, and the explanation of the genesis of caste is the explanation of this process of parcelling”.⁶ The caste system has practices and the norms are also constructed based on this parcelling. “It is true that caste rests on belief but before belief comes to be the foundation of an institution, the institution itself needs to be perpetuated and fortified.”⁷ Caste system in India is built on the basis of the Hindu ideology; Hindu belief hence compels people to practice caste as a means to maintain their social and political dominance. Caste and Varna system has been romanticised in India as a well-structured labour system, which is imposed on the lower caste by the upper caste people. Dalits were kept as slaves for the upper caste and were denied a dignified life for centuries⁸. This practice of “slavery”, although constitutionally and lawfully prohibited and punishable has been legitimated in different ways. Historically, Dalits were considered unclean because they continued to live outside Hindu society, turning them into untouchables. They were forced to have distance from the mainstream society and their socially sanctioned duty was to serve the upper castes.

⁴ Prameela K Prabhakaran, “Gender and Caste Encounter with Travel Writing: An Analysis of Existing Women’s Writing and Travel Experiences of Dalit Women from Kerala,” 95.

⁵ B R Ambedkar, “Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development,” in *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 1 (Bombay, Maharashtra: Education Department. Government of Maharashtra, 1979), pp, 3- 6.

⁶ Ibid., 6

⁷ Ambedkar, “Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development,” 22.

⁸ Prameela, “Gender and Caste Encounter with Travel Writing: An Analysis of Existing Women’s Writing and Travel Experiences of Dalit Women from Kerala,” 98.

Ursula Sharma argued that caste has conceived Indian society as an unequal phenomenon.⁹ The classification of caste has been glorified as a form of ethnic difference. Such glorification does not take in to account the thousands of years of enforced bondage, inequality, untouchability, social and political exclusion and humiliation that the upper castes subject the lower castes to. This strategy to ahistorically draw parallels between caste and ethnicity has allowed people to accept caste as part of their culture. These are the ways in which the differences are made silent, Sharma argues. Caste system has also been made significant place in the cultural life of the people in India. Interestingly, this acceptance of the caste system has been the privilege of one section in Indian society.¹⁰ Hence, they continued to practice it for their stability and dominance over the society. Caste and its evolution has largely been overlooked by scholars. Ideologically, caste dissociates from the idea of equality, in the process establishing a hierarchical society on the basis of its values. It breaks the internal connection between people in the society and erases their historical consciousness.¹¹

Prakash Louis argues in the context of Dalit women's freedom that Dalit women's social position was at par with that of Dalit men; thus the community followed a pattern in which Dalit women had the liberty to exercise freedom both spatially and temporally. He argues that it is important to refer to the equality between Dalit women and men in their community which is visible in the social order itself. For instance, historically, there was no practice of dowry or subsequent dowry deaths. The more contemporary

⁹ Ursula Sharma, "Caste," in *Caste: Concepts in the Social Science Series* (Buckingham, New York: Open University Press, 1999), pp. 5-12.

¹⁰ Prameela, "Gender and Caste Encounter with Travel Writing: An Analysis of Existing Women's Writing and Travel Experiences of Dalit Women from Kerala," 96.

¹¹ Prameela, "Gender and Caste Encounter with Travel Writing: An Analysis of Existing Women's Writing and Travel Experiences of Dalit Women from Kerala," 96.

practices of dowry and dowry related violence in the Dalit community “mimic” the ways in which dominant caste practices patriarchy. Louise argues that dominant castes can in fact learn from the Dalit community lessons on how to assure freedom for their women.¹² The notion that Dalit women enjoy relative freedom in the domestic space widely celebrated both in the women’s movement and the Dalit movements.¹³ This study argues that such notions which romanticise caste occupations and the freedom associated to caste reduces Dalit women’s question when it comes to gender and Dalit discourse. The second chapter of the thesis discusses the ambiguities on freedom from subjugation and freedom to liberation in the quest of Dalit women’s social and political subjectivity in detail.¹⁴

According to Kalpana Kannabiran, caste has occupied sociology's central focus for almost a century. Caste practices have been opposed and continuously resisted by the anti-caste struggles in the country. However, studies on caste system in sociology have a tendency to follow the conventional ways of a depoliticised social anthropology, producing serious contradictions between social practice and knowledge systems within the academic discourse. This idea has led to the exclusion of studies on the social practices in the curriculum of sociology. Moreover, conventional theories on caste prevail where caste becomes the centre of study without a critical understanding of how it is practiced in Indian society and the social institutions as well. As a consequence, the history of anti-caste movements is erased as a result of the politics of caste inside social movements, which disregards the room for structural discussions on the politics

¹² Prakash Louis, “Introduction,” in *The Political Sociology of Dalit Assertion* (New Delhi: Gyan Pub. House, 2003), pp. 17-20.

¹³ Prameela, “Gender and Caste Encounter with Travel Writing: An Analysis of Existing Women’s Writing and Travel Experiences of Dalit Women from Kerala,” 96.

¹⁴ Prameela, “Gender and Caste Encounter with Travel Writing: An Analysis of Existing Women’s Writing and Travel Experiences of Dalit Women from Kerala,” 96.

of caste in academics.¹⁵ She is examining caste's positioning in sociology as a discourse critically. When caste emerges as a domain in sociology, the issue has been disregarded in the conventional sociology discipline. When sociology was taught in academic settings, the evolution of caste and its practises was not a concern. By arguing against the anti-caste movements serving as the focal point of methodological apparatuses, she challenges the intellectual practises of Indian sociology, where the caste question has been eliminated.

The supposed social homogeneity and how it has been discussed in academics have been criticized by Kalapana Kannabiran. She contends that no social group is constant over time and space. As a result, there is diversity even amongst Dalits. Dalit groups share their caste-based experience as a unifying factor across the diversities of culture, language, region and ethnicity. She says that B. R. Ambedkar propagated the term “Dalit” in his writings, speeches, and anti-caste movements to bring the Dalits and their experiences together for a common cause. Kannabiran has criticised the tendency which ignores the critical question of caste in the academia. And the arguments on difference in the Dalit community. The purpose of this study is to destabilise the notion of homogeneity from the foundation of its essentialist justifications. Social movements have a history of erasing the early and significant engagement of Dalit feminist activists who were included into these organisations. Scholarship has generally failed to locate the candid complexity of feminist mobilisations in the movements in Kerala. Thus, this dissertation attempts to historicise the feminist movement in Kerala since the emergence of women’s movements in the state.

¹⁵ Kannabirān Kalpana, “The Habitations of Violence in India,” in *Violence Studies* (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 1-60.

The contemporary debates on caste have been dominated largely by the Left. These arguments acknowledge that India is not a casteless society and caste continues to prevail in different forms. Old forms of inequality do not persist but have transformed into newer modes of operation. Surinder S Jodhka says that newer forms of caste inequality manifest in income inequality, occupational prestige etc in contemporary society.¹⁶ Thus, caste is one paradox which we continue to live with. The continuing linkages between privilege and deprivation in Indian society have caste at their basis. Due to the dynamic efforts made by anti-caste movements and writings, caste has become more visible in India. This is largely due to Dalits and other people of the lower caste mobilising actively to regain public places to eliminate caste. This poses the biggest threat to the caste system and the upper caste groups, who want to maintain their hold on power and privilege.

History of Caste System in Kerala

History of caste in Kerala is associated with untouchability and slavery which was practices against Dalits. The lower castes were compelled to maintain a set distance between themselves and the higher castes. Dalits were prevented from using the streets and public areas. They were forbidden access to temples and the areas around them. Slavery was a distinct feature of Kerala society as well, and Dalits were treated like property and sold and bought publicly as slaves of the upper caste population. Women from the Dalit community were treated in extremely brutal ways. They were not allowed to dress neatly and properly; they were not even allowed to cover the top half of their bodies, much less wear jewellery. The cruel history of slavery has a direct connection to Kerala's enslavement of Dalit women. Yet social scientists have mostly

¹⁶ Surinder S. Jodhka, "Caste in Contemporary India," in *Caste in Contemporary India* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 1-20.

overlooked it. Dalit women's historical experience with slavery needs to be studied specifically. Even after promulgation of anti-slavery laws, slave trade continued to exist in Kerala after independence. According to R. S Sharma, land was the primary means of production. But thinking only in terms of exclusive control over land by one party makes it extremely difficult to understand the distribution of land. Although the peasant communities were permitted to exist, they lacked functional control over any form of production. The landlords had superior rights on the same plot of land while the peasants had lesser rights. The wealthy landowners prevented the poor and weak peasant communities from defending their rights and alienated them from their way of life. The caste system undoubtedly aided their oppressive ways. Even if they possessed a plot of land, the untouchables were prohibited from using public tanks and wells and were unable to operate freely in the industrial process. In India, peasant labourers were known as Dalits. In the past, Dalit women were slaves. Such actions persisted even after the abolition of slavery in 1970. Dalits were forced to continue working for powerful caste masters. Agricultural labourers received rice as payment.¹⁷

For generations, Kerala's upper caste-dominated societal structure treated the Dalit populations there like slaves. For their upper caste rulers, they were made to perform menial tasks like farming and other menial labour. An entire Dalit family with no exceptions was forced to live as slaves and protect their master's rice fields and other belongings while leading deplorably unfree, destitute lives. They weren't even given human decency. Dalits' oppressed life in Kerala underwent change as a result of the

¹⁷ Ram Sharan Sharma, "The Nature of Indian Feudalism," in *Early Medieval Indian Society: A Study in Feudalisation* (Kolkata: Orient Longman, 2003), pp. 77-118.

unrelenting fight against caste prejudice led by people like Ayyankali, Poykayil Yohannan, Pampadi John Joseph, and their contemporaries.¹⁸

Untouchable Channars led one of the earliest movements against casteism in south Travancore in 1926. Following a directive from the Madras government, the elite Ezhavas began going by the moniker Nadars from 1926. The fights for the right to modest and appropriate clothing were started by this movement. The upper caste individuals were obliged to lift the clothing restriction on Dalit women as a result of the historic movement of the Channar Christian converted women. The Channar Mutiny for the right to cover their upper body was born out of this and grew into a powerful social movement. The Christian missionaries assisted the Channar women in their uprising against caste-based social inequality.

Dalit women led anti caste struggles such as *Kallayum malayum samaram*, a protest against the imposed caste remarks called *Kallayum Malayum* which refers to stone necklace, used by Dalit women for covering their breast. This protest was held in resistance to the caste restrictions that prevented Dalit women from covering their breasts and from donning white clothing on their bodies. They covered their breasts with jewels like stone made necklace (Kallu Mala) and chains. Many Dalit women took part in this rebellion, breaking the stone chains and donning *jumbers* (blouse). The Dalit women of Kerala spearheaded what became regarded as a revolutionary anti-caste campaign. Dalit women took the lead in the fight to provide their kids a formal education. These agitations served as stepping stones in Kerala's history of the anti-caste movement and women's emancipation.

¹⁸ K C Alexander. "Changing Status of Pulaya Harijans of Kerala". *Economic and Political Weekly* 7, no. 3. (1968): 1072.

In Kerala, most of the Dalits have historically been politically affiliated to the Communist movements. They were the strength for the party as laborers and cadres but did not gain political power in the party, which has historically claimed itself as a proletariat's party. Many have argued that Dalits have been used for the party's mobilization as followers. Dalits did not find any position amongst the top leadership till today except in positions that were specifically reserved for them. Dalits are discriminated in the Communist Party and while being burdened with the moral expectation to be in the party at the same time. For long the Communist Party in Kerala has convinced Dalits that they are the only party that has been fighting for their rights as citizens. It could be argued that, the reality is that Dalits have been committed to the party, while Dalit colonies continued to be used as vote bank by the party. Dalits have historically followed the left movement blindly without access to positions of leadership in the well-known "secular and progressive political space".¹⁹

Sharmila Rege has pointed out that sensitive discussions on the intersections of caste and patriarchy have developed in contemporary times. However, the core problems of Brahminical predominance are not addressed by the contemporary political parties. Leftist organisations staged protests against landowners in Kerala, but these conflicts only addressed class interests and neglected caste issues. The reality is that Dalits in Kerala experience cultural estrangement as a result of societal exclusion. The Government implemented certain programmes for the promotion of these marginalized groups but the condition of oppression of Dalits remains the same, and Dalit women continue to be among the lowest sections of the society.²⁰

¹⁹ Achamma John, *Dalit Sthreekalude Samoohika Sampathika Padavi: Oru Padnam*, (Thiruvananthapuram: CDS, 2002), 14.

²⁰ Sharmila Rege, "Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of 'Difference' and Towards a Dalit Feminist Stand-Point Position," *Economic and Political Weekly* 24, no. 10 (1998): pp. 39-46.

Sreedhara Menon has argued that it is uncertain if the caste system can be considered to have entirely died away, but it is true that inter-caste boundaries in Kerala have broken down and caste consciousness is less pronounced in the thoughts of the people of the present generation. Caste, according to him, has moved into new territory. Here, Sreedhara Menon's argument ran contrary to the existing discourses around Kerala's caste system. On the one hand, he argues that caste is a reality in the state of Kerala, although less so in the people's minds. This argument is quite popular and completely negates the experiences of Dalits. Menon's claim about caste is therefore not supported by sociological or historical evidence. What is the benchmark of measurement of caste? This shows the lack of understanding about caste and its practices in an upper caste historian. However, his argument has been widely used to show Kerala society as one that is amongst the most progressive in India. Such an idea of relative castelessness has had such an impact on the people that they argue in its favour, even when they experience and practice caste.²¹

Understanding Politics of Representation and Language

An important aspect of Dalit women's question has been that of representation and language. Academia has particularly been blind to the question of representation amongst Dalits. This study examines representational politics from the perspective of Dalit women. It makes the case that caste and gender are infrequently addressed while discussing Dalit women's difficulties in Kerala.

The question of representation is one of the foundational ones that undergird the objectives of this thesis. As a research endeavour that engages with studies on women and gender, representation remains a political question that one needs to return to

²¹ A. Sreedhara Menon, in *Social and Cultural History of Kerala* (Sterling, 1979), p. 75.

consistently and with persistence. In contemporary times, the issue(s) of identity is inextricably related with that of representation. In the context of India, Dalit, Bahujan, Ambedkarite anti-caste movements are being compelled to visit and revisit the “problem” of reservations or affirmative action, as it is globally understood, and arguments for democratic and proportionate representation have to be repeatedly articulated in newer and more “nuanced” and contextual ways. However, reservation is only one site where the significance of representation as a human right is being debated. Especially with social media emerging as one of the important places where Dalit Bahujan expression, assertion and articulation is taking place with relatively more freedom than anywhere else, one has to return to the questions of representation again and again. For the Dalit movement, the problem does not remain limited to only that of challenging Ssavarna domination and exclusivity across all social, cultural and political fields but also has to self-reflect on questions of gender, sexuality, religious, ideological and regional locations within Dalit communities. Do marginalities of “other” kinds find equal space of articulation and existence within the Dalit movement? What kind of hierarchies and differences fracture and diversify the Dalit communities, in a way challenging the oppressive, unifying, homogenizing and essentializing dominant and Brahminical discourse that seeks to understand and describe the thousands of communities and groups that comprise the Dalit Bahujans of India? The problem of representation for the Dalit movements in India cannot therefore be limited to one of access of resources but also that of self-description, identification, assertion, governance and recognition. Representation then is intimately tied up with the struggle for autonomy across all areas of life and subjectivity.

Stuart Hall, the founding father of Cultural Studies has worked extensively on the concept and practice of representation. Hall argues that in the study of culture, the

theory of representation has taken on a new and significant role. He continues to engage with the significant question of the relationship between culture and meaning and representation. The act of representing something to others involves using language to convey important information or to give them a meaningful impression of the world. The method by which meaning is created and transacted amongst members of a society is fundamentally dependent on representation. It does involve the use of words, symbols, and other visual representations of things. How does the idea of representation link culture, language, and meaning?²²

According to Hall, the work of representation is inter-related with language, which significantly is to be understood as a function of one's subjectivity and subjective relationship to the society that they are a part of. Hall proceeds to explore a number of approaches to representation in his seminal work "The Work of Representation" (1997). This book's introduction poses several queries regarding the connection between language and meaning; whether meaning of "things" pre-exists language and the work of language hence becomes one of mediating a meaning that is already there. Does language therefore have a "reflective" function? Hall also asks whether language is a function of human subjectivities? The question is primarily about the social function of language, in the sense that does language exist only to "express" what the author "intends"? Or is it that work of language is to construct meaning, which may not be seamlessly linked to the intentions of the author or the speaker? The above-mentioned three questions adhere to three approaches to the understanding of representation, the constructionist, semiotic and discursive approaches. The linguist Ferdinand De Saussure and the French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault are responsible for

²² Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon, "Representation, Meaning and Language," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London etc.: Sage, 2013), p. 15.

developing the semiotic and discursive approaches. The first is part of the structuralist frameworks of thought, while the second emerges during the post-structuralist phase of historicization.

The introductory chapter entitled “Representation, Meaning and Language” of Halls book, *The Work of Representation* heavily informs the ways in which this thesis engages with the question of representation. In the section, “Language and representation”, Hall writes about how individuals from the same culture must have a conceptual map that is broadly comparable, and they must understand signs in a language similarly as well. Meanings can only be effectively shared between people in this way. But how can we tell which idea represents what? Or which term best encapsulates each idea? How does one choose the words or images that will convey to another the meaning of their ideas? In the case of visual cues, this may appear to be rather straightforward because a drawing, painting, photograph, or television depiction of a sheep resembles the woolly-coated animal grazing in a field. However, one must constantly remind themselves that a digitised, painted, or sketched representation of a sheep is not exactly the same as a "genuine" sheep. One difference between most photographs and the "actual" sheep is that the latter exists in three dimensions.²³

In this section, Hall points to the complex nature of the relationship between a “concept”, the sheep being the specific instance referred to in Hall’s book. He writes about two kinds of signs; iconic and indexical signs. Through these engagements Hall establishes the “shifting” relationship between signs and meaning.

²³ Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon, “Representation, Meaning and Language,” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London etc.: Sage, 2013), p. 19.

In the third section, Stuart Hall writes about conceptual maps through which transference and reception of meaning takes place. Hence, according to Hall, one approach to conceptualise "culture" is in terms of these shared conceptual frameworks, shared linguistic systems, and the rules that govern the linkages of translation among them. Codes establish the relationships between concepts and signals. Across linguistic and cultural divides, they preserve meaning. They instruct on the appropriate language to employ for each notion. The reverse is also valid. When one hears or reads certain indications, codes indicate which ideas are being discussed. Whilst also arbitrarily setting the links between the conceptual system and the linguistic system, codes allow us to communicate effectively within a culture and allow us to talk and hear intelligibly. They also establish the translatability between concepts and languages, allowing meaning to be transferred from speaker to hearer. This translatability is neither predetermined by the gods or granted by nature. It is the outcome of a number of societal norms.²⁴

For Hall, the work of understanding a culture is intrinsically linked to the study of the relationship between language and representation. Therefore, educating oneself in the language and the codes of representation have a lot to do with becoming a part of a culture. Therefore, being a part of a culture means sharing a similar mental and linguistic universe, understanding how thoughts and concepts are translated into various languages, and understanding how language is used to refer to or reference the outside world. To share these things is to view the world from the perspective of a single conceptual framework and to interpret it using the same linguistic frameworks. This

²⁴ Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon, "Representation, Meaning and Language," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London etc.: Sage, 2013), p. 21.

finding, when applied to all human civilizations, forms the basis of what now is referred to as linguistic or cultural relativism.²⁵

Through this chapter then Hall establishes the ways in which representation can and is constructed through the use of language within a given cultural framework. While languages can be used to signify and represent things that are real, they can also be used to produce imaginary, ideal and fantastical things and beings as well. But the relationship between language and the world as it is before us is in no way simple. It involves the work of mimicking, reflexivity and communication between individuals and slippages including miscommunication and misrepresentation are part of the work of language and representation. Hall adds that concepts emerge in the mind. To have a concept before us would therefore also entail knowing its meaning and significance within a cultural as well as social context. However, concept only comprises the first system of representation. Another system of representation that follows is that of language through which meaning are mediated. The mediation of concepts and their meanings can only be successful or one may say, complete if the codes to unpack the symbols of language are accessible to the subjects concerned. According to Hall therefore, they are the consequence of societal conventions and do not exist in nature. Common "maps of meaning" between people are an essential component of our culture, which we pick up and unconsciously internalise as we integrate into it.²⁶

Halls approach to the politics of representation frames the research questions of this thesis because the fundamental work being undertaken here is to unpack the cultures of representation and interpretation within which violence against Dalit women has been

²⁵ Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon, "Representation, Meaning and Language," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London etc.: Sage, 2013), p. 35.

²⁶ Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon, "Representation, Meaning and Language," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London etc.: Sage, 2013), p. 38.

and continues to be represented in the media today. Representation is always related to the Dalit women's question. The debates on representation of Dalits have been overlooked in the academia. This study deals with politics of representation from the standpoint of Dalit women. Critical interrogation in the politics of representation is mainly concerned with issues of caste and gender. The representation of Dalit women's issues are rarely concerned with caste and gender in Kerala.

According to Hall, language creates the connection between concepts and words in our minds by giving a concept its meaning. It allows us to relate our concepts to the "actual" world of things, people, or events, or even to fictitious worlds of made-up things, people, and events.²⁷ News makers control the ways in which representation in news writing can reach people. The language which they use shapes readers opinions and perceptions about Dalit women. This study tries to examine the multiple acts of collective violence on Dalit women through an analysis of the description and language of news writing, specifically focussing on the representation of violence against Dalit women.

Thus, the study enquires whether discussions on Dalit women comes to the public discourse through the print media as subsumed within the "broader" question of Kerala women. To understand the paradoxes which prevail in Kerala's discourse would be to understand how the Malayalam newspapers represent Dalit women. By "discourse", Invoking Foucault, Hall's definition of discourse states that it is a set of claims that serves as a lexicon for discussing and a means of disseminating information about a particular issue at a certain historical moment. Discourse is all about the language-based

²⁷ Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon, "Representation, Meaning and Language," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London etc.: Sage, 2013), p. 17.

acquisition of knowledge.²⁸ Following Foucault, this study sees the significance of understanding the public language and literature produced to discuss the violence on Dalit women.

According to J. Habermas, the mediaeval representative public sphere, which was a public space directly linked to the actuality of a ruler, had nothing to do with representation in the sense of a bourgeois public sphere, such as the representation of a country or of certain mandates. The prince and estates of the realm can speak "before" the people rather than as or on behalf of the people as long as they still "are" the country and not just serve as its representatives.²⁹ The understanding of public sphere and representation by Habermas is important for critical intervention in the history of the Malayalam newspaper dailies in the colonial period and to interpret the nature of writing of "mainstream" Malayalam newspaper dailies.

The question of print media and the public sphere are often associated with the German social theorist Jurgen Habermas. Habermas argued that the significance of the idea of public sphere "as a discursive space" cannot be underestimated. The public sphere can be any space when it comes to gender. Habermas deconstructed the idea of public sphere which until then was considered an elite space in Europe. In Habermas' view, even a coffee shop where people from different classes were present could be considered a public space. In this sense, Habermas's idea of public sphere is crucial in this study.

²⁸ Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon, "Representation, Meaning and Language," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London etc.: Sage, 2013), p. 44.

²⁹ Jurgen Habermas, Sara Lennox, and Frank Lennox, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)," *New German Critique*, no. 3 (1974): p. 54, <https://doi.org/10.2307/487737>.

“Politics” and “representation,” according to Judith Butler, are contentious terms. In a political process, representation is a word that refers to the search for ways to keep women’s visibility and legitimacy as political subjects alive. Representation can also be defined as a language’s “normative function”, which is believed to expose or misrepresent what is assumed to be true about the category of women. As Butler points out, representation confines women’s subjectivity, which people subsequently interpret as the truth. When women become political subjects, they are more likely to be represented. As a result, Butler claims that when the political process is linked to women, representation becomes politicized. Similar techniques and understandings may be applicable in the realms of gender and caste representation, according to the proposed research.³⁰

The Bridge between Language and Gender

Language is a complex and dynamic system that generates meaning concerning social categories like caste and gender. Rather than being outside of language’s structures, power is interwoven within them. As a result, gender is created by performing activities that meet societal norms. The topic of gender and language was initially raised by linguist Robin Lakoff in his book *Language and Women’s Place*. He asserted that women use linguistic forms that are inferior to men’s when they use tag questions (such as "isn't it?" or "Am I?"), inquiring expressions, or mitigates. This suggests a desire to be recognised or the potential for error.³¹ According to Judith Butler, people identify gender roles and enact themselves and participate in the process of gendering both themselves and others throughout their lives because they play out gender roles from a

³⁰ Judith Butler, “Gender, Sexuality, Performance – Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,” *Judith Butler: Live Theory*, n.d., <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472545688.ch-002>.

³¹ Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Mary Bucholtz, *Language and Woman’s Place: Text and Commentaries* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2004).

spectrum of masculine and feminine traits. This display of gender is known as "performing gender" in the field of gender and language use. In many ways, gender is something people do, not something people are, and people practise it like practising for a role in a play.³²

The Dynamics of Collective Violence

In this section, the thesis engages with the question of collective violence. Why is it necessary to not individuate instances and events of violence but to see and understand these as part of social formations and practices? What is it that makes certain kinds of violence collective and what about collectives can take on the form of violence and violations is a question that this research project is interested in? As Roberta Senechal De La Roche argues that the ultimate objective of a theory of collective violence is to forecast, explain, and describe how it manifests itself in various situations of conflict. Such a theory must address two distinct issues: the reasons why conflicts are resolved through violence (rather than through alternative conflict management techniques) and the reasons why conflicts are resolved collectively (rather than by individuals on their own).³³

Through this thesis, we are questioning what constitutes violence in the realm of representation and what its consequences are. We are trying to establish that certain forms of violence are both symbolic and historical, which is what also invisibilises them as anything that is the norm is then made invisible. De La Roche locates violence in the realm of conflict. If one were to broaden the scope of conflict in the terms of difference,

³² Bergvall, Victoria L., Janet Mueller Bing, and Alice F. Freed. *Rethinking Language and Gender Research: Theory and Practice*. London: Longman, 1996.

³³ Roberta Senechal de la Roche, "Why Is Collective Violence Collective?," *Sociological Theory* 19, No. 2 (July 2001): pp. 126-144, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2751.00133>.

then the question can be further complicated to that of why one of the primary ways in which difference is resolved is through violence, that of erasure, repression, suppression and oppression. This thesis does not take conflict or difference as “pure” or “ahistorical” categories but as those which are determined by historically established norms and practices. De La Roche for instance states that their theory completely disregards subjective or psychological elements, such as participant perceptions, meanings, emotions, and intentions, because it is based on Donald Black's pure sociology. Additionally, it completely lacks teleology—what Black refers to as the super paradigm of sociology, which is the explanation of human behaviour as a means to an end. As a result, De La Roche's theory does not assume, state, or imply that specific motivations, preferences, requirements, functions, objectives, or interests are expressed by collective violence.³⁴

De La Roche makes a significant argument against the need to explain violence through individual intent and behaviour. While locating the problem of violence firmly within the paradigm of sociality, he further raises questions about the relationship between certain forms of society and the nature of social practices and spaces they engender. The question then is also about the relationship between the forms of law and the kinds of society they may emerge from. Similarly, this thesis may extend this question to ask what kinds of social representations are engendered by a given social formation? Or what is the nature of violence that one may expect from a certain kind of society? In such a way, De La Roche argues that the violence of collective violence is in a way an embodiment of the society that it emerges from. He then goes on to write about the collective violence. According to De La Roche,

³⁴ Roberta Senechal de la Roche, “Why Is Collective Violence Collective?,” *Sociological Theory* 19, no. 2 (2001): pp. 126-144, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2751.00133>.

An important factor in the collectivization of violence is fervent partisanship. When (2) parties band together and (3) third parties support one side over the other, strong partisanship results. On the other hand, partisan support occurs when at least one adversary has high status and when third parties are close to one side while being socially distant from the other. Their sense of camaraderie with one another is heightened by the third parties' familiarity, cultural homogeneity, and interdependence on each side nature of violence.³⁵

With this De La Roche is able to establish a number of important factors in the consideration of collective violence. This involves not just the identification of two parties or groups in conflict with each other but the significance of a third party that is socially closer to one party. This is further complicated if between the two conflicting parties, one wields more social power than the other and is in a position to be oppressive. According to De La Roche, these are the conditions within which collective violence ferments and eventually takes place. He also suggests that the partisanship between groups must be strong enough for the conditions of violence to emerge in a “tangible” form. This is something that is observable in the social circumstances of India’s caste society where conflicts and violence between two groups emerges from strong social and historical patterns of oppression of one group and by another group. All historical violence between different groups is characterized by factors of caste, religion and gender and are further complicated by the intersections between them. Here, De La Roche takes the historical example of lynching. She argues that lynching appears everywhere with a recognisable partisan pattern. The pattern of partisanship conducive to lynching is profoundly unequal, in contrast to the bilateral distribution of

³⁵ Roberta Senechal de la Roche, “Why Is Collective Violence Collective?,” *Sociological Theory* 19, no. 2 (2001): pp. 126-144, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2751.00133>.

partisanship that characterises, say, feuding or combat. The offended party typically draws a lot of political support, whereas the alleged offender draws little to no support: Strong partisanship for the accused victim and weak partisanship for the alleged offender work together to justify lynching. The social geometry of each conflict clarifies whether there is a strong and unequal partisan pattern, which clarifies the collectivization of violence in each instance.³⁶

De La Roche therefore argues that conditions of lynching involve a radical inequality between two conflicting partisanships where power and the lack of it underscores the act of offence and that of being offended itself. The capacity and the right to be offended then lies squarely with the offender, who is in a position of privilege. On the other hand, the party with relatively less power is somehow consistently placed in a position that is criminalized in such a way that they are susceptible to offend the privileged by the slightest act. The definition of what constitutes an offence then rests radically in the hands of the more powerful.

De La Roche goes on to talk about two kinds of lynchings, the classic lynching and the communal lynching. According to him in all communities and throughout history, there have been two main lynching scenarios: the conventional lynching and the communal lynching. In the first, individuals from a well-established group or community discipline an outsider or recent immigrant. In the first, group or community members discipline an insider. The former usually happens after a single act of misconduct, but the later usually happens after several offences committed over time by the same

³⁶ Roberta Senechal de la Roche, "Why Is Collective Violence Collective?," *Sociological Theory* 19, no. 2 (2001): pp. 126-144, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2751.00133>.

person. However, although having different beginnings, both traditional and collective lynchings ultimately develop in the same place and manner in social space.³⁷

From De La Roche's theorization then it is clear that social formations, inherent hierarchies and oppression determine the logic of collective violence. This thesis engages with the question of collective violence both at the symbolic and the real level. Lynchings are only one mode through which marginalized and historically oppressed communities in India are subjected to collective violence. Collective violence can also be symbolic in the way that communities are misrepresented, stereotyped and erased from the realm of representation. This thesis in particular deals with the question of newspapers and representation of Dalit women and the nature of symbolic violence and erasure that they are subjected to. The question of collective violence is also something that must be addressed at the level of the representation. De La Roche concludes that both violent and nonviolent conflict are not inherently collective or violent in nature. In reality, individual violence predominates over collective violence in collective conflict. Thus, a theory of lynching or other types of riots must account for both the violent nature and the collective nature of the behaviour. Roche's earlier theoretical work looks at the factors that lead to violent collective social control, including the opponents' distance from one another in terms of relationships, cultures, and other factors.³⁸

This thesis adds to De La Roche's formulation of the third party who is socially closer to the oppressor group that if mediums of representation are socially and materially owned by the dominant group, then they are likely to further collective violence through

³⁷ Roberta Senechal de la Roche, "Why Is Collective Violence Collective?," *Sociological Theory* 19, no. 2 (2001): pp. 126-144, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2751.00133>.

³⁸ Roberta Senechal de la Roche, "Why Is Collective Violence Collective?," *Sociological Theory* 19, no. 2 (2001): pp. 126-144, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2751.00133>.

symbolic means. Hence, this thesis harps on the importance of questioning given representations, where they emerge from and what they erase in the process of naming and describing the “other”.

Violence against Dalit women is also a violation of human rights. Many rape and molestation cases are reported; most of the victims in such incidents are Dalit women or girls and the assailants are upper caste men. According to Sharmila Rege, it is difficult to comprehend the problem of violence against women since it cannot be explicitly identified as a "caste" or a "gender" issue. Instead, they must be examined in the context of their relationship with one another.³⁹ Violence reproduces the experience of society which is based on similar ideologies. Political action and institutionalised ideology can form as collective violence.⁴⁰ Collective violence can be of various forms. This research is identifying how the collective violence has taken place on Dalit women from the society and is posing the question: how and why do people get involved collectively in attacking Dalit women in Kerala?

Any collective assault, characterised by premeditated and intense emotional rage directed against Dalit women due to their gender as well as lower caste and class position, is categorised as group/gang violence. The category of group/gang violence due to its collective dimension does not take away from the fact that violence against Dalit women is of a specific kind, since Dalit women have been forced to undergo caste-class and gender-based discrimination and violence over generations.⁴¹ The collective

³⁹ Sharmila Rege, “The Hegemonic Appropriation of Sexuality: The Case of the Lavani Performers of Maharashtra,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 29, no. 1-2 (1995): pp. 35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0069966795029001003>.

⁴⁰ Allen Feldmann, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁴¹ Aloysius Irudayam, Jayshree P. Mangubhai, and Joel G. Lee, *Dalit Women Speak out: Caste, Class and Gender Violence in India* (New Dehli: Zubaan, 2014).

violence against Dalit women form a culture of violence in society and it produces stereotypical notions about Dalit women's status in society.

This research identifies how collective violence has taken place on Dalit women and poses the question: how and why do people get involved collectively in attacking Dalit women in Kerala? Collective violence can be in various forms, therefore through an understanding of the nature of the violence which is imposed on Dalit women in Kerala, this thesis questions the secular social organisation and civil society of Kerala. The study also look at how language emerges as an instrument of collective violence. Particularly focusing on the representation of violence against Dalit women in Kerala through news writing, the study try to examine the multiple acts of collective violence, also through description and language about Dalit women and their positioning in Kerala's public sphere.

Collective violence in this study as an act which produces a collective consciousness against Dalit women. Thinking about history and violence is a key objective of this research which makes the connection between gender and caste contextually for critiquing the power relations of caste and gender. However, caste and gender systematically function on the basis of power relations and finally come across as violence. Violence can be unspeakable by the individual who has gone through violence. Everyone cannot choose to speak about it or explain the act which is a traumatic experience in addition to the existing violence. Like Hannah Arendt argues that violent experiences draw a boundary of silence which show the intensity of that experience.⁴² Thus violence lies between "speakability" and "unspeakability". One can opt to speak about violence and one can keep silence about it the way in which violence

⁴² Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York, : Harcourt, 1969).

mutes and creates silence. The “unspeakability” becomes political when the person refuses to speak about it openly. But when someone openly speaks about experiences of violence and reveals its intensity to the people then it creates a serious occasion for a public dialogue on their experience. Here, we see how media can play a vital role in bringing the discussion on such experiences.

Thus the study enquires in to whether discussions on Dalit women comes to the public discourse through the print media as subsumed within the broader category of Kerala women. Understanding the paradoxes which prevails in Kerala discourse would require interpreting how the Malayalam newspapers represent Dalit women.

Patriarchy: A form of Oppression

Patriarchy has been understood as displaying masculine power against women. The intersectional feminism recognise the patriarchy and its oppressive forms where it practises and produces inequality in different ways. According to Gail Omvedt, the term "patriarchy" is being used more frequently to characterise a form of exploitation that operates almost as much within the working class and other oppressed groups as it does between them and their ruling class exploiters. This exploitation cannot be fully explained in terms of rigorously understood economics.⁴³

There is a much wider understanding on gender and caste, particularly on the question of structural violence against Dalit women by the upper caste and men from other communities as well. Very interestingly, there is a transition towards Ambedkarite ideology in studies and writings against Brahminical patriarchy. The demand to look at the intersection of caste and gender has been raised by Ambedkarite organisations and

⁴³ Gail Omvedt, ““Patriarchy:” The Analysis of Women's Oppression,” *Insurgent Sociologist* 13, no. 3 (1986): pp. 30-50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/089692058601300305>.

ideology, and others in the political spectrum are now compelled to look at it. But there is not much clarity of criticism on Brahminical patriarchy which is seen as contradiction to Ambedkar's criticism. The notion remains that Brahminical patriarchy can only be practiced by Brahmin men. This notion was taken seriously by non-Brahmin upper caste men, lower caste men and the upper caste women, thereby refusing to acknowledge how they themselves have internalised it. This irony of not understanding Brahminical patriarchy and its practise creates a heteromorphic power in the political struggles. This creates the issue of those who are oppressed by Brahminical patriarchy, refusing to acknowledge the ways in which they themselves can be oppressive. Criticisms of Brahminical patriarchy against those in the anti-caste and progressive movements often leads to reactionary fears about damages to the solidarity of political struggle. These criticisms are breaking the attempts to form multiple fronts of resistance.

Feminine Subjectivity as Embodied Performance

According to Chris Weeden, subjectivity as it appears in feminist theory refers to the individual's conscious thoughts and feelings, her sense of self, as well as in psychoanalytic and post-structuralist contexts. The "subject" is variously described in the western philosophical tradition as "the thinking and feeling entity," the mind, the ego, and the conscious self, all of which are relevant in feminist arguments. It includes hidden intentions, wishes, and wants. The terms "experience" and "identification" in addition to "subject" and "subjectivity", are frequently used in feminist discourse. Perspectives on the subject that are based on personal experience contend that a

woman's interaction with and observation of the outside world shapes her sense of self. The term "identity" refers to a woman's conscious self-perception.⁴⁴

The question of whether femaleness and femininity are fundamental, static traits inherent in the female body, psyche, or experience or whether they are historically and socially distinct has long dominated disputes over feminist subjectivity. While critiquing heterosexism, Judith Butler made an effort to analyse how bodies are sexified and manifested. Butler investigates the ways that social reality is constantly created as an illusion through language, gesture, and all kinds of symbolic social signs, working from the premise that bodies only appear, only endure, and only live within the productive constraints of certain highly gendered regulatory schemas. Butler then continues to examine how linguistic constructions shape our reality in general by influencing the speech acts we use on a daily basis. She describes that while one "incorporates" that reality through the performative act of speaking by enacting it with their bodies (a step removed from what Lacan refers to as "the Real"), that "reality" nonetheless remains a social construction; one endlessly cites the norms and ideologies of the social world around us. By embodying such fictions in their acts while acting out the conventions of reality, one provides the impression that these made-up conventions are necessary and natural. Conventions are somehow made "real" by people putting them into action—after all, they have "real" ramifications for people—but they are still artificial. Butler is particularly interested in "gender acts" that affect a person's existence and even their physical self materially. One is not merely a body; rather, one does one's

⁴⁴ Chris Weedon, "Subjects," in *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory*, ed. Mary Eagleton (Malden (MA): Blackwell, 2006), p. 112.

body in a very important way, and one does it differently from one's contemporaries as well as from one's embodied ancestors and successor.⁴⁵

According to Butler, gender is performative since it is constructed by its own behaviour rather than being essential or physiologically established. The subject of gender discourse acquires gendered subjectivity through techniques of repetitional performance. Butler argues that gender identity is not hidden behind the displays of gender, but rather that it is performatively formed by the very manifestations that are thought to be its results. Instead of being viewed as a singular or intentional act, this performativity must be understood as a reiterative and citational practise by which speech generates the effects it identifies.

The Subjects in Feminist Theory

Social feminists claim, class as the fundamental dimension of patriarchal forms of tyranny and subjugation. Social Feminism concludes that, in contemporary capitalist states, contracts between seemingly free individuals, such as employees and employers, represent the connections between capital and labour – by conceptualising historical events as directly influenced by a series of modes of production administered by explicit forms of class relations. Ideology, which is ingrained in social and cultural activities and forms of subjectivities, including gender, is responsible for securing these production relations. Women's oppression by capitalist patriarchy was viewed by early second-wave socialist feminists as a class oppression. "False consciousness", according to Marx, is a result of capitalist ideology that inhibits the working class from seeing and

⁴⁵ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 272.

questioning the exploitative nature of capitalism social relations. False consciousness was apparently viewed as a result of patriarchal social relations in feminist articulations.

Euro Centric Subject and the third World

Feminists from the Third World reject the dominance of western intellectual traditions because they believe that they are Eurocentric in their presumptions. Liberal and radical feminisms have come in for criticism for their assumptions about women, "the subject," and women's subjectivity as well as their claims that they speak for all women. In its articulations, Western philosophy entails a rejection of the specificity of the many positions of women in the third world, a reading of them through a kind of Western gaze that victimises and denies them agency, and an othering that silences them. Some third-world women have found Post-Structuralist theory to be a more effective analytical tool than other Western models, thanks to terms like "socially created" and "historically specific" subject. However, the liberal humanist topic remains crucial in the fight for human rights.

Feminist subjectivity has been discussed during the second wave of feminism in its right sense. Subjectivity was associated with western white women's struggle for liberation in early writings on feminism. In *A room of one's own* for instance, Virginia Woolf discusses an important point that women need their own private space, which she calls "a room of one's own".⁴⁶ It was celebrated as a revolutionary argument during that time. But it took years to understand the specificity of the feminism that this writing was talking about. The subjects of this thought defined women who had the privilege of owning a space to write/demand for a private space, especially those who belong to

⁴⁶ Virginia Woolf and Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own ; and, Three Guineas* (London: Penguin Classics, 2019).

a particular class. However, this writing had introduced an important discussion on women's space in public sphere, particularly in the academia.

The political subjectivity of Dalit women in the feminist movements and the Dalit movements have been attacked by biased interventions. The priority has been given to the larger interest of these movements, thereby erasing the question of caste and gender respectively. The idea of gender and caste has been spoken separately here. This notion of protecting and being protected (patriarchal notions/masculinity) is the ideal form of caste and Brahminical patriarchy.

Politics of identity and politics of difference

Identity and difference are the key debates of feminism at this point of time. Feminist writings are speaking politically about identity politics and the politics of difference such as race, ethnicity, sexualities, religion, regionalities etc. Caste has been intentionally avoided from these themes in many academic discussions and feminist writings globally and specifically in India. Indian feminists who have got the opportunity to publish and work internationally have not spoken about caste for years; instead they went into the deep essentialist analysis of their self. This limited the theorisation of caste and gender for a particular time. However, upper caste women academics who have written about caste and gender have done so with particular focus on sexual violence on Dalit women.

Subjectivity and politics of difference is often discussed in academic intellectual debates in the language of postmodern theory. The subjectivity of Dalits is one of the intact debate in it, however the caste question have been the central theme of such debates and says that it addresses the caste question in general which is the core of Dalit women question. Dalit politics has been imprisoned in such arguments and this situation

creates the complete silence on the question of gender within Dalit politics. Such politics makes a hopeless journey and claim towards equality.

Feminist Politics and Difference

Contemporary feminist politics has been raising the question of difference and questioning the idea of women as a homogenous category across the world. This has made an impact on the conventional ideas of feminist politics, especially the idea that shared women's experiences can unite women and their struggles. This ideology which was the central question of second wave feminism restricts the opportunities to engage with questions of difference among women. It has focused on sisterhood and this politics acknowledges sexual sameness that women share which also ignores other differences among women and their experiences. Women's liberation movement in the West was exclusively determined by the white women's agenda that was organised by elite educated white women. This movement was perpetuated as the first women's movement and claimed to represent all the women in the world. This led to the people in the world to believe this movement as the first and foremost feminist initiative which negates all other efforts and struggles by the women apart from the west. The idea of womanhood as a whole is rooted in women's experience as oppressed, one which believes that all the women have experienced oppression but this doesn't allow the questions on how these oppressed experiences are different and it cannot be the same with every woman and their cultural identities. Moreover, it does not address the question of how women can also be oppressors.

Feminism has arisen as a philosophy among academic women in the west. However, in the recent past, feminist academics realized the importance of gathering oral histories and lived experience from all categories of women, including the ordinary and invisible,

as well as those who were left out of official record. For feminist historians studying women's autobiographical writing, whether unpublished diaries or published memoirs, the connection between the writing subject and the reading subject is always a crucial topic for discussion. This may entail refuting or opposing other accounts of the author's actions, goals, or reputation. Autobiography is always a purposeful exercise of rewriting and reassessing the past as it has passed. The affinity that feminists have for autobiographies and personal narratives has been a reflection of the significance of women's life cycles as well as class, caste, gender, and race.

Any discussion of a woman's life cycle must take into account both continuity and change over time and space. It also necessitates an accurate assessment of how bodies and biological functions are endowed with socio-political significance. Finally, it's critical to consider the emotional and mental effects of the culturally marked body.

Feminist Philosophies

The task of organising and classifying diverse feminist schools of philosophy is so complicated that it deserves its own investigation. It's really a philosophical topic in and of itself, dealing with issues of indexation and canonization in a large and diverse tradition. *The Second Sex* (1953), by Simone de Beauvoir, is considered a seminal text in feminist philosophy.⁴⁷ The phenomenological method of Beauvoir emphasises the necessity of thinking through existence and experience. She also emphasised the concept of difference's structural worth and structurally discriminating force. Rosie Braidotti writes that, Beauvoir argues that the dialectics of dominance, which elevates the Self or the Same to the status of the sovereign subject and categorizes the other(s) in a hierarchically inferior category, must be overcome in a way that is influenced by

⁴⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Vintage Classic, 2015).

Hegel. A link of solidarity between her and all other women is proposed by Beauvoir as an essential condition for overthrowing this dialectical system, laying the conceptual groundwork for the feminist conception of sisterhood.⁴⁸

According to Beauvoir, the category of otherness is necessary for the creation of the self as a self since the self needs otherness in order to define itself as a subject. Man, who plays the role of the Self, continuously defines woman as the Other for Beauvoir. She argues that transcendence and immanence interact in an unpredictably complex way throughout human existence, but that men have been given the chance to express transcendence through projects while women have been forced to lead repetitive, uninspired lives of immanence.

The fundamental tenet of feminist theories is that all theories regarding women and gender must be evaluated in the context of actual experiences. This dedication to the politics of experience has its roots in Marxist epistemology and extends back to the 1960s. It asserts that real-life women's testimony must be taken seriously and that the most reliable gauge of women's status is how they live their lives.

Adrienne Rich seeks to replace the fundamental category of experience with a more complex framework of analysis that emphasises variety and different sources of power. By highlighting the differences between women, particularly in terms of ethnicity and sexual orientation, she achieves this. Insofar as it assesses the distribution of power in terms of the variety and richness of the interactions that produce it, the politics of location is a positive approach to the subjectivity question. The phrase "politics of location" therefore alludes to a process of developing consciousness that calls for a political awakening and, as a result, outside aid. The foundation of politics of places is

⁴⁸ Rosi Braidotti, "Feminist Philosophies," in *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory*, ed. Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 197.

a critical, genealogical self-narrative that serves as a map of power. They are externally directed and relational. Therefore, embodied accounts enlighten and alter our understanding of who we are and how the world works. White women are thereby made aware of the limitations of our contexts, facts, and discourses by the texts and experiences of black women. Feminist knowledge is a process that involves interaction and brings forth parts of human existence, particularly our own relationship to power.⁴⁹

Insofar as it examines the workings of power in terms of the richness and plurality of the relationships that form it, the politics of locations is an affirmative approach to the topic of subjectivity. Feminist theory has rejected dualistic patterns of thought in order to achieve this. Feminist knowledge becomes an interactive process that brings out aspects of human existence, particularly women's involvement with power; it transforms women from the familiar, intimate, known, and casts an external light on it; it articulates on multiple and potentially contradictory locations and differences among women, but also within different women to account for them; it rejects dualistic modes of thought and becomes inclusive towards diverse voices, as Braidotti argues that feminist philosophy, in my opinion, is the process of connecting matters of personal gender identification to concerns about political subjectivity, the creation of knowledge, diversity, alternative subjectivities, and epistemic legitimacy.⁵⁰

The practise of institutional philosophy, according to Feminist Empiricism, unintentionally expresses men's interests, desires, and expectations. As a result, it attempts to raise awareness of the underrepresentation of women in research, teaching, policymaking, and data and information dissemination at all levels. Feminist

⁴⁹ Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, in *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. 197.

⁵⁰ Rosi Braidotti, "Feminist Philosophies," in *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory*, ed. Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 197.

empiricists consider how feminist theories can effectively guide empirical research as well as how to enhance scientific methods in light of scientific sex bias.

The endeavour to reconcile the politics of location with an effective scientific technique is known as stand point feminist theory. It represents the importance of starting from the perspectives of those who have traditionally been excluded from the process of knowledge production. Investigating the lived experiences of women and others who have traditionally been excluded from the institutions that generate and classify social knowledge. The importance of a naturalistic view of knowledge is emphasised in standpoint theories. as Spivak states that the critic of essentialism is implicit in standpoint gender theory. The exclusive focus is on themes of diversity and the distinctions amongst women. This method tends to stress variations among women in terms of class, colour and ethnicity, sexual orientation, but also age, thereby focusing in particular on the needs and ambitions of the next generation. By combining gender issues with a critique of the Eurocentric bias in science, this approach questions the notion that science and scientific knowledge can be really global.⁵¹ Stand Point Feminist theory encompasses a wide range of approaches, all of which share a critique of empirically based theory of gender equity. Difference is confronted as a positive value rather than as a sign of inferiority or oppression on these grounds. The majority of feminist philosophers are dubious of “female” or “feminine” methods of knowing. Such a gendered perspective emphasizes upon the contributions that women and other socially marginalised groups can make to the generation of scientific knowledge.

A criticism of essentialism among those who assert fixed, deterministic identities results from postmodern feminists' belief that there is no way out of the complex

⁵¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 2014).

structure of our own history and language, that the voices of the oppressed, whether women, blacks, or people of colour, are not pure or authentic, and that there is no easily accessible, purified, or true voice of the oppressed. Because they imply subject positions that are not mediated by language or representation, purity claims are inherently problematic. Identity politics are ideologically opposed to feminist postmodernist perspectives. Postmodern feminism casts doubt on concepts such as universality, necessity, objectivity, essence, and foundations, while recognising concepts such as localization, partiality, contingency, instability, uncertainty, and ambiguity.

Intersectionality: A Tool for Understanding the Difference

The analysis of caste and gender categories, in general and in particular, must take intersectionality into account. Intersectionality examines the connections between the socially constructed categories as well as the inequality that exists between various social groups. As a result, this study also employs intersectional analysis to comprehend how violence functions in a given culture's intersections and the attitudes and concerns that the general public has about that society. Understanding the various power structures and how they operate in terms of gender and caste requires a thorough understanding of the intersections within the community. Without taking into account the theoretical notion of intersectionality, intersections between socio-cultural categorizations cannot be articulated. A major addition to social theory, according to Mc Call, is made by feminists who criticise intersectionality.⁵² It can be argued that feminist understanding without a proper analysis of intersectional identities fails to understand the social category in particular. The feminist analyses of social groups

⁵² Leslie McCall, "The Complexity of Intersectionality," *Signs* 30, no. 3 (March 1, 2005): pp. 1771-1800.

and the dynamics of the intersections make the validation in the argument and it forms the subject which questions the hegemony of the particular social group.

Kimberley Williams Crenshaw, a black feminist researcher, coined the word “intersectionality”. Intersectionality is an analytical framework for determining how distinct aspects of a person’s social and political identities interact to cause disadvantage and advantage in various forms. It also shows how society’s interwoven power networks influence society’s most vulnerable citizens. These variables include gender, caste, sex, colour, class, sexuality, religion, handicap, and physical appearance. Intersectionality is a term that describes a complicated interplay between race, gender, and other institutions that cooperate to oppress while granting privileges. Crenshaw was a vocal opponent of mainstream liberalism at the time, which sought to level the playing field by looking beyond race, gender, and sexuality to enable all people to succeed. Crenshaw illustrates the idea with the help of the following analogy, which makes use of a crossroads or traffic intersection: Consider using an intersection with four lanes of moving traffic as an example. Discrimination is like traffic at a crossroads; it might move one way or another. If a collision takes place in an intersection, cars travelling in any number of directions, and occasionally in all of them, may be to blame. Similarly, if a Black woman is injured at an intersection, her harm could be the result of sex or racial discrimination. Reconstructing an accident, however, is not always easy: It can be difficult to determine which motorist caused damage when skid marks and injuries both appear to have occurred at the same time.⁵³

⁵³ Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics [1989],” *Feminist Legal Theory*, 2018, pp. 57-80, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429500480-5>.

The idea of simultaneity, which is defined as the simultaneous influences of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation on an individual's life and their resistance to oppression, is similarly related to the term in historical and theoretical contexts. When Crenshaw coined the phrase "intersectionality" in 1989, it quickly gained popularity because it was able to capture in one word the simultaneous experience of the various oppressions that Black women endured. However, the idea was not wholly original. Since the abolition of slavery, Black women have used a variety of descriptive phrases to eloquently convey the intertwining oppressions of race, class, and gender, including "simultaneous oppressions," "double peril," and "triple hazard."

Crenshaw contends that feminist theory and politics that claim to reflect women's experiences and aspirations do not include or speak to Black women by contrasting Bell Hooks' experience with the white suffrage movement with Black women's experience with modern feminism. Since the theory of intersectionality gained traction, a slew of feminist scholars has arisen with historical evidence to back it up. The theory of intersectionality aims to bring to light dynamics that feminist thought and movements have frequently overlooked. First-wave feminism, which mainly aimed to achieve political equality between white men and white women, typically overlooked racial discrimination. Early women's rights movements usually focused on the membership, conflicts, and interests of white women. Right after the term "intersectionality" was coined in the late 1980s, third-wave feminism appeared by addressing the exclusion of race, class, sexual orientation, and gender identity in early feminist movements, tried to confront political and social inequalities. These challenges were overlooked by early social justice movements, and intersectionality recognises them. In order to understand the depths of inequality and the connections between them, many contemporary academics have argued that intersectionality is crucial. Intersectional feminism

prioritises the voices of those who are subject to concurrent, overlapping kinds of oppression in every situation. Using an intersectional lens also entails being aware of the historical context of a problem. Fundamental imbalances have developed as a result of long histories of violence and systemic discrimination, which disadvantage some people right away. Inequities including racism, sexism, caste systems, and poverty combine to deprive people of their rights and opportunities, with negative long-term effects. Feminism becomes really inclusive when intersectionality is incorporated, allowing women of many races, socioeconomic statuses, faiths, identities, and orientations to have their views heard.

Bell Hooks, the renowned intersectional feminist, was a powerful voice in academic and cultural circles, and her writings changed viewpoints on race, capitalism, and gender intersections. When politically aware white feminists downplay black women's sexism, it shows how successfully sexist-racist propaganda has persuaded the American people to view black women as beings with little intrinsic value. The white public has long viewed black women as sexually permissive, ready and prepared to be sexually assaulted by any guy, black or white, as Bell Hooks writes,

The slave system is where the idea that all black women are loose, immoral, and sexually depraved first emerged. By claiming that enslaved black women initiated sexual connections with white men, white women and black men were able to defend the sexual exploitation of these women. Such reasoning gave rise to the sexist caricature of black women as sexual savages and the idea that an animal cannot be raped.⁵⁴

Black women were sexually exploited during slavery, which resulted in the devaluation of black womanhood, which hasn't changed in a hundred years. The morale of black

⁵⁴ bell hooks, in *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 52.

people was harmed by sexual exploitation of black women. They believed that unless they could eliminate negative stereotypes about black women, they would never be able to improve the race as a whole. Whether married or single, a kid or a woman, white male rapists were likely to target black women. The systematic devaluation of black womanhood resulted in the devaluation of any endeavour undertaken by black women. By emphasising their commitment to motherhood, many black women attempted to divert attention away from their sexuality. All of the myths and stereotypes that are used to describe black women have their roots in derogatory anti-woman mythology, but they nevertheless form the basis for the majority of critical analysis into the characteristics of black femininity.

The parasitic dependence on the man that is required of females and encouraged in patriarchal society has not been available to most of the black women. Slavery compelled African women to give up any previous reliance on the male figure and pushed them to fight for their own survival. Under slavery, the social equality that characterized black sex role patterns in the workplace did not allow for black women to be inactive.

Chapterisation

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter framed to provide the theoretical understanding of a wide areas of the Gender Studies such as Gender and Caste, Intersecting forms of Patriarchy and oppression, Language and Representation, Feminist Subjects and philosophies and Intersectional feminist approach. The contextual understanding will help to understand the study and its significance.

The second chapter discusses how Dalit women are placed politically and culturally in Kerala's public sphere. This chapter is trying to analyse the location of Dalit women in

Kerala society. It looks in to the historical and contemporary scenario of Kerala to understand where Dalits women have been placed. The chapter begins with the argument that how Dalit women are different from other women and interrogates the public notions about Dalit women. This chapter is intervening in to the history of Dalit movements in general and Dalit women's movements in particular. Through an understanding of women's movements in Kerala, one may observe the pre-existing arguments based on homogenous womanhood in mainstream women's organizations and the ignorance of difference. This chapter has brought the discussion on Dalit women's participation in the political system. This chapter focuses on the hierarchical relations which convert difference into violence against Dalit women in Kerala. And discussing about stereotypes through analysis of the lived experiences of Dalit women in Kerala with understanding from a Dalit women's stand point could analyse how Dalit women's presence was kept invisible in Kerala society.

In the third chapter, the researcher analyses the political economy of the Malayalam print media. This research specifically intervenes into the history of newspaper industry in Kerala and enquire in to the role of sensitising Dalit issues through news writing. This chapter will enquire how important newspapers are in shaping the Kerala public sphere. An understanding of news reports will focus on the language of news writing on Dalits. In Kerala, the print media includes three categories, owned by religious groups, political parties and corporate groups. The chapter enquires the history of print making and its politics as well. As Robin Jeffry argues, in India there is near total absence of Dalits from Indian print media.⁵⁵ The reality can be re-presented by a media producer to construct a text which creates popularity. Hence, the chapter critically

⁵⁵ Robin Jeffry, "[Not] Being There: Dalits and India's Newspapers," in *South Asia*, 2nd ed., vol. 21, n.d., pp. 223-225.

analyse the history of Newspaper and the print culture in Kerala to understand the ownership and the cultural capital of the communities as well.

Chapter four will be a detailed analysis on the collective violence against Dalit women and how it has been discussed in Malayalam newspapers. This chapter is looking at the news coverage on selected four cases of caste and gender violence which happened between 2002 to 2009. This chapter will critically analyse the politics of representation through language and its meaning. The chapter argues how violence collectively acts on Dalit women and is brought to the public sphere. The four selected cases offer a feminist enquiry that is self-reflexive to the Gender Studies and Dalit studies as well,

The fifth chapter would be the conclusion of the dissertation. This chapter will provide the observations of each chapter and the analysis. The chapter will be looking at how the study offers a future possibility for addressing and ending Caste and Gender-based violence and discrimination against Dalit Women.

Chapter 2

Caste and Gender: Feminist Politics and Dalit Women Question in Kerala

This chapter questions the idea of womanhood as homogenous and interrogates how Dalit (untouchable communities) women have historically been placed in the women's movements and political sphere. It also discusses the emergent stand point of Dalit women in Kerala. This chapter will then analyse the history of women's movements in Kerala. Dalit women are confronted with problems of two kinds in the existing caste patriarchal social, political and cultural system; one from the society at large, which is the external milieu and the other from the community itself which is the internal milieu. Thus, caste and gender discrimination simultaneously affect Dalit women. Dalit women suffer from the inter-connections and variations of caste, gender, class and cultural oppression at all levels. They are the victims of the process, systems and institutions of patriarchy and caste and they remain among the lowest of the social segments.

In Kerala, Dalit women are the foremost victims of caste system. The social situation and condition of Kerala Dalit women can be understood on studying the social history in general and the caste history in specific of the state. Dalit and tribal women are the most exploited categories among women. A significant difference among them is that Dalit women have gradually become part of the mainstream societal life more than tribal women where they face caste in their everyday life. Historically and religiously, Dalits had a separate identity of their own. They were not part of the Hindu religion, but after the formation of caste-based socio-political institutions and other establishments, they were brought under the fold of Hinduism.

Kerala women's experience frames this chapter. In order to comprehend how Dalit women express their decline from the idea of womanhood based solely on gender, this study examines their works. According to Lovely Stephan caste and gender are the two main determinants of an individual's position in Keralan society. These things are necessary for having access to wealth, knowledge, and power. The same two criteria also serve as the foundation for responses to issues and their analysis.¹ Her understanding on caste and gender is from the stand point of a Dalit woman, where she argues that casteism determines the position of an individual in society. She also questions the imagined progressive Kerala which is known to be secular in the public domain.

The tendencies of discussing gender and caste separately are very common in feminist epistemological concerns in India. Issues of Dalit women have been isolated from feminist academic discussions for a long time. As Rege has argued, "a large part of feminist discourse of experience has been an autobiography of the upper caste women, her conflict with tradition and her desire to be modern."² The idea of liberation which is discussed widely in feminist discourses is closer to western feminist thought. Rege has argued that the experiences of upper caste women are constituted by their struggle with religion, and their efforts to leave their tradition for modernity. The upper caste women's experiences are widely accepted as that constituting the Indian women's experience as a whole. It could be argued that upper caste women have deliberately generalised their experience to the effect of marginalising the Dalit women's question from discussion in mainstream feminist discourse.

¹ Lovely Stephan et al., "The Issues of Self Liberation," in *The Oxford India Anthology of Malayalam Dalit Writing*, ed. M Dasan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 285.

² Sharmila Rege, "Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of Difference and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position," *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, no. 44 (October 31, 1998): p. 0012-9976, <https://doi.org/ISSN> (Online) - 2349-8846.

Gopal Guru argues that in the debate on Dalit women, the problem of representing Dalit women has repeatedly surfaced, both in terms of theory and politics. Dalit women defend their right to speak differently by citing both internal patriarchal dominance within Dalits and external non-Dalit factors that homogenise the topic of Dalit women.³ According to Sharmila Rege, the category of "woman" was created to reflect the oppression that all women experience as a result of being women.⁴ This chapter takes in to consideration both Guru and Rege to complicate the pre-existing category of womanhood that has been historically constructed by patriarchal notions in the state of Kerala. The centering of the Dalit women's standpoint drives the critique in this chapter.

Dalits generally, and Dalit women specifically do not enjoy social equality and represent the most backward sections in India. Rekha Raj says,

In the first decades of the 20th century, upper caste women pointed out that in a patriarchal society, every space sanctioned to men is linked to power, and women's life is confined within the realm of domesticity. Even as they were subject to gendered oppression, because of their high caste status, they could exercise limited rights. This is what made the upper caste women more powerful than Dalit men.⁵

Upper caste women and Dalit women do not experience gender in the same way. Dalit women's life has been historically associated with power relations in the society. Chantal Mouffe says, an individual can be fixed into a multiplicity of social relations.

³ Gopal Guru, "Dalit Women Talk Differently," *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, no. 41/42 (October 14, 1995): pp. 2548-2550.

⁴ Rege, Dalit Women, 0012-9976

⁵ Rekha Raj, "Dalit Women as Political Agents: A Kerala Experience," *Economic and Political Weekly* 48, no. 18 (May 4, 2013): p. 60.

This would mean that an individual can be dominant in one relation while subordinate in another. This nature of power relations can be seen in the social relations between upper caste women and Dalit women and between Dalit men and Dalit women as well.⁶

Dalit women's history is based on social traditions of caste and patriarchy. Lovely Stephen argues in her essay "The Issues of Self Liberation",

A situation exists now in which there is no recognition of the Dalit women's right to think for herself, organise herself, and liberate her. Dalit women have always been in the forefront of struggles for their own and public causes but there is no mention of them in the history of any social or women's movement. Dalit women do not even seem to have the status of a woman. She is forever dominated by others. In short, in all areas Dalit women appear to have been kept far away from any position of power.⁷

She then raises the central question of how Dalit women have been placed in the movements and how their voices have been side-lined. The history of Dalit movements and debates on caste brought more contradictions on what really exists in Kerala society. Rekha Raj talks about the word "Dalit" and how it appeared in the Kerala society in late 1970s. She also writes about how consciousness about their identity emerged amongst Dalits and their subsequent separation from the Left movements. She critiques the efforts of mainstream women's organisations at homogenising women's experiences and the ignorance of differences among the Kerala women's community itself. Here, Raj upholds the significance of identifying the intersections of caste and gender. She observes the role played by Dalit Christian women in giving a public life

⁶ Chantal Mouffe, "Citizenship and Radical Democratic Politics," in *In The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 78.

⁷ Stephan, "The Issues," 287.

to Dalit women. Therefore, she argues that Dalit Christian women played an important role in building the bases for Dalit women movements. She articulates the politics of difference that have challenged “universal” gendered experiences and how Dalit women’s life is different in family and society. She raises the question of how Dalit women are positioned in inter-caste marriages and how state and public have been denying the motherhood of Dalit women. Raj also challenged the prevalent construction that produces all women as upper caste and all Dalits as men. She argues that such statements reproduce casteist patriarchal notions that in turn drive public attitude and ignorance towards Dalit women’s engagements in Kerala society. She also argued that Dalit women activists are being ignored and treated in a lowly manner in the public domain because of preconceived notions towards Dalit women and their bodies.⁸

Subsequently, many separate movements emerged to fight for rights and liberation of Dalits. Many of them were influenced and inspired by the ideology of Ambedkar. But even these organisations, which championed specific causes of the Dalits, did not care to highlight contemporary Dalit women’s issues. Later, many women’s organisations also emerged to seek justice. But their agendas did not include the issues of Dalit women in any serious manner. Obviously, the Dalit organisations could not address the issue of Dalit women as they could not come out of the grip of patriarchy. Similarly, women’s organisations failed to identify the specificity of Dalit women’s issues because of their misreading of gender as a general category. Perhaps the solution lay in mobilisation of Dalit women through separate organisations as they are discriminated against more severely than any other group in our society.

⁸ Raj, *Dalit Women*, 27.

Uma Chakravathy argues that cultural oppression, particularly as it affects women from lower castes and Dalits, is far more dehumanising than economic exploitation, which is a defining characteristic of class.⁹ Dalit women have many cultural differences from other women. They are always placed, situated and represented differently. Their experiences are different from other women. Dalit and Adivasi women are the most exploited women in Kerala. Dalit women's identity is also part of Dalit identity politics. But Dalit women's issues are not presented properly because of the hierarchical values of the existing social system and the patriarchal values of the Dalit community. Dalit women's political participation and mobilisation still remain a big question.

India has witnessed two decades of autonomous women's movements. But these movements are dominated by upper caste women who prioritize their own positions and perspectives. They have failed to address the issues of Dalit women. If Dalit women's issues are clubbed with the upper caste women's issues and discussed in general terms; issues such as women in higher education, patterns of unemployment, rape and atrocities against women, man-woman relationships and so on, the specific differences between Dalit women and others are effaced. Women's movements question gender inequality and want to correct this imbalance by participation in decision-making roles but the struggle of Dalit women against upper caste atrocities and low wages do not get attention within the body of women's movements.

According to Chantal Mouffe, the importance of feminist politics resides in the deconstruction of fundamental identities as the prerequisite for a sufficient comprehension of the diversity in social interactions. If the principles of liberty and equality apply only to essential identities, which is based on sexual differences and if

⁹ Uma Chakravathi, *Gendering Caste through a Feminist Lense* (Calcutta:Stree, 2003), 37.

the category woman is not a unified category then what is the relevance of feminist politics? She asks how woman as a category is constructed within discourses? How sexual differences are validated in social relations and how relations of subordination are constructed through such action? She further argues that since there is no longer a homogeneous entity woman opposing a homogeneous entity male, the debate over equality and difference is rendered irrelevant. The fight against subordination needs to be recognised as distinct and as taking various forms.¹⁰

The particular experience of the former is what distinguishes Dalit women's struggle from that of women from other sectors. Since not all women endure the same forms of oppression, those Dalit women encounter must be distinct from those experienced by other women. The problems faced by Dalit women differ significantly from those faced by mainstream Keralan women. This chapter investigates how Dalits have been positioned historically, with a focus on Dalit women. Ancestors of the present Dalit community were akin to commodities that the upper caste could buy and sell. Even today, Dalits, especially the Dalit women, remain victims of caste-based exploitation and extreme poverty. According to social scientists like A.K Ramakrishnan, the miseries experienced by women from the upper castes and the Dalits are similar.¹¹ But he ignores the important fact that Dalit women do not have any privileges. They have limited rights and are adversely affected by discrimination.¹²

Since the formation of the Kerala state and government, many reforms were implemented to end certain forms of untouchability like the right to enter public places, right to work etc. It is to be noted that all subaltern communities are economically

¹⁰ Mouffe, "Citizenship," 80.

¹¹ A K Ramakrishnan and K M Venugopan, *Sthree Vimochanam: Charithram, Sidhantham, Sameepanam*: (Payyannur: Nayana Books, 1989), 39.

¹² Raj, *Dalit Women*, 29.

exploited, as they are continuously subjected to casteism. The same was the case with Dalits. They were and still are employed in traditional occupations which do not help them in upward mobility. Education was prohibited for women and Dalit women were supposed to maintain their traditional occupation and way of life. As a result of many social struggles, Dalit girls began to go to school. Initially, the untouchables had designated schools and classrooms. They were not allowed to enter the classrooms of the upper caste students. All teachers were not ready to teach them. In Travancore, under the aegis of Ayyankali, few schools were opened for Dalit students, including girls. Dalits live at the boundaries of villages, excluded from mainstream civilization, education, religion and culture. In Kerala there are differences among Dalit community/women as well; they are divided into different sub castes and their religious practises are associated with two religions; Hinduism and Christianity. Thus, they were generally referred to as “Hindu Dalits and Christian Dalits”, especially when referring to each other. The majority of Hindu Dalit women work as agricultural labourers, domestic workers, inland fisherwomen etc. The situation of Christian Dalit women is much better than Hindu Dalit women. According to Achamma John, Christian Dalit women are the educated and mobilized section among Dalit women. They have obtained certain opportunities to access education and other forms of social integration through conversion into Christianity. But they were excluded from the quality of education that upper caste women received.¹³ Thus, their social mobility cannot be compared with that of upper caste Christian women such as women from the Syrian Christian community in Kerala.

¹³ Achamma John, “Dalitha Sthreekalude Samoohika Sambathika Padavi: Oru Padanam” (Thiruvananthapuram: CDS, 2002), p. 23.

As Sharmila Rege notes, there are now significant discussions on how class and patriarchy interact. However, casteism and Brahmanism were not concerns that the political parties addressed. Leftist parties initiated anti-landlord campaigns in Kerala, but these campaigns neglected caste issues and focused primarily on class interests. Dalit women in Kerala experience cultural estrangement as a result of societal isolation. The government put in place certain programmes to advance these underprivileged groups, but Dalit women continue to be among society's lowest classes as a result of the Dalit community's ongoing oppression. Dalit women continue to live as the lower stratum of society. They continue to be the victims of caste, class and gender violence. Dalits are the victims of caste system but Dalit women experience triple discrimination. Along with the dual exploitation of caste and gender, Dalit women also suffer from class discrimination. Majority of Dalit women are poor and are considered inferior to other women. The "Dalit women's question" is raised by many social activists and intellectuals frequently. But most of the activists of women's groups belong to the upper castes. This aspect is quite often overlooked by Dalit women who remain the "Dalits among the Dalits". Many Dalit women face sexual exploitation from upper caste men, and justice continues to evade the majority of cases. Sharmila Rege says, universalizing the category of Indian women, often encroached on the customary rights of the women in the lower strata of society. A lot of mainstream women are of the mistaken notion that Dalit women have the freedom to work and work as equals aside men in almost all menial jobs in the unorganized and organized sectors. Their working and living conditions are the worst. It is true that there is gender discrimination for the same job and men and women are given different wages. This matter requires time and effort to redress. It is a typical example of the pattern of gender exploitation among the poor sections. The number of Dalit women in menial occupations is greater than Dalit men

in the same. As a result of lower caste women's need to work outside their home for their family's survival, they are deemed "impure" or "lacking in virtue."¹⁴

Trajectories of women's movements in Kerala

The history of women's movements in Kerala is closely associated with the struggles against the caste system. Women's position in the society and family was dependent upon the caste which she belonged to. The upper caste women were subjected to the moral consciousness of upper caste men whereas the lower caste women were victimised by caste violence. The lower caste women were not allowed to cover the upper part of their body, they were forced to be half naked in front of upper caste men and women. Wearing cloth on the upper part of the body was considered a sign of arrogance and disrespect towards the upper caste. Therefore, these caste-based practices became the basis of victimhood of Dalit women and the control over lower caste women's sexuality.

Channar Movement

In this epoch of caste evils, the Channar upper cloth movement was a significant struggle against casteism and casteist practices. The movement fought for the right of Channar women to cover the upper part of their body. This movement was led by women from the Channar community. It continues to be considered the first women's struggle in Kerala. This was not an organised movement but it had immense support from the Channar community who led with the slogan "*nammude sthreekalkku apamanakaram*" ("insult to our women"). On July 26, 1859, the then Travancore king declared the circular stating that Channar women had the right to wear the upper cloth.

¹⁴ Rege, *Dalit Women*, 42.

The temporality of this struggle marked an immense moment in Kerala history.¹⁵ The Channar community is considered lower caste that holds the status of other backward castes in the state. A large population of Channar community was located in the southern part of Kerala. In time, the social status of the Channar community elevated due to their engagement in business and cultivation of cotton and sugar particularly. Many became land owners during the British colonial period. Their economic mobility was linked to their educational mobility. Their consciousness raised their social status and they demanded a dignified life through the Channar movement.

Dress codes are an important marker of the caste system and its power relations. This affected women more than men. The upper caste women had the right to wear dignified dress and ornaments. The lower caste women of communities such as the Channar, Ezhavar, Pulayar, Paryar and Kuravar were not allowed to wear the upper cloth in front of the upper caste people. Such form of humiliation of lower caste women was normalised by the upper castes. Lower caste women faced brutal experiences whenever they tried to cover their breasts.¹⁶ In 1812, Cl. Manro¹⁷ declared the right to wear upper cloth only for Channar and Ezhava women, those who had converted into Christianity thorough missionary influence. The women who began wearing jackets and upper cloth were attacked by upper caste people as they walked through the public streets. The Savarnas responded to the new law by destroying a church and schools started by missionaries. At the same time, the Hindu Channar community also mobilised themselves for the upper cloth movement and the Channar women began wearing the upper cloth in public places. The upper caste men attacked them in response. However,

¹⁵ C S Chandrika, *Keralathile Sthreemunnnetta Charithram* (Thrissur: Sahitya Academy, 1996), 10.

¹⁶ R Radhakrishnan, *Keralathile Navodhana Samarangal* (Thiruvananthapuram: Malu Ben Publications, 2010), 28.

¹⁷ The British Resident and the Diwan of Travncore during late 18th Cenury.

the Channar community united and resisted the upper caste mob. On December 27, 1858, the Diwan Madhava Rao proclaimed that “the violation of customs and conventions is an offence. This would lead to transgression of a peaceful society; therefore, Shudras and others should not act against this. If they act against the upper caste, that will be a punishable offence”. This statement provoked the Channar community and missionaries. The Divan’s officers were present at the public places to ensure implementation of the rule. One of them went to the Parassala market and declared that he had the right to undress the Channar women if they were seen wearing the upper cloth and he did so publicly. After that, the caste Hindus continued insulting the Channar women and burnt three churches. This violence continued for twenty days and spread to other places as well.¹⁸

The men from the Channar community began resisting the upper castes by destroying their shops and robbed their shops under the leadership of Chinna Nadar at Nagarcoil. The government sent the army to suppress the movement but the Channar community and their struggle became very strong. The upper caste men attacked the Christians in Puthankada, Thirupuram and Arumanur. The Channar community mobilised their networks and organised a militant form of struggle and they attacked the upper caste dominated villages. The Channar movement ended in February of 1859 with a new proclamation from the Divan in which he declared that “all the Channar women are allowed to wear the upper cloth like the Christian Channar women and unlike the upper caste women”. The British government under the influence of the Christian missionaries played an important role in the new proclamation. Later, the same law was made applicable to the Ezhava community and other backward castes but not the Dalits. The Channar movement was the first and foremost organised people’s movement in

¹⁸ Ibid, 30.

Travancore's history. This movement could begin the social reform in Kerala and this movement was the motivation for many of the subaltern movements in Kerala.¹⁹

Kallumala Samaram²⁰

Even though, the right to cover upper cloth was permitted to only Channar women and other lower caste women, Dalit women were still not allowed to cover the upper part of their body and not allowed to wear gold and silver jewellery. Dalit women resisted this act by wearing layers of stone necklaces to cover their body. Kallumala Samaram was the unmarked evidence of how Dalit women were victimised by caste patriarchy in Kerala. The movement happened in 1915 at Perinad, Kollam district. It was led by Ayyankali who urged Dalit women to reject the symbols of caste slavery. In response, Dalit women from Neyyattinkara removed the stone ornaments and began wearing clean clothes and modern ornaments. This way of struggle was new during that period and it quickly spread to other places. In Kollam district, Dalit women started to remove their stone malas and iron bangles under the leadership of Gopaladasan. He organised the meetings of Pulaya (Untouchable caste) groups and they threw away the Kallumalas. These incidents provoked the Nair feudal lords and they beat a Pulaya leader at site of the meeting. Pulaya mobs resisted this act by attacking them back. As a result, the Nair mob burnt sixty Pulaya huts in Perinad.²¹

After this incident, Ayyankali came to Perinad immediately and he discussed the issue with the divan and other social activists such as Parameswaran Pillai²² and C. Raman²³

¹⁹ Ibid,40.

²⁰ Kallumala Samaram was a historical struggle against caste practices where Dalit women were forced to wear kallumala, a garland of of stone. That's how the struggle came to be known as Kallumala Samaram. Kallu means stone and samara means protest in Malayalam.

²¹ Radhakrishnan,43.

²² Parameswarn Pillai was a lawyer and became a judge later attorney general in Travancore. He was also a social reformer who became the president of the Nair Service Society. He was elected as the member of Sree Moolam Popular Assembly four times.

²³ C Raman Pillai was a social activist and Malyalam writer

Pillai. They decided to organise a mass meeting of all the communities and find a solution towards peacefully reforming old customs. Hence, the meeting was held at Kollam. This meeting was presided over by Parameswaran Pillai on December 10, 1915. The Dalit community participated in this meeting in large numbers with more than 4000 Dalit women being part of it. Ayyankali had addressed the people: “by the intervention of Sadhujanaparipalansangam, the Pulaya women in south Travancore threw away their Kallumala and have started wearing a piece of white cloth which is called as *Mundu* and *Rowkka* (*a top for women*) which was considered as a clean and tidy clothing and it was forbidden for untouchables during that time. Therefore, I request my sisters who are present here to throw away their Kallumalas”. Following this meeting, Dalit women threw away their Kallumalas and cut off their bangles with sickles. This struggle shows how Dalit women stood for their rights and resisted the upper caste forces. Kallumala samaram was the declaration of freedom for Dalit communities because it was the struggle for their self-respect and survival.²⁴ This movement was communicated symbolically whereby they rejected the symbols of caste slavery. It was the women of the Dalit community who raised their voice against caste injustice and towards their right to wear clothes. It is important to note that this movement has found mention in Kerala history and women’s writings only after decades.

In Kerala, the first women’s conference was held in 1942 at Kozhikode. The agenda of this conference was to form the agitation against fascist forces and to organise a women’s movement. As a result, in 1943, the Mahila Sangham was formed. The main aim of this organisation was to organise women to be part of the struggles against fascist

²⁴ Ibid,48

forces and save the country, to mobilise mass participation of women in the freedom struggle and to address the issues of poverty and scarcity. The leaders of Mahila Sangham were Thankamma Krishna Pillai, Kamalakshi, Saaswathi, Radhamma and Thankachi. They participated in the struggles against feudal forces for land and wage. In Malabar, women had also participated in agrarian movements. In Travancore, women coir workers and labourers participated in agitations for their rights.²⁵

In India, the 1930s and 1940s was considered as the time of reformist movements. But the reform movements were focused on Hindu Brahmin women and side-lined the experiences of caste practises which were based on untouchability. The situation in Kerala also was similar. One can see this in the way the history of reformist movements for Namboothiri (upper caste Brahmin caste) women is written and recorded in the history of Kerala but the struggles of lower caste women and their movements have not been considered as part of the women's experience in the scribal culture of Kerala. These "mainstream" women movements were part of the freedom movement and Communist movement. Dalit women had immense participation in the agrarian struggles and the labour movements which were led by Communists. However, Dalit women's contribution and struggles have been ignored in the written history of these movements. The agrarian movements protested against untouchability and the caste system by conducting inter-dining in their conferences. The upper caste women activists who were part of these movements attended the inter-dining with people from untouchable castes.

The agrarian organisations which were part of the Communist movement conducted two agitations which were very peculiar in nature: The Tholuviraku Samaram and

²⁵ Chandrika, Keralathile, 17.

Mechilpuluu Smaram Tholuviraku samaram in November 1942 at Hosdurg Taluk. The agitations were led by women for their right to collect firewood from the Government land. This agitation was mobilised at the grassroot level which was led mainly by four women namely, Chettichi Paru, Marathi Parvathi, Edadam Veetil Madhavi and M. P Cheriya led this agitation. An agitation called the Pullusamaram was held in December 1946 at Kandamkai village. This agitation was against the feudal Zamindar (landlord) who denied lower castes the permission to cut grass so they could build roofs over their head. The Kisan Sangh activists cut off the grass, growing on the Zamindar's land by force. After this agitation, the zamindar and his people attacked the farmers and destroyed their houses. As a result, Kunjakamma, a lower caste woman led a march to the zamindar's house with broken utensils, broom sticks and slated cloths.²⁶

In 1934, women coir workers declared a strike which was the beginning of their awakening in to the labour struggles. They formed a coir workers' union named Ambalappuzha Taluk Kayarupiri Thozhilali *Union*. The secretary of this union was K. Devayani. The primary demands of the strike were reduction in the price of coir making material *thundu* (the outer green coloured cover of coconut), to increase the price of coir, and to stop exploitation of workers by pushing them to the organised sectors. But the union could not sustain for long because the livelihood of the members depended on the daily wages earned from coir making and agricultural work. Hence, the inability to focus on the union activities forced the union to stop the activities. However, the union had a vital role in the labour movements in Alappuzha and this was the women's organisation by unorganised workers. Later, this union was able to strengthen the agrarian movement in Alappuzha. The women led protest in Kalarkottu showed their consciousness towards their rights. The women were supposed to do the work of

²⁶ Ibid, 23.

planting paddy seeds. They declared a strike which was not a decision by union. They demanded their wages be raised to five annas and for time to rest in the afternoon. The police and the goondas tried to interrupt the strike but the women continued their protest. The protestors were also able to mobilise more women from the nearby paddy fields. As the result, the wage was increased to 6 annas and they were granted time for rest. These two struggles are the locus of the women's movements in Alappuzha.²⁷

C S Chandrika observes that the women's role in communist movements through agrarian struggles can be analysed through different dimensions. Kayyoor and Vayalar agrarian movements were the two major movements that formed the foundation for the Communist Party of India. The women's role in the movements was mainly to protect the leaders from the police; therefore, women gave shelter to them, cooked food and served the men. It may be argued that the resistance was dependent upon gender roles. The women's participation, especially from the Dalit communities was huge. It should however be noted that the women leaders of these movements were the spouses of the male leaders. Their struggles became part of the history of Kayyoor and Vayalar struggles. Only the women who were associated with the leadership such as the wife, mother and sister, found centrality in articulating their stories of struggle and victimhood.²⁸ Dalit women had a vital role in the agrarian struggles of Kerala in the late 1970s but their role was not documented in the history of agrarian struggles in Kerala.

The identity of women who had participated in these struggles are unknown in the written history of these movements. Even this piece that was written by a progressive writer such as C S Chandrika could not explore the identity of those women in her book

²⁷ Ibid, 26.

²⁸ Ibid,28.

*Keralathile Sthree Munnettangalude Charithram*²⁹. These agitations were organised by the women, who were part of the left movements, although their engagements were not highlighted in the history of left movements in Kerala. Namboothiri women's reform movement was very popular in Kerala and it has been well documented in Kerala history. Their struggle was against the evil customs which were practised against women in their community. Namboothiri Yogakshema Sabha³⁰ had a vital role of the upliftment of Namboothiri women. Namboothiri men were also part of their movements. Their role was to write revolutionary plays and novels such as *"Adukkalayil ninnu arangathekku"* (From kitchen to the stage) by V.T Bhattathirippad, *"Marakkudakkullile Mahanarakam"* (the holly hell inside the umbrella) by M. R B and *"Rithumathi"* (menstruated women) by Premji. These writings deliberately focused only on Namboothiri women's liberation.³¹ Hence it may be read as a Brahmin reform movement for their own community, an issue that dominated Malayalam women's writing in the mid-1990s and was spoken of as the experience of "Malayali" women.

Women in the Freedom Movement

Women's participation in the freedom movement against the British was an initiative of the Indian National Congress. Therefore, the women who were part of Thiruvitamkoor Congress were activists of the freedom movement. Akkamma Cheriyan had a vital role in the freedom movement. She was an educated revolutionary woman who hailed from a Syrian Christian family and held the position of headmistress of St. Mary's school, Kanjirappally. She was the president of the Thiruvitamkoor Congress and she marched towards the Travancore Kings' palace on his birthday to

²⁹ Chandrika, *Keralathile*, 20.

³⁰ An organisation formed by the Namboothiri Brahmin community for the upliftment of the Namboothiri community specifically

³¹ Ibid, 32.

demand the release of the leaders of the nationalist movement. The women's wing of the INC was called Desasevika Sangham. She had participated in nationalist historical agitations including the Quit India movement and had been arrested by the police. She wore saree and sandals to break the stereotypical image of a Syrian Christian woman. Wearing saree and sandal was considered undignified by the Syrian Christian community.

In 1935, the All-India Women's Conference was held in Trivandrum. This was a shock for the patriarchal Kerala society and the event invited hatred towards women. Women leaders like Ammu Swaminadhan³², Aruna Asaf Ali, Anna Chandi, and Margret were the delegates of this conference. The Thiruvitamkoor Congress had organised several strikes and agitations against the king.³³ This chapter goes on to trace the history of women's movements in Kerala to understand the politics of engagement and to analyse the temporality of women's writing and the spatiality of Dalit women through an analysis of the biography of Sulochana teacher and P K Rosy. Their stories have been written and brought to academic discussions only recently, even though these experiences were contemporary to the women's movements in Kerala.

Dalit Women's Entry into the Kerala's Cultural Space: Story of P K Rosy

There has been very little mention of P K Rosy in the history of Malayalam cinema, who was the first heroine in Malayalam cinema. She was a Dalit Christian woman from a Pulaya slave family. She acted in the first ever Malayalam film *Vigathakumaran* in 1928 which was made by J.C Daniel in Trivandrum; this was the time when Dalits were not allowed to walk in public places and roads. She appeared as a Nair woman in the film. Offended that a Dalit woman played the role of a Nair woman, the upper castes

³³ Ibid,46.

attacked her and her family, burnt their house and beat them. In the face of upper caste violence, Rosy was forced to run away from her native village the night of the attack. Film historians have largely been silent on Rosy's story and predicament. Kunnukuzhi Mani and other Dalit writers have been demanding a film award in Rosy's name. If not for the efforts of Mani and others, who interviewed JC Daniel, Rosy's history would have been buried. Chelangattu Gopalkrishnan's book on JC *Daniel Life Story* (J C Danielinte Jeevitha Katha) and Vinu Abraham's work on PK Rosy *The Lost Heroine* (Nathtanayika) have played an important role in "reintroducing" Rosy in the history of Kerala and the Malayalam film industry.³⁴ It must be noted that neither women writers, who focussed largely on the stories of Namboothiri women nor the platforms of reform movements in the 1920s spoke anything about Rosy. It is this deliberate silence that erased Rosy from the history of Kerala society and the women's movements.

Caste Hatred against a Dalit woman Teacher: Story of Sulochana Teacher

Dakshayani, also known as Sulochana teacher was a school teacher in Kerala. She hailed from the Pulaya Dalit community in Kannur district. She received her early education from Basil Mission School and completed her vocational training in coir making after her schooling. After that she was appointed as coir teacher at Karadukka School in Kasargod district. Later, she was forced to leave her position because of the persistent caste discrimination at her work place. The students called her "Adiyar teacher".³⁵ they were told not to sit beside her or touch her. She writes about her experience in her biography:

³⁴ Jenny Rowena, "Locating P K Rosy: Can a Dalit Woman Play a Nair Role in Malayalam Cinema Today," *Round Table India: for an Informed Ambedkar Age*. (24 February 2013):1-4.

³⁵ The term Adiyar was used by the dominant caste people to against the lower caste especially Dalits/untouchables.

It was all about caste; something which I cannot even imagine today. I would go to sign my attendance and the headmaster would open the register and move far away. After I had signed, the register would be wiped with paper or a cloth before the headmaster touched it. It hurt so much. I would weep away from everybody's sight. Not that it mattered if anybody did see me cry for pulaya tears did not have any value. One had to just suffer.³⁶

Sulochana was treated as an untouchable teacher. Both students and colleagues were casteist towards her. She eventually left the job and became a coolie worker for her survival. She was the only Dalit woman who had been employed as a teacher in that school; all others were from Nair, Nambiar and Namboothiri Brahmin castes. Students would pelt stones at her. She received a handsome salary of forty-five rupees at the time but the harassment was intolerable. She complained about the ill-treatment to the District Education Officer who offered to transfer her to another school but she refused to join and face the same treatment again in another work place. Stephan (Sulochana's friend) talks about Dalit women's situation during the said period:

After finishing my work I was planting a banana tree within a fence near the tombs of a senior Muslim religious leader. At that time a lady, a fat lady, went that way to the shop to buy rice. She was Pulaya and the shop owner was Thiyya. She was carrying a fish basket which only Pulayas carried. The thiyya pulled off the *mundu* (dress) that she was wearing. She was not wearing much else and she stood there naked not knowing whether to stay or run. I witnessed this through the fence. I ran up, gave her my *mundu* to hide her shame. People used to pull off the Pulaya women's *mundus* whenever they could, that was how things were in

³⁶ Taha Madayi. "Adiyar Teacher." In *The Oxford India Anthology of Malayalam Dalit Writing*, 2012, 230- 239.

those days. As Sulochana says, Pulayas were not allowed to wear white cloths.

They did not wear blouses but a short, thin, loosely woven towel was tied round the shoulders. Even that was not spared.³⁷

One can imagine how both upper caste and lower caste men such as those of the Thiyya community used their power over Dalit women's body as an opportunity to harass them even in public places. Sulochana teacher's history had not been written anywhere in Kerala women's history or in odes about famous teachers. However, the stories about upper caste teachers such as Akkamma Cheriyan and Karamperoor Neelakanda Pillai are well-known in Kerala society. The caste discrimination was such that it changed a Dalit women's life and future, forcing her to give up her position as a teacher and become a coolie worker.

Feminist collectives

Modern feminist organisations came into existence in the 1970s, especially in the western countries. The first feminist organisation in India was the Progressive Organisation of Women from Hyderabad. Socialist women's groups such as Sthree Shakti Sangatana, Sthree Mukti Sangatana and Vimochana were also feminist collectives that were formed during that period. Kerala's feminist consciousness also emerged during this time. A number of feminist collectives such as Prachodana in Trivandrum, Bodhana in Kozhikkodu, Manushi in Pattambi, Chetana in Trissur, Grameena Vanita Sabha in Thiruvalla, and Prabudhatha in Kanjangadu were started during this time. These feminist organisations were based on socialist feminist ideology. Most of the members of these organisations were also associated with the left movements. Many had been known to leave the Communist movement because of its

³⁷ Taha Madayi. "Adiyar Teacher." In *The Oxford India Anthology of Malayalam Dalit Writing*, 2012, 230- 239.

patriarchal norms and practices. These were Marxist feminists, whose focus was on the capitalist nature of the state and its patriarchal forces. Prachodana for instance was known for openly criticising women's groups, who spoke against the patriarchy and practised animosity towards men. Prachodana argued that feminism should fight against capitalism instead of focusing against male domination because the capitalist state was responsible for producing a patriarchal society and male domination. Therefore, the struggles for women's liberation should be against capitalism. The political consciousness of this group was influenced by western Marxist theory.³⁸

The first get-together of the feminist groups in Kerala was held in 1982 at Vavannur Govt. L P School. These feminist organisations largely took up the issues of dowry deaths, rape and harassment. Manushi's struggle in the Balamani case caught a lot of public attention. Balamani was thrown out from the family, stripped naked and forced to walk on the street. Manushi's intervention brought public attention and support to Balamani and the issue. She received police protection, and was later able to stay alone because of Manushi's intervention. The collective formed a citizens' councils for public support and demanded arrest of the culprits. Manushi organised hunger strikes for justice for rape victims. They were able to mobilise large numbers of women for these protests. Manushi also organised a protest, demanding the arrest of the culprit who raped and murdered a 15 years old girl. The culprit was also a leader of the BJP (Bharatiya Janatha Party). Manushi, along with the victim's mother and siblings protested for many days. The culprit was finally arrested by the crime branch. This had become a people's movement with the support of the entire village. Later the communist party criticised the "emotional" expression of the women in protest.

³⁸ Chandrika, Keralathile. 26

Manushi was able to resist these attacks and they replied to the CPIM (Communist Party of India (Marxist)).

The Thankamani³⁹ gang rape was one where the state police committed brutal sexual violence against a Dalit woman. Manushi activists from Pattambi went to Thankamani and started poster campaign against the state. Once they returned to Pattambi, they started a hunger strike to form public opinion on the case. The response from the public was very encouraging; people from Pattambi sent money through Manushi to the women protesting in Thankamani. Manushi was invested in the politics of classlessness. The members of Manushi were from different financial backgrounds. Later, some of them left Manushi because of their political stand. Many members of Manushi were part of Communist student groups such as the SFI (Student's Federation of India). Sara Joseph, Sumangalakkutty, Parvathy, Indira and activists of the Yuvajanavedi remained in the party. However, the political party CPIM which was related to Yuvajanavedi publicly declared that Manushi would inaugurate the rail strike on behalf of them. Such strategies ensured that Manushi fell in line with the party. This compelled Sara Joseph, Indira, Parvathy and Sumangalakkutty to form the organisation, Manavi. Manushi's work is now part of history. Many of the activists faded away over time. Manushi had published three volumes of a magazine by the same name. The collective brought these issues to the public through street plays. They are known to be the first feminist group to introduce a women's theatre wing. The theatre group functioned primarily out of the Palakkad district. It must be remembered that Manushi was fighting against three fronts of state power: media, police and political parties.

³⁹ Thankamani is a place which located in Idukki district in Kerala. The violence and rape against dalit women which happened in that place is known as Thankamani violence/case.

Bodhana's activities were focussed in the Kozhikkodu district. They are widely known for their intervention in the Kunjeebi case, a prostitute, who was allegedly murdered by the police in prison. Bodhana organised an agitation to arrest the culprits and bring the truth to the public. This agitation was able to mobilise all the prostitutes. Ajitha, women's rights activist led a hunger strike, demanding punishment for the culprit policemen. It is in the backdrop of this agitation that the All-India Conference of Feminist Organisations was held in Kozhikode in 1991.

It is argued that the ignorance and reduction of the feminist discourse in Kerala was the result of deliberate conspiracies by the left parties and the women's groups affiliated with them. The Naxalites rejected feminism because they believed it was bourgeois feminism. Chadrika has argued that the patriarchal structure of the political parties was at the basis for the rejection of feminist thought as a political tool for social change. Feminism faced antagonism from both the left and the right-wing political parties. The former were always against women and were involved only in promoting communal riots and religious fundamentalism. The left parties objected to feminism in Kerala because they felt it was an imitation of western feminism and that it was an anarchical and immoral discourse for sexual freedom. Ironically, the rejection of Marxism by the right wing political parties in India and the rejection of feminism by the Left have a lot in common.⁴⁰

Ajitha writes that her thoughts on women's liberation developed through her disagreement with the patriarchal structure and practises in the Naxal movements in Kerala. She observed the male comrades' over protective nature, the objectification of women's bodies, women having to cook and serve the men and the difficulties in

⁴⁰ Ibid,34.

accepting the assertions of women activists. Relationships between comrades were also frowned upon.

The All-India Democratic Women's Association are associated with the Communist party of India (Marxist). A book titled "Feminist Movement: A Marxist Analysis" was released by Chintha publishing in Kerala and was written by Vimala Ranadive, a central committee member of the Communist Party of India and the head of the All-India Democratic Women's Association. The preface of the book claims to expose the unscientific methods of feminism and this book is useful for those who aspire for real women's liberation. Ranadive writes "feminists are not criticising the state for the ignorance of women's issues and they are not attacking the feudal system which holds the men and women in the feudal chains. The mother in laws are responsible for practising Sati for their sons. Women are not raising their voices against their feudal heritage."⁴¹ C S Chandrika, feminist writer from Kerla had argued that Ranadive's observations on women's liberation show their basis in the narrow leftist political consciousness. She further argues that feminist analysis of feudalism must question how women are used and exploited in feudal practices. She goes on to write that Ranadive's argument reproduces the interest of the male centred political party and their influences. Ranadive suggested men and women must participate together in the struggle against feudalism and that it was the only way to ensure liberation from exploitation of, a feudal society. Chandrika however argued that women would invariably question men about their patriarchal behaviour and demand that they change whenever they struggled together.

⁴¹ Ibid, 39.

Ranadive recalls in her book an incident where a member of Sthree Shakti Sangathdana proclaimed that “rapes happens in USSR” in a public meeting, organised by the CPIM. She was thrown out from the public platform for raising the question of misogyny in progressive societies. This statement was seen as an act, dividing the labour classes. Sthree Shakti Sangatana was warned by the Communist Party for such statement. On the one hand, it is clear how the left parties control their women’s organisations. On the other hand, they continue to motivate the women’s group and comrades because Lenin said that any democratic people’s movement is not possible without the participation of women. Chandrika says that in the late 1980s, the feminist groups became inactive and those who remained were mainly focused on the upper and middle class women and their interests. The activities of the women’s groups turned to the academia, limiting themselves to theoretical discussions. Their activism became absent in the feminist groups in the late 1980s. Hence, women’s liberation became a subject for feminist academic discipline by scholars. This led to the absence of feminist groups in the people’s movements, especially in the Dalit, Adivasi and fisher folk’s movements.⁴²

However, the feminist groups which were formed in the 1980s played a vital role in the cultural consciousness of the state. One may argue that feminism was limited to cultural discussions. It can be argued that raising political consciousness and making interventions through agitations should have been the main agenda of the feminist organisations in Kerala. Samata, a feminist theatre based in Trissur was formed by students and teachers associated with the Marxist party CPIM and SFI during this period. In the beginning, Samata performed street plays as part of CPI (M)’s election

⁴² Ibid, 41.

propaganda but later they began performing independently. This shift happened because the Marxist party's narrowness and patriarchal structure was not able to accept Samata as a feminist theatre group. Unfortunately, Samata stopped their activities after seven years of performances. The activists were not able to manage their family and activism because of the gender segregated family system and society. The other reason was that Samata replicated the male centred hierarchy within the organisation, although the leadership was held by women. Chandrika argues that the failure of the feminist movements had to do with their inability to undo patriarchy within their systems and practices.

Sthree Padana Kendram

Sthree Padana Kendram was formed in 1991. This women's collective was an intervention in the history of Malayalam literature. They began a strong debate on the politics of women's writings in Kerala. In 1992, Sthree Padana Kendram organised a six day women theatre camp at Koothattukulam with participation of 64 women from different parts of Kerala. The women's wing of Sasthra Sahitya Parishad also made their presence felt in the cultural sphere of Kerala during this period. They performed street plays and cultural programmes across the state.

Dalit Women's Position in the Feminist Movement *Kerala Sthreevedi*

Sthreevedi was formed in 1995 in Trissur. Their activities also included interventions into literature, theatre and other aspects of the cultural sphere. Sthreevedi organised a women's writers meet and started the second phase of the debates in the politics of women's writing in Kerala. Sthreevedi was a feminist collective which still exists in Kerala. Sthreevedi was a feminist collective with women from different sections of the society. Their response to the public was vibrant and many Dalit women were part of

Sthreevedi. However, Dalit feminists such as Iniyammal and Achamma John came out from Sthreevedi later. They questioned the ways in which hierarchy was practiced in the organisation. They did not have a role in the decision making in Sthreevedi. This forced them to start a collective of their own.

In this period, Dalit women started speaking up about their subjectivity in feminist organisations and they questioned the so- called ideology and praxis of the feminist groups all across India. Anweshi, a Dalit women's collective was started in Thiruvalla during this time. In 1994, the 20th year of women's movements in India was celebrated in a conference held in Hyderabad. Dalit feminist Ruth Manorama's speech was very assertive. She spoke about difference amongst women and how the life and status of Dalit women is not equal to privileged upper caste women and that Dalit women want to speak this truth and break the notion of homogenous womanhood. Therefore, the women's question should be identified based on gender, caste and class⁴³. Dalit women raised their question against the feminist organisations by saying that Dalit women do not have any participation in decision making especially in major decisions. Hence, they demanded a change in those organisations and further stated that they would stand separately from the organisations until or unless these issues were settled. This was a big challenge to the Indian feminist organisations and forced the Indian feminists and theoreticians to change their analysis and talk about subaltern identity.

Rusly, a Dalit feminist from Kerala raised questions against Dalit patriarchy and the positioning of Dalit women within Dalit organisations. She says that Dalit women are treated as participants in Dalit organisations like any other male centred organisations. Dalit women lack the language in which so-called feminists speak; hence, they feel

⁴³ John, Dalitha Sthreekalude. 32.

strange when they come to feminist organisations and hear the language. Dalit feminists find themselves standing alone because we are side-lined from everywhere and we are accused of communal tendencies. Dalit women are fighting against caste because Dalit women face the burden of caste⁴⁴. Caste is practised in Kerala very strongly and Dalit women are the victims of caste system. Rusly has argued that the lack of representation of Dalit women in the feminist movement forced them to start their own organisation.

Lovely Stephan has argued that the status of a Dalit women is determined by her history, that of slavery. The written history of Kerala has ignored even the presence of Dalit women, because the power to write history was held by the upper caste. Therefore, Dalit women are not present as any symbol in the history of women in Kerala. The so-called progressive historians wrote the history of Namboothiri women as the history of women in Kerala. This tendency is visible in Kerala history when the historians write about the Channar rebellion as the struggle of lower caste women for the right to cover the upper part of the body at the same time, the story of Nangeli, a lower caste women who protested alone against the evil custom like breast tax by cutting one of her breast and gave to the king, is invisible in the history of Kerala.⁴⁵

Ruth Manorama has famously stated that Dalit women are the Dalits among Dalits. Though the women's movement helped them speak up, the mainstream movements continue to isolate themselves from the Dalit women's movements. Dietrich has rightly observed that, untouchability, caste differences, sexual exploitation, poverty, powerlessness, absence of their representation in the administration and the

⁴⁴ Ibid, 34.

⁴⁵ Stephan, The Issues. 289.

continuation of Devadasi systems etc. are the main reasons for the discrimination faced by Dalit women which the women's liberation movements ignored.⁴⁶

Kerala had witnessed three decades of autonomous women's movements. But these movements are dominated by upper caste women who prioritize their own positions and perspectives. They have failed to address the issue of Dalit women. If Dalit women's issue is clubbed with the general women's issues and discussed in general terms like women in higher education, unemployment pattern, rape and atrocities against women, man -women relationship and so on, their specific difference is effaced. Women's movements question gender inequality and want to correct this imbalance by participation in the decision-making but the struggle of Dalit women against upper caste atrocities and low wages do not get attention within the body of women's movements. Chandra Talpade Mohanty argued that it is important to think of women's unity as something that has been pursued throughout history rather than something that comes naturally or as a result of psychological or natural similarities. Instead of attempting to infer one from the other, we need to define how the historical forms of oppression relate to the category of "women". And it is in this context (as opposed to the idea of universal sisterhood) that the definition of feminist solidarity or coalition makes sense.⁴⁷

The upper caste autonomy of engagement in the scribal culture marginalised Dalit women erased them as subjects in the Kerala history. Dalit women's subjectivity has remained one of contributors, same as in the left movements and women's movements. According to Sharmila Rege, the independent women's organisations sought to create a sisterhood among those fighting against violence by politicking the subject of

⁴⁶ John, Dalitha Sthreekalude. 41.

⁴⁷ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (New Delhi: Zubban an Associate of Kali for Women, 2003).

violence against women. But it has only recently become obvious that this sisterhood is threatened by caste and religious differences.⁴⁸

Dalit women suffer from cultural alienation because of exclusion by the civil society in Kerala. The Government implemented certain programmes for the promotion of these marginalized groups but the circumstances for the suppression of the Dalits, the Dalit women remain among the lowest sections of the society and still exist. It is very clear that the exclusion of Dalit women continues to be a contemporary issue in Kerala. Dalit women suffer from the inter connections and variations of class, caste, gender and cultural oppression at all levels. Dalit women are the victims of the process, systems and institutions of patriarchy and caste system Dalit women remain to be placed in the lower strata among the lower social segments. The public space in its real meaning is possible to make a discussion on many issues through this women's groups but Dalit women voice ignored in the grand narratives of homogenous woman experiences exclude the Dalit women discourse in the academia and focus on Dalit women issues based on class analysis reduces the Dalit women question

The emergence of Pombilai Orumai, a Dalit women led organisation came into existence in 2015 to fight for their labour rights as plantation workers. The agitation was started by Dalit women plantation workers at Kannan Devan Tea Plantation in Munnar. They demanded increase in their daily wage and bonus which was assured to them by the plantation company, their employees. This movement offers a future to the women's movement where it claims to be the first women led agitation in the plantation company. The leader Gomathi Augustine argued that they did not want to associate

⁴⁸Rege, Dalit Women.43.

with male workers for the agitation because the latter often get influenced by the management and it would negatively affect the movement. Further, Pombilai Orumai staged a protest against the minister MM Mani and demanded his apology for his derogatory and sexist language against Dalit women Plantation workers.⁴⁹ The movement Pombilai Orumai has deconstructed the notion of Women's Rights movement where they are fighting for their labour rights and for the dignity as well.

Conclusion

Critiquing the idea of heteronormative anxiety in the women's movement and the Dalit politics is another concern of this study. Feminist politics placed gender as the central question and sidelined caste and the Dalit women's question. Similarly, Dalit politics places the community as the central questions when it comes to the question of patriarchy and decentres the gender question as well. There is conscious pressure on Dalit women to not speak about Dalit patriarchy openly which believes that Dalit politics is diverting from the process of annihilating caste. Thus, Dalit women have been criticised in recent time for raising criticisms on heteronormativity when Dalit women have raised questions on patriarchy in their own communities through intersectional lens. Dalit women's presence in the feminist politics is very clear from the historical struggle itself. The central question of Dalit women politics is caste and gender. These criticisms try to preach that the identity as Dalit and its experiences comes first which includes gender as well. This argument become crucial in this time particularly where Dalit women voices are not taken seriously over the period of time especially when Dalit movement and the feminist movement are in rage.

⁴⁹ TA Ameerudheen, "Kerala's Women Plantation Workers Return for Another Fight – against 'Sexist' Minister MM Mani," Scroll.in (Scroll.in, April 28, 2017), <https://scroll.in/article/835776/pombilai-orumais-women-return-for-another-fight-against-sexist-kerala-minister-mm-mani>.

Chapter 3

The Making of Print and its Culture in Kerala

This chapter will focus on the culture and history of print in Kerala. It is generally believed that Kerala has a vibrant density of print media. Given this context, the chapter will try to analyse the readership of newspapers in Kerala. It will focus on the political economy of the Malayalam newspaper industry as well.

A lot of discussion on Malayalam newspapers focuses on the history of Malayalam newspapers and the contributions of journalists. These works primarily discuss the history of prominent newspapers and their struggles of existence. This chapter helps the readers understand the growth and the existence of corporate newspaper institutions. This then gives us the occasion to analyse the cultural capital of the newspaper industry of Kerala.

It has been widely argued that in spite of the explicit claims of objectivity, newspapers and the stories they carry reflect vested interests. The people of Kerala have accepted most of the newspapers and the ideology that the newspapers propagate therein. Now, it becomes crucial to understand and question how and in what circumstances do people accept whatever is being propagated through newspapers. Thoroughly rereading the colonial past of Kerala would help us in a better understanding of the history of Malayalam language newspapers. Given the context, the chapter will look at the colonial past of the state to understand the rise of newspapers and print culture, which was introduced by the British in Kerala. It will discuss the newspapers which emerged during the freedom movement of India. Part of the chapter will emphasise on the cultural history of print in Kerala. Thus, the temporality of the print in Kerala will form the framework of this chapter. The chapter will also try to analyse newspapers on the

basis of whether, or not, these newspapers focus on caste related issues. This chapter will also analyse the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of the above-described conundrum. Such a study would make clear as to how issues related to Dalits are being portrayed, if at all, and carried out to the people in Kerala. A hope of opening a new window to see and realize how the sensitisation of Dalit issues is undertaken would be one of the key roles that the chapter will take up. The themes therefore that will be taken up in this chapter are as follows:

- The history of print and newspaper
- Newspaper as a tool for freedom struggle
- Political economy and cultural capital of the Newspaper
- The politics of print journalism in Kerala

The print still remains as the popular media in Kerala even today. The British colonisers introduced print in India as a vehicle of their own interests. Print came into existence in Kerala through Christian missionaries. It was done with a focused aim to spread Christian values amongst the people and therefore the newspapers were full of theological content. This motive had a successful impact among people of Kerala in terms of conversion and literacy as well. In 1578, the book titled *Doctonia Christ* was printed in Tamil script at the printing press in Thankassery, Kollam district which is located in the southern part of Kerala. In this period, the printing machine (*achukoodam*) already existed in Goa, Kochi and Thankassery. The first Malayalam script was printed in a Latin book titled *Horthus Indicus Malabaricus*.¹ This book was written in Kochi but printed in Amsterdam. It took 25 years to print 12 volumes of this book. The missionaries started a printing press in Vaipinkara in the beginning of the

¹ Dinesh Varma, “Vyavasthakku Nere Koorpicha Ayudham,” in *Pathrapravarthanam: Vazhiyum Vasthuthayum* (Thrissur, Kerala: Kerala Sahitya Academy, 2011), pp. 17-20.

17th century; later it was moved to Kodungallur in 1605 and another one was started in 1679 at Ambalakkattu in Kerala. But later, it was demolished by the Dutch attack. A new printing press was started again in Varappuzha. These were not the Malayalam language printing presses.

Colonial Missionaries in Print/ News making

The first Malayalam language printing press was established in 1821 by the CMS missionary in Kottayam. The missionaries established printing presses in different parts of India by this time; in 1761 at Madras, in 1778 at Bengal and in 1807 at Bombay². Here, we understand how print and religion have evolved together in Kerala and its association with a particular community.

Dinesh Varma says that the colonial missionaries used print as a medium for religious conversion and led to a transformation in Kerala society. However, it can also be argued that the lower caste communities in Kerala because they could access the social status which was denied to them by Hinduism. In 1842, Benjamin Baily translated the Holy Bible into Malayalam; this marked the initial stages of Malayalam scripting and printing. The Bible was printed in the CMS press, Kottayam.³ The lower caste communities had an important role to play in the initial years of print in Kerala. The colonial missionaries introduced them to the Bible for purposes of religious conversion; however, it also introduced the communities to education and access in social life. The missionaries took an initiative for the emancipation of Dalits and other lower caste communities. Converting into Christianity enabled them to have a dignified life. The ability to read helped them understand their rights as human beings, which until then

² Puthuppally Raghavan, *Kerala Pathrapravarthana Charithram* (Thrissur: Kerala Sahitya Academy, 1985), 15.

³Varma, *Pathrapravarthanam: VazhiyumVasthuthayum*, 19.

had been denied to them by Hinduism and caste society. The role of missionaries has often been narrowly understood in terms of “proselytising tendencies”; however, print, which was a part of the missionary initiative made its own place in Kerala’s religious, social and political sphere. The coming of the print also introduced Western education in Kerala.

The history of print in Kerala is connected with the history of western education which was brought by the Christian missionaries such as the London Mission Society, Church Mission Society and Basel Mission. The London Mission Society focused their activities in Southern Kerala where they established English schools in Trivandrum and Nagarcoil. In 1816, the Church Mission Society established the first college of Kerala in Kottayam. The Basel Mission focused on the northern part of Kerala and started English schools.⁴ These Christian missionaries established churches in Kerala and their charity was based on church and its activities. However, they were the reformists for the lower castes⁵ during that time because the lower castes were only allowed in missionary schools during this time. Educational institutions and its entry to the people from different castes made the situation much easier for the Christian missionaries. As a result, people from different castes and communities willingly converted to Christianity. The missionaries could create the foundation of Christianity in Kerala through these reformist activities. Later, they tried to strengthen the community through print. The missionaries circulated printed pamphlets and published books for the Christians in the church, which was part of their religious education.

The first newspaper in Malayalam was “Rajyasamcharam”, started in June 1847 by Dr. Herman Gundart who came to India from Germany as a Christian missionary. It was

⁴ Raghavan, *Kerala Pathrapravarthana*, 25.

⁵ Lower caste were called as Avarna untouchables and they belongs to the dominant category who practiced untouchability towards dalit castes.

published by the Bassil mission⁶. They also started the second newspaper “Pachimodayam” in Malayalam. The content of these two newspapers was similar. Their emphasis was on Christian religious stories and focused on conversion. These newspapers also carried news about British rule in India, the French revolution and Christianity, and the anarchist state of Germany etc. It would appear that the newspapers were well-received by the public. “Pachimodayam” was designed as a supplement and it was popular in its form. The three most popular columns in the “Pachimodayam” were on astrology, Kerala history and the Keralolpathy. “Pachimodayam” was the first source of Kerala history for common people in Kerala. The “Njannikshepam” is considered as the first Malayalam newspaper daily, published by the Bassil mission from Kottayam in 1840. Historians however have different opinions about the actual title of the newspaper and the period of its publication and circulation. S Nadarajan and Nadiga Krishnamurthy argue that it was published in 1940. In 1870, “Njananikshepam” stopped its daily publication but continued as a newspaper magazine from 1898 onwards till today. Njananikshepam introduced stencil printing in Kerala and this was made at Rev. Baily’s press in CMS, Kottayam. “Njannikshepam” was also designed by Christian missionaries, though the newspaper’s front page contained a Sanskrit sloka. “Njananikshepam” continues to be circulated from Kottayam as a newspaper magazine every month. ⁷

Another newspaper, “Vidyavinodini” was published in 1889, which focused on translating the world classics into the Malayalam language. “Vidyavinodini” played a vital role in introducing English writings and ideas to the people in Kerala. The writings were mainly by European thinkers, rulers and writers. *Abhijnana Sakunthalam* was

⁶ “Herman Gundert,” Herman Gundert | Kerala Media Academy, accessed December 26, 2022, <http://keralamediaacademy.org/archives/?q=content%2Fherman-gundert>.

⁷Raghavan, *Kerala Pathrapravarthana*, 32

translated into Malayalam in 1887 by the king Kerala Varma Valiyakoithampuran under the pen name Oru Keraleeyan. Therefore, “Vidyavinodini” also made its own place in the print culture of Kerala, also in Malayalam literature.⁸

The Church Mission Society introduced the college quarterly magazine “Vidyasamgraham” from Kottayam in 1864. Rev. George Mathan Varghese, a priest from Kerala was the editor of this magazine though, Richard Collins, the principal of CMS college Kottayam took initiative for this magazine and its design. The content of this magazine was written in both English and Malayalam. This magazine brought a new phase in the history of magazines in print. It included the history of Kerala, biblical teachings and debates, biographies, poems in English and Malayalam, book reviews and critical pieces, moral teachings, short stories and novels, psychology related articles and games. Contributors were from across Kerala and the West; however, students did not contribute although “Vidyasamgraham” was a college magazine. In 1867, CMS stopped publishing the “Vidyasamgraham”.

The first newspaper daily published in Kerala was “The Western Star”. It was in English and published from the European printing press “Western Star” located in British Kochi in 1860. College students from across Kerala contributed to this daily. G. Parameswaran Pillai wrote articles against the reign of king Visakham Thirunal. He criticised the Brahmin supremacy and their appointments in government officer⁹ positions. This article caused an uproar in Travancore and on orders of the king, G. Parameswara Pillai was ousted from Travancore and his friends were suspended from the college. This may be considered the first revolutionary anti-Brahmin move against the state by Nair writers. The Western Star printing press started its Malayalam version, known as the

⁸Varma, *Pathrapravarthanam: VazhiyumVasthuthayum*, 20.

⁹ Puthupally Raghavan, “Samudayika Parishkaranavum Malayala Pathrangalum,” in *Kerala Pathrapravarthana Charithram* (Thrissur, Kerala: Kerala Sahitya Academy, 2008), pp. 114-144.

“Pashchimatharaka”, edited by T J Paily and Philipose, who was also a Malayalam fiction writer and teacher. Philipose retired from his position as a teacher and continued as the chief editor of the newspaper until his death¹⁰. The Western Star Press printed and published the book “the history of Syrian orthodox Christians in Kerala in the year of 1869, written in English by Ittupp writer from Kerala. “Pachimatharaka” was a threat for the bureaucrats because it criticized corruption in the bureaucracy. This newspaper gained popularity amongst the people through its articles and debates on literature and book reviews. The editors of “Pachimatharaka” were followers of the CMS church; unsurprisingly, they criticised the Pope and the Catholic churches. This created animosity amongst Catholics towards the “Pachimatharaka” newspaper and the Church Mission Society as well¹¹. “Pachimatharaka” was a Christian owned newspaper but Hindu Nair writers also contributed to it. “Pachimatharaka” created a new face for the newspaper in Kerala by its own writing style which made them popular.

The making of print and newspaper in Kerala is associated with the history of religious and social newspapers. This chapter attempts to understand how they created the experiences of writing and reading in Kerala society. These Christian missionary newspapers created a relationship between people and the state through active discussions on the affairs of the state and their impact on people. It must also be recognised that the space of circulation was limited to only the people who could read and who also owned a certain kind of cultural capital as a community. However, it may be argued that the making of print brought a modern pace to the state of Kerala.

¹⁰ Raghavan, *Kerala Pathrapravarthana Charithram*, 40-43

¹¹ Ibid., 44-47

Newspaper as a tool for the struggle for freedom

Newspapers in Kerala underwent two kinds of phases during the colonial period; initially they were critical of the nationalist movement, and later they became vocal supporters of it. Supporting “popular culture” was a strategic move by the newspapers in Kerala. The newspaper titled “Malayali” made its entry into the social realm of Kerala during the period of the revolutionary movement against non-Kerala Brahmins who migrated from outside of Kerala to work in government positions. The agitations were led by Nairs and they demanded that the government put an end to Brahmin domination in government appointments. This enabled Nairs to get job opportunities in the government. In this time, the “Malayali” newspaper appeared in to the scene with articles which actively supported and became the voice of the movement. The “Malayali” helped to strengthen the movement by campaigning about its ideology¹². They tried to raise the ‘Malayali’ consciousness among the people through writings but finally the campaigns were only concentrated in the region of Travancore. In 1903, Ramakrishna Pillai, a nationalist writer started writing in the “Malayali”. He had earlier written articles against the divans and their rule and this was considered an attack on the authority through words. Ramakrishna Pillai and his style of writing became very popular during that period. Since, his writings focused on the issue of nationalism, he was invited by Vakkam Maulavi, the publisher of Swadeshabhimani Newspaper for the position of Chief editor and later Ramakrishna Pillai came to be known as Swadeshabhimani, (Nationalist) Ramakrishna Pillai¹³.

¹² Raghavan, *Kerala Pathrapravarthana Charithram*, 144-146

¹³ Raghavan, *Kerala Pathrapravarthana Charithram*, 144-145

Dinesh Varma observes that Swadeshabhimani never criticised British colonialism directly but the editor Ramakrishnapillai wrote articles against Brahmin landlords and the casteist domination of Brahmins in the administrative bodies ¹⁴. Swadeshabhimani was successful in introducing nationalist ideology among the people. The editor Ramakrishnapillai who was also known as Swadeshabhimani was sent out of Travancore by the king's order. The "Swadeshabhimani" newspaper, in many ways, was the voice of the freedom movement and it had an enormous role in British Kerala in those times. Later, many newspapers emerged in support of the freedom movement and this could help the people in their perception of nationalism.

The newspaper titled "Swarad" was published in the period 1920-22 by A K Barister Pillai. "Swarad" published articles against British colonial rule and landlords in Kerala. This newspaper's writing was based on Marxist ideology and talked about how capitalist work denies the working class their rights. Therefore, "Swarad" spread the Marxist ideology among the readers in this period.

Interestingly, one of the magazines started by Brahmin youths in colonial Kerala were titled "Unninamboothiri" (A young Namboothiri Brahmin). They wrote revolutionary articles for the upliftment of the community and in support of the freedom of Namboothiri Brahmin women. Nair writers also contributed to this newspaper. This magazine did not focus on social issues such as education for the lower castes and casteism in society. It may be argued that although Brahmins were part of progressive intellectual activities and movements, their politics was caste blind and did not take the Dalits and lower castes in to account.

¹⁴ Varma, *Pathrapravarthanam: VazhiyumVasthuthayum*, 28.

Contemporary Newspapers of the Ant caste Movement

The presence of anti- caste movement in the print history of Kerala is unknown where the Sreenarayana Guru's disciples had an active role in the society during that time. "Vivekodayam" was another newspaper, published by Sreenarayan Dharmapariipalanayogam and edited by poet and activist Kumaranasan who belonged to the Ezhava community¹⁵. This newspaper was meant to spread the teachings of Sreenarayana Guru. "Vivekodayam" was the voice of the lower caste community at that time. The peculiarity of this newspaper was the argumentative articles of Sreenarayana Guru. He talked about education for all irrespective of caste, which during that time was a radical thought. Kumaranasan argued that avarnas and savarnas must be encouraged to receive education together in a class room. His argument was criticised by the then government and the "Swadeshabhimani". It is clear from this that "Swadeshabhimani" may have been focussed on issues of nationalism but otherwise supported caste and practices of untouchability.

"Vivekodayam" introduced the writings of Aristotle, Karline, Emerson and Arelious in a language that could be easily understood by the common readers. It also incorporated writings on various religions including discourses on the Quran, Geeta and the Bible. Kumaranasan, the editor, regularly focused on the writings of Hindu philosophers such as Vivekananda and Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Kumaranasan was clearly invested in Hinduism and his writings against the caste system were reformist in nature¹⁶.

¹⁵ Priyadarshan, *Sahodaran Ayyappan: Prakshobhakariyaya Pathrapraarthakan*, 37-39

¹⁶ Raghavan, *Kerala Pathrpravarthana Charithram*, 178-180

“Vivekodayam” was also the first newspaper that was started by people of the lower caste communities.

“Malayala Manorama”

“Malayala Manorama” was registered as a company in 1888 by Varghese Mappila¹⁷. This was the first newspaper company. During this time, the people of Kerala did not own a single printing press or paper mill. “Malayala Manorama” was the first to start a printing press in 1890 from where the daily was printed and published. Manorama declared that they were secular and their work did not favour any particular caste or religious community. They claim that their first editorial was on “Pulaya education” and later they published articles on lower caste communities in the state, “caste-based conflicts” and “Mohammadiar in Travancore¹⁸”.

“Malayalam Manorama” started a new phase in reporting news in the form of popular journalism in the 1980s. They started reporting incidents of murder, rape, local, national and international politics. This nature of reporting helped Manorama increase their circulation. As a result, it stayed on as their dominant form of journalism. Soon enough, all Malayalam newspapers followed in the path of popular journalism. It must be noted that media also represents and protects the caste, class, economic, religious and political interests of both their parent institutions as well as society at large.

The cultural capital and political economy of newspapers in Kerala

The cultural history of newspaper in Kerala cannot be studied without understanding the social history of the communities in Kerala. The history of newspapers also speaks of the cultural capital and political economy of the communities of those who engaged

¹⁷ Raghavan, Pathrapravathana, 50

¹⁸ “The Legend of Maathukuttychaayan,” Open The Magazine, December 16, 2015, <https://openthemagazine.com/lounge/books/the-legend-of-maathukuttychaayan/>.

with the print culture of the state. Therefore, the politics of time and history of Kerala could also be understood as the history of the cultural capital of the newspaper industry.

Christian missionaries introduced the newspaper to the state, and later included the people of Kerala, especially those of the Syrian Christian community. They also gave space to the Hindu upper caste educated persons to write articles in the newspapers. The newspaper started a revolution in Kerala by creating an awareness amongst the people about the importance of education. It helped people receive education and acquire the ability to read and write; however, this was reserved for people of the privileged castes. This throws some light on the social and political condition of the state at the time of the emergence of newspapers, but this is often absent from the written history of newspapers.

News writers from Kerala worked with British newspapers such as the “Western Star”. Later, they became independent writers and started their own newspapers. They had immense influence on the people’s thoughts. People also had influence on the content of the newspapers. Being able to read and write for newspapers became a question of social status during the time and continues to be so till date. Making a newspaper unit and writing articles became the passion for the young educated upper caste men. Newspaper dailies in Kerala were both a domestic and public thing. Here the question is, who constitute the “people” that were engaged in the production of newspapers. Thus, the political economy of newspaper in Kerala lay between the colonial and local hierarchies.

According to Gopal Guru, the exclusion of Dalits was evident in India's print media just as it was in all of the country's social and governmental institutions. This exclusion, whether internal or external, strongly implies that Dalits are illiterate in terms of

linguistic skills, if not in terms of substance and ideas. However, this denied viewers a “alternative” interpretation of the topics being covered in the media.¹⁹ The exclusion of Dalits in print media shows the lack of cultural capital among the Dalits. Guru notes that these tendencies have not been paid attention to by the academia and the anxiety about lack of knowledge and ability amongst Dalits continues to persist. He further argues that the lack of Dalit presence in media, especially in the print media has to be addressed. Thus, this chapter fundamentally focuses on the historical causes underlying the absence and erasure of the Dalit from print media through a mapping of the history of print in Kerala and the scribing culture.

The introduction of print culture in the state of Kerala helped people receive education and engulfed them in paper. They gradually learned how to read and write in colonial Kerala. Thus, the colonial modern emerged in Kerala itself. The colonial modern space in Kerala followed the western practices and it communicated through the English language. The engagement with print in Kerala was dominated by certain communities. The government started schools for the first time in India in Travancore by the order of Rani Parvathi Bai in 1817. Soon schools were also started in Cochin and Malabar. Unfortunately, the government did not make education accessible to lower caste communities; at the time, education was only allowed for upper castes in Kerala. However, print culture made this move possible in Kerala. The missionary schools did religious conversion as well as making attempts to spread consciousness amongst the lower caste. These tendencies were an effort to raise the consciousness towards dignified life of the untouchables in that time.

¹⁹ Gopal Guru, “The Indian Nation in Its Egalitarian Conception,” *Dalit Studies*, n.d., pp. 31-50, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822374312-002>.

Robin Jeffrey says in India there is nearly total absence of Dalits from Indian print media.²⁰ The print media of Kerala misinterprets the news concerning Dalits and the newspaper language itself excludes Dalit issues. The major reasons behind the exclusion of Dalits from the media is the combination of modernity and political economy, and to some the biased reading of aesthetic notions and body language. The reality can be re-presented by a media producer to construct a text which creates popularity. Representation has been associated with aesthetics notions. The media follows their own hidden politics to address issues. According to C.P Scott “facts are sacred; comment is free”.²¹ Media has to prioritise public interest over narrow interests. Newspapers in Kerala have considerable power to influence public opinion. The power of influence is established through readership of people who are also part of the history of making print and its culture in Kerala. They influence people’s perception and play a significant role in helping them shape their opinions. Therefore, a relationship is established between the readers and the newspapers. For instance, most people make a habit of reading and following the same newspaper. This relationship could be understood as a complex with each influencing the other; an ideological thread being drawn between the two. The meaning of the news is created from the interaction between a text and its readers. In this sense, readers in Kerala can be classified on the basis of ideology. Some people follow the ideology of the newspaper and others choose their newspapers according to their ideology and political affiliations.

Historicizing the print culture of Kerala involves not only understanding the material history of print but also its close association with the cultural and political economy of

²⁰ Robin Jeffrey, “Testing Concepts about Print, Newspapers, and Politics: Kerala, India, 1800–2009,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 68, no. 02 (2009): p. 465, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0021911809000679>.

²¹ “CP Scott's Centenary Essay,” *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, October 23, 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainability/cp-scott-centenary-essay>.

the print industry as well. There is a need to combine political economy to contextualize the spatiality of the communities who are involved in the making of print in Kerala. Cultural, economic, social and political dimensions intersect with Kerala's print culture.

The writings on the history of print in Kerala have been documented well and clearly show the involvement of the people and the communities who have been part of making of print and who owned its capital. The colonial missionaries and the upper caste from Hindu and Christian communities had immense role in Kerala's print history. Therefore, it may be argued that print and scribing culture are closely associated with caste locations. The question of absence of Dalits in this history is merely a question because caste decides the history of the people in India. In this chapter, I attempt to discuss the parallel history of Dalits in the making of news print in Kerala, thereby historicizing the place of Dalits in the history of print.

“Swadeshabhimani”

The “Swadeshabhimani” and its chief editor Ramakrishna Pillai are well known for their political journalism in colonial Kerala. Ramakrishna Pillai and his writings are documented widely by historians and journalists. “Swadeshabhimani” and its politics has widely been promoted as revolutionary intervention in Ramakrishna Pillai's writings. This can also be understood from many of the writings by historians and journalists from Kerala, who admire the political writings of Ramakrishna Pillai. “Swadeshabhimani” had written an editorial in September, 1901, criticising the temple custom where Nair women had to attend a temple festival without their upper cloth. This writing received wide publicity and the king issued an order to stop the custom. According to the order, rituals such as *ezhunnallippu* inside the temple include only

those who are interested in *bhakti*. Thus Nair women participating in the rituals without upper cloth does not harm them in any way but the situation is different in big festivals like *aarattu* and *vetta* where people of other castes participate in the event. On such festive days, Nair women were exposed to the eyes of “outsiders”. Therefore, the editorial ends with the request to the king Sree Moolam Thirunaal to stop such practices, and this resulted in the order to stop the custom. It is also clear that the issue discussed in the editorial is more of a caste issue, rather than a feminist issue, and reflects the anxieties of the Nair community. The newspaper therefore was a medium for the Nair community. The issue was not that Nair women’s bodies were exposed, since it was argued that Nair women could be bare bodied inside the premises of the temple, which was accessible only to the Nairs and upper castes. However, the problem was that their bodies were exposed in front of lower castes when during festivals outside the premises of the temple. “Swadeshabhimani” was therefore only representing the narrow interests of the Nair patriarchy. Moreover, it must be remembered that it was during this time that lower caste women were not allowed to wear the upper cloth, irrespective of who their body was being exposed to. This shows how women were treated differently in Kerala and how media and the authorities denied the struggles of the lower caste women to cover their upper body towards a dignified existence.

“Swadeshabhimani” and its editor Ramakrishna Pillai have historically been celebrated and romanticized by writers from Kerala as “a revolutionary newspaper”. But this chapter argues that “Swadeshabhimani” was in fact the voice of the Nair community and did not represent all of Kerala. It wrote about the discrimination faced by the Nair community from the upper castes. However, it remained silent about anti-caste movements. Ramakrishna Pillai in fact had famously written an article against reservation for the lower castes.

Print history of Kerala often mentions Christianity and the proselytising practices of colonial missionaries. This has been the prime focus of many analyses. However, the Hindu upper caste and their association with the history of print in Kerala have not been interpreted in relation to their religion. For instance, the scribing culture of the Hindu upper caste has been considered as “Malayali” to authenticate their indigeneness. They have historically been recognised as Malayali writers and social revolutionaries. However, caste Hindus had an immense role in the making of print and their movements have been romanticized as representative of Malayali and Kerala society and culture. Here it becomes important to understand how they evolved as a movement and became part of print making. Puthupally Raghavan²² noted that the Savarna castes were inspired by the lower caste movements against caste practices and they started their movement against Brahmins. Such a movement was led by the Nair youths from Maharajas College, Ernakulum. Their dissent was against the state’s policy towards recruiting and appointing Brahmins (who migrated from other states of India) for the officer posts.

News Writing against Brahmin Dominance

The very idea of this movement is different from that of anti-caste movements because of certain reasons. First of all, it was a progressive move against Brahminical dominance but only over the caste Hindu Nair community. It failed to make a universal argument against caste-based dominance. They were specifically disgruntled about the unemployment of Nair candidates. Thus, this movement cannot be considered an anti-caste movement. Moreover, this movement is very important to understand how communities are engaged in print history and build their cultural shift. This cultural shift focused on the Nair community’s welfare which has resulted in the formation of

²² Raghavan, *Kerala Pathrapravarthana*, 122

an organization called Malayali Social Union and later named as Thiruvithamkoor Malayali Sabha. This organization was considered as the first organization among caste Hindu communities. Thiruvithamkoor Malayalisabha was focused solely towards their community's future which led to the establishment of a newspaper of their own called "Malayali".

The "Malayali"

The name of this newspaper itself reflects its politics which made a big impact on the cultural shift of the people of Kerala. This name was given with the intention to reach to the people of Kerala. On studying their stories, the title "Malayali" was a misnomer since it represented the issues of the caste Hindu Nair community when Brahmins were recruited from outside Kerala. To claim the title of "Malayali" was strategic in terms of secularizing their claims, while continuing to fight for their community's honour. This was reflected in their editorial titled as "Njangal" and it aimed to make an impact on the people. The articles appeared to take a neutral position, claiming to speak for instance for both the "kudiyar" as well as the landlord. Subsequently, the "Malayali" and the Malayali Sabha equally influenced each other's growth. "Malayali"'s strategic coverage of the activities of the Malayali Sabha had the latter receive wide acceptance from the people of Travancore. The government, under the control of Brahmin officers, made deliberate hindrances to stop the "Malayali" by starting parallel newspapers/magazines. The government also implemented a rule that disallowed its employees from engaging with the newspaper and its politics. This law targeted the "Malayali" and the Malayali Sabha as well. All the editors of the "Malayali" were from the Nair community. The publication of "Malayali" however did not stop printing and engaged with a lot of social movements. Eventually, "Malayali" underwent a great transformation, diversifying from newspaper to magazine, weekly etc. It was published

from different places and it had a large number of employees. Interestingly, the Nair Service Society (NSS) authenticated the “Malayali” and its publication as their community magazine in the year 1960. Since then, the Nair Service Society (NSS) has taken ownership of “Malayali” as a cultural representative of their community, although it stopped publishing altogether. It is very interesting to see how the caste Hindu community intervened in the printmaking culture although it was the Syrian Christians who were involved in its early years. These two communities and their privileges allowed them to have autonomy in the scribing culture. Thus, the Christian and Hindu religion had a vital role in the print history of Kerala.

The Construction of Language in News Writing

A number of scholarly works have been done in the area of newspaper language by reporters in the print media. Their focus has largely been on the politics of the language, chosen by the newspaper. They studied how newspapers started by writing in English and eventually shifted to the Malayalam language etc. These writings help us to understand the history of language in news writing and the development/changes of the language and writing as well. The colonial Christian missionaries started printing and publishing newspapers/magazines in the English language. V P Subair ²³ writes how Christian missionaries made the shift to Malayalam and since then how Malayalam printing has evolved. He says that, “Christain missionaries learned Malayalam to reach the local people with their preachings.” This transformation took place through different stages, including the shift from old Malayalam, a form of the language connected to Tamil and Sanskrit to the later usage of local slang in writing. The

²³ V P Subair, *Malayala Pathrabhasha Vikasa Parinamangal*”. (Kochi: Kerala Press Academy, 2013), 5-15.

Malayalam dictionary helped Christian missionaries translate the Bible into Malayalam. They adopted a particular writing style in the newspapers/magazines with the intention of proselytising the Christian religion. The writings included criticisms on colonial rule, local news and the Bible. Simultaneously, they used Sanskrit slokas on the front page of the newspaper/magazine. This might have been included to create a familiarity with the upper castes, especially the Brahmins who were well-versed with Sanskrit and the Hindu texts. Only the educated dominant castes could then access, read and understand the newspaper and its language.

The Sanskrit basis of the old Malayalam script meant that a wider readership could not be created. Once the Christian missionaries identified this limitation, they attempted to delink Malayalam from Sanskrit. This was a turning point in print history because Malayalam newspaper writing then invented a new writing style which was close to the verbal language.

Anti- caste New Writing Culture and its Impacts

Sahodaran Ayyappan was the revolutionary social reformer who worked to transform the society as casteless. He was also a follower of Srinarayana Guru thought and philosophy. Sahodaran Ayyapan's efforts against caste system was also through writing in the Sahodaran Newspaper and he propagated the anti- caste movement in Kerala.

“Sahodaran”

The newspaper titled “Sahodaran” has a different history from others. This newspaper evolved as part of anti-caste movement in Kerala and was started by Sahodaran Ayyappan. In the year 1917 Sahodaran Ayyappan founded Sahodara Sangam, an organization to launch his fight against the Caste system and related social evils prevailed in Southern Kerala. On May 30, 1917, at the home of Ayyappan's nephew

Raman Pillai, he hosted an inter-dining occasion known as *Misrabhojanam*, a feast when members of all castes met and dined together under one roof. At the time, this was a revolutionary initiative, and the traditional Ezhava community rejected it. Around 200 people, including those from the untouchable Pulaya caste, attended the feast. For his efforts, he was given the mocking moniker Pulayan Ayyappan, which he graciously accepted. In furthermore, the founding of the Sahodara Sangam gained him the moniker Sahodaran Ayyappan, by which he was subsequently known. The “Sahodaran” periodical was started and edited by him. Yuktivada Sangham, Kerala's first rationalist group, was founded in 1935 in part thanks to him. Sahodaran was the journal's editor.

Inter-caste marriage was encouraged by Ayyappan because it was crucial for fostering goodwill and cooperation amongst various cultures. He declared the goal and mission that “Sahodaran” is caste and religion-free in the very first issue.²⁴ He also asserted that everyone should bring love and respect for one another before caste. He supported secularism as well. As a religion that fosters a greater moral consciousness based on humanist ideals, Buddhism, according to Ayyappan, will have a significant positive impact on human morality. He thought that Buddhism may help humanity build human greatness and independence as well as world peace and cooperation. Ayyappan was introduced to Buddhism in this context as the ideological foundation for his fight against casteism and injustice. His rational approach was founded on Buddhism's critique of Hinduism and its denial of casteism. Through his radical political democratic initiatives and rationalist practises, he transformed Keralan culture and society. He also questioned and even challenged the societal ills that existed there. His poems, articles, and editorials are outstanding classics in their respective genres. He was the one who

²⁴ Priyadarshan, G. *Prakshobhakariyaya Pathrapravarthakan*. (Thrissur: Kerala Sahitya Academy, 1991), 41-48.

established the norms and fashion for journalism and writing in Malayalam. He created logical prose and clear, compassionate poetry in Malayalam for the contemporary, democratic era. His writings represent a fundamental transition away from the old debauched and Sanskritic savarna vocabulary and toward a clear, straightforward expression that is appropriate for the humanistic, democratic, and dynamic period.

Ayyappan burnt effigies of Brahmins (complete with the sacred thread) as an effective method to propagate anti-caste values. People raised slogans such as “down with caste devil” and beat drums as they took out processions. On one instance, Ayyappan and the people carried the effigy with a procession along the same temple road where the lower caste Ezhava people were not allowed to walk because the road was occupied by Saraswat Brahmin traders. On reaching the temple grounds, they burnt the effigy; the burning was accompanied by music and crackers. Ayyappan also made a speech against casteism.²⁵ As an educated Hindu lower caste man, Ayyappan used his privileges to enter the temple grounds and used that space to propagate “anti-caste” ideas to the public.

Sahodara Prasthanam was a remarkable anti-caste movement in Kerala during the early 20th century. A few members from the Ezhava caste were very active along with Ayyappan in this movement, and they were also socially boycotted by the community organization called Vidhyavardhini and labelled as “Pula chovans” which means a mix of men from Pulaya and Ezhava community and it was used derogatory against the movement. It is important to look at how Dalit caste names were used (and continue to be used) as abuse to humiliate a person and the community.

²⁵ Ibid., 13

Public Sphere and the Cultural Capital of the Communities

The cultural capital of the communities can be understood by observing their historical engagement in the public sphere especially in the writing and print making. The dominant caste Christian communities had played a vital role in working with missionaries and engaging in the print making of Kerala.

“Nasrani Deepika Newspaper”

The newspaper titled “Nasrani Deepika”²⁶ was started by Syrian Christian missionaries of Kerala. This was the first newspaper by Christians which did not involve any western missionaries in its production and publication. This newspaper was started under the leadership of a priest called Valiya Chandy Achan at Maannanam Kottayam.²⁷ “Deepika” aimed at becoming a newspaper for the local Malayali community across all sections of its society. Also they were against using English language as the official language for government affairs. They argued in their writing that Malayalam should be the official language of Kerala and the government should use Malayalam language to establish its importance. “Deepika” played an important role in giving Malayalam a central role in Kerala society.

Primarily, “Deepika” was an initiative by the Syrian Christian community and its aim was to focus on the socio-cultural and political development of the Syrian Christian community. However, this newspaper got attention from the public because of its interest in the social and political life of the people in general.²⁸ Deepika had a set of prominent writers as their regular columnists such as Kerala Varma Valiyakoythampuran, A R Rajaraja Varma, Muloor, I C Chacko, K C Keshavapilla,

²⁶Nasrani Deepika had started in 1887 april 15th at Mannanam,Kottayam.

²⁷Puthupaally Raghavan P 57

²⁸Puthupally Raghavan P 59

Mahakavi Kattakkayam, Oduvil Kunjikirishnamenon, Anthappayi, and Nidheekarikkal Manikkathanaar. All of these writers, including the kings started writing in the newspaper such as “Nasrani Deepika” which was started to propagate Christianity and motivate people to convert into Christianity and this became a noticeable contradiction. This also clearly reveals Nasrani Deepika’s cultural capital and how it was accepted as a newspaper by the public.

Regional Politics and Newspapers

It was quite interesting that the news writing and its politics had changed by the time of late 19th century in Kerala. The notable change was the newspapers had changed its prime focus from religious/conversion propaganda to Kerala regional politics. They have asserted Kerala as a regional state and Malayalam as regional language. This resulted in initiating newspaper publishing with the names which associated with Kerala and Malayalam such as “Kerala Deepakam”, “Malaylamithram”, “Thiruvithamkoor Abhimani” and “Kerala Chandrika”.²⁹

In this situation, a newspaper was started which claims to be the first newspaper in Malayalam language³⁰, started in the first January of 1881. It was not owned by a Malayali and but by Devji Bhimji who migrated to Kerala and was brought up in Kerala by a businessman. He is the person who started a printing press called Kerala Mithram and published Hindu religious texts like *Sri Rama Karnamrutham* and *Venkita Kalyanam*. But later, the Kochi government asked him to get permission for all the printing works of Kerala Mithram printing press before publishing it. This situation was resolved when he submitted an application to the resident officer (British) for removal of such surveillance by the Kochi government. Further, he continued the newspaper

²⁹PuthupallyRaghavan P 63

³⁰According to Perunna K N Nair: MalayalapatrathinteKadha 1976,p15.

“Kerala Mithram” for 15 years. He was well accepted by the historians and the journalists from Kerala.³¹

Social Reformations and the Malayalam Newspapers

In the second half of the nineteenth century drastic changes took place at the level of socio-economic relations in Kerala. The concept of Kerala as a geographical entity has not yet come to exist whereas it was divided into three princely states, Travancore, Cochin and the British administered Malabar. As early as 1792, caste-based slavery was abolished in Malabar due to the imperial governing policies and more or less people belong to the lower castes were admitted to the schools and later on they were able to get various jobs in the British administrative system.

The situation prevailed in Travancore and Cochin was considerably different; both princely states followed the Brahminical rules which restricted the social mobility of the lower caste subjects oppressing them into the rigid structures of the caste fold. Lower castes in Kerala were the ones who advocated for enlightenment. Kerala's reformation efforts were led by Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, and others who belonged to caste groups who were viewed as lower in society during the nineteenth century. From the early mediaeval era onward, caste slavery was an oppressive, discriminatory, and exploitative system in Kerala. The bonded or forced labour system was an inescapable component of slavery in Kerala's socioeconomic framework. Due to the feudal associations of the bonded labour system, the state developed social structures based on land. The majority of lower caste movements placed more emphasis on the necessity for the caste system's elimination than on its reformation.

³¹Puthuppally Raghavan, *Kerala Pathrpravarthana Charithram*, 54-61

Christian missionary activities helped to promote education among the lower castes; they founded printing presses and journals as early as 1847 which helped the natives to come across news from around the world leading to the broadening of horizons of knowledge and sense of justice. New philosophies encouraged the populace, and the Europeans rejected the fundamental social systems of caste and slavery in Indian culture in the new spirit of critical thinking and rationalism. For the advancement of oozhiyam (bonded labour) servants in Kerala, the missionaries pressured the government to enact a number of social laws. Numerous low caste schools were established by the British, and many low caste pupils were accepted to them. These schools provided vocational education. Additionally, the European engagement ended India's intellectual isolation and gave the socio-religious reform movements in India a boost.³² The colonial economy, administrative machinery, religious activities, and education were the main methods utilised by colonialism to subjugate Kerala's ancient sociopolitical and economic structures. The actions of British administrators sped up the state's social transformation process and improved living conditions for the poorest members of society. They supported the weaker groups' campaigns to win civil liberties. The British had a fairly compassionate attitude toward the oppressed classes, which led to the development of various ameliorating measures in the nineteenth century, including social laws and the opening of schools for the castes who were underrepresented in society. Second part of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of lower caste movements on different levels against the social injustices prevalent in the princely states of Travancore and Cochin. In the year 1855, the Maharaja of Travancore abolished slavery and in 1859 came out the proclamation allowing the lower caste women to wear melmundu or upper cloth, the white colour

³² Robin Jeffrey, *Politics, Women and Well-Being: How Kerala Became 'A Model'*. (New York: Oxford, 1992), 1-10.

cloth used for covering the upper body of women. The lower caste women were not allowed to wear the Melmundu or uppercloth . After the rigorous struggles fought for years by different communities of the lower castes in Kerala in the year 1865 another proclamation came out allowing the lower caste people to use public roads.

In Kerala, the colonial era saw the emergence of several socio-religious reform movements, which were also among the first mass democratic movements. Though there was a subtext of militancy in these movements, they were mostly nonviolent and peaceful. These protests were extremely important since Kerala had endured the caste system in its most repressive form for centuries. Because of the tight caste structure and nonsensical social taboos, the lower classes were not only "untouchable," but also "unapproachable." In Malabar, the caste system continued to define a person's social status and economic ability even after direct British administration began and the caste system was cut off from the government's control.

Sri Narayana Guru, a prominent avarna saint and social reformer, led one of the most significant social reform campaigns. He spoke out vociferously against the Brahmin hegemony and the severe societal disadvantages experienced by the Ezhavas and other lower castes. The Ezhavas and Thiyyas quickly gathered at Sri Narayana Guru as a focal point for organisation. On May 15, 1903, the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP), also known as the association for the spread of Sri Narayana's moral teachings, was established. Ayyankali, who was born into the untouchable Pulaya community in Travancore, a princely kingdom that remained staunchly traditional under the grip of caste oligarchy, started his emancipatory mission by challenging a range of purity-birth based charges. In 1893, he rode a bullock cart with brass bells while donning a white lungi, white waistcoat, white shawl, white turban, and a huge moustache. Ayyankali's bullock cart provoked the fury of caste oligarchs who tried to

stop him at various locations, resulting in violent conflicts. Riding bullock carts was thought to be an upper-caste privilege in Kerala. His active action against caste abuses also rocked Dalit communities' complacency because they mainly relied on higher castes for employment and subsistence.

English educated Nair community members in Travancore found that most of the higher administrative posts in the kingdom of Travancore were reserved for Tamil Brahmins. They formed an organization called Malayali Sabha and started a Malayalam daily called “Malayali” in the year 1886. In the beginning years C.V. Raman Pillai contributed most of the articles for the newspaper, later he himself became the chief editor and the newspaper “Malayali” became popular in the Travancore among the Nair community. Malayali influenced the activities of the organization Malayali Sabha, a Nair organization which submitted a mass petition known as Malayali Memorial to the Raja of Travancore in the year 1891 against the discriminatory policies of Travancore state in selecting the candidates in the state administrative posts.

“Vivekodayam”

In the year 1904, SNDP founded a Malayalam monthly magazine called “Vivekodayam”. SNDP general secretary, Kumaran Asan was the chief editor. “Vivekodayam” promoted the emancipatory ideals of Sri Narayana Guru. It was widely circulated among the Ezhava community and continued the publication for almost fifteen years perpetuating the need of education, social mobility of lower castes and importance of economic upheaval of the community. Guru believed self-empowerment as the key for transformation and insisted on the importance of educating women for the overall development of the society. “Vivekodayam” published articles on the need of education without caste or gender bias to reform the society.

“Mitavadi”

“Mitavadi” was founded by a trader named Sivasankaran in the year 1908 from Telechery. Moorkoth Kumaran, an Ezhava social reformer was the chief editor and most of the journalistic ventures it brought about were against the caste oppression and associated social injustices prevailed in the early 20th century Kerala. Kumaran Asan published his poem "Veenapoovu" in "Mitavadi" in the year 1917. Later C Krishnan became the editor. He was a leading proponent of the revolutionary socialist reforms that Sree Narayana Guru advocated for the improvement of Kerala's millions of underprivileged people. He earned the moniker Mithavadi (minimalist) from the publication he ran from 1913 to 1938 to propagate the reformatory movement's ideas.³³ He accepted British rule because he had doubts about the viability of national freedom without addressing social inequality. He promoted the initiatives of Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP), an organisation founded to fight for the progressive ideas that Guru articulated for the social uplift of the underprivileged, in the Malabar region. “Mitavadi” was circulated among the backward community of Thiyyas so it was ridiculed by the upper castes as the Bible of Thiyyas. "Mitavadi" expressed its disapproval of the ruling classes in Travancore and Cochin through editorials when they passed legislation that oppressed the weaker groups of the population. It also emphasised that rather than kings or other powerful individuals, the people were the real landowners. Through its editorials, it compared the Russian tsars who were ousted during the October revolution to the King of Travancore.

³³ <http://keralamediaacademy.org/archives/?q=content/mithavadi-c-krishnan>

“Kerala Kaumudi”

“Kerala Kaumudi” was founded in the year 1911 by C.V. Kunhiraman, an Ezhava social reformer from Kollam. Most of his life he was influenced by the teachings of Sri Narayana Guru. “Kerala Kaumudi” was launched as a weekly newspaper. His early career as a journalist began with writing articles for “Sujana Nandini”, a weekly newspaper founded by Paravoor Kesavan Ashan. Kunhiraman participated actively in the educational and social events of Sivagiri Mutt as a follower of Narayana Guru. In the years 1924–1925, he participated in the Vaikom Satyagraha, a social movement against untouchability centred on the Shiva temple in Vaikom. He persisted in taking part in the protests that led to the 1936 Temple Entry Proclamation. In 1928–1929 and 1931–1922, he worked as the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam's general secretary. At Vellamanal, Mayyanad, and Quilon in Travancore, he founded and served as headmaster of a school for Hindus of low caste. He was a member of the first Indian legislature to be chosen by the people, the Sree Moolam Popular Assembly of Travancore. In Travancore, India, the predecessor legislative council was established in 1888 with 8 appointed members. Sree Moolam Thirunal Ramavarma, who assumed the throne on March 30, 1888, became king of Travancore in 1886. To promote more public involvement in governance, the Sree Moolam Popular Assembly (also known as Sree Moolam Praja Sabha in the local language) was established in 1904 with 88 members. Over the span of more than a century, Kerala Kaumudi has developed and diversified into numerous media channels.

“Deshabhimani”

“Deshabhimani” was founded by T.K.Madhavan and K.P.Kayyalakal in the year 1915. T.K. Narayanan was appointed as the chief editor. Like “Sujana Nandini” and “Kerala

Kaumudi”, “Deshabhimani” also catered to the sentiments of Ezhavas and it mainly circulated among the Ezhava community. T.K Madhavan was the original architect behind the Vaikom Satyagraha. In 1918, he bravely presented a resolution to the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha, Travancore's legislative assembly, asking for permission to enter temples and the right to worship for everyone, regardless of caste or group. Castes were the only foundation upon which Keralan society was founded. Kerala's social articulation and political mobilisation were significantly influenced by castes. As a result, it recognised both the system of forced labour and the division of work. Kerala's entire society was rigorously segregated based on castes. The traditional Brahminical values of cleanliness and pollution shaped Kerala's societal structure. Different types of social injustices and economic exploitation, such as untouchability and slavery. “Deshabhimani” rigorously fought against the Brahminical-casteist policies of the Travancore government.

“Mathrubhumi”

“Mathrubhumi”, the self-proclaimed voice of India's movement for independence, is one of the leading Malayalam newspapers. The first edition of “Mathrubhumi” was released on March 18, 1923, the day before the first anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi’s initial imprisonment by British authorities. “Mathrubhumi” was intended to promote the message of the great National Movement under the direction of K.P. Kesava Menon, a well-known freedom fighter, as Editor and K. Madhavan Nair, the organization's managing director. The newspaper's first week of publication consisted of just one edition from Kozhikode (Calicut). “Mathrubhumi” was created as a result of the unwavering fervour of independence fighters, later evolved into an essential component

of Kerala's social structure.³⁴ “Mathrubhumi”’s history is also similar to other newspapers such as “Mithavadi” and its nationalist interest. However, “Mathrubhumi” claims that they were the only newspaper who did not associate with the British during the colonial period.

“Madhyamam Daily”

“Madhyamam” newspaper was started in 1987 at Calicut district of Kerala. Vaikom Muhammed Basheer witnessed the emergence of “Madhyamam” and K C Abdullah, P K Balakrishnan and K A Kodungallur were behind the emergence of the newspaper. “Madhyamam” claims that they are run by the Ideal Publication Trust which believes in people-centered value-based journalism.³⁵ Madhyamam Media house has an impressive growth though it is the latest newspaper to excel in the mainstream new writing industry and culture. Their international editions extended to the Middle East.

It is understood that “Malayalam Manorama” started a new phase in reporting news as popular journalism in this period. Their stories of reporting included murder, rape, local, national and inter-national politics. This nature of reporting helped Manorama increase their circulation. Manorama has shaped popular journalism in the state. After that, all Malayalam newspapers followed popular journalism. Arguably, the media have to protect their mother institution’s interests in their work; print media is not dealing in politics only but they discuss the wider understanding of politics.

³⁴ About Mathrubhumi, accessed December 28, 2021, <https://media.mathrubhumi.com/static/AboutMathrubhumi.html>.

³⁵ “History,” Madhyamam, accessed December 28, 2022, <https://www.madhyamam.com/aboutus/history>.

Conclusion

This chapter is a vital part of the thesis because it draws the history of print culture in Kerala. It discusses how print was evolved in Kerala and how it shaped the Malayali public. The socio- political aspect in the print culture of Kerala is an important subject to be discussed when any thing is related to print has been considered for the study. Here, it is not only discussing the history of the newspaper rather the history gives us the picture of political economy of the communities in Kerala. It is clear that who owns the print culture in Kerala and who are the beneficiaries of this culture.

Chapter 4

Caste and Gender Politics of Representation in Print Media: Analysis of Malayalam News Writings on Violence against Dalit Women

This chapter is the detailed analysis of the selected reports on violence against Dalit women in Kerala from the period of 2000 to 2010. It focuses on the cases of violence where Dalit women had participated in anti-caste movements and questioning the caste based discrimination. This is to understand how stories on Dalit women who questioned caste through their life have been written in the Malayalam newspapers, especially the mainstream newspapers. These women engaged in protests in different ways for equal rights and space. This chapter argues how acts of collective violence were performed against Dalit women and how print culture reproduced this collective violence in the public sphere. Here, the analysis of caste and gender politics in Malayalam news writing is undertaken on the basis of news reports on particular cases. The data for this analysis is taken from newspapers such as “Malayala Manorama”, “Mathrubhumi”, “Madhayamam”, “Deshabhimani” and “Kerala Kaumudi”. Each of these newspapers has its own readership based on a particular political interest. Thus, this chapter looks deeply into the reports to understand how they have discussed caste and gender violence against Dalit women when they resisted caste hierarchies. The chapter specifically looks at such incidents where Dalit women faced attacks for taking a political stand on the caste question. Select issues such as the institutional murder of Dalit student Rajani S Anand, the struggle of Dalit woman auto rickshaw driver Chrithralekha who claimed her right to public space and employment and questioned caste atrocity against her, sexual harassment against women who participated in the Chengara land struggle and the women who were in DHRM (Dalit Human Rights Movement). Caste violence is

visible in these incidents but this study analyses how these particular issues have been discussed in the newspapers which play a vital role in the making of public and political consciousness of the Malayali public sphere. Caste and gender violence can be understood in these selected cases in which Dalit women collectively and individually fought against caste.

The Story of Rajani S Anand

Rajani S Anand was a Dalit student from Kerala who died by suicide on 22nd July 2004 by jumping from the building of the entrance commissioner (medical and engineering courses) in Trivandrum. She was studying in IHRD Engineering college, Adoor, Kerala. Rajani chose to take admission in the government merit quota. Her tuition fee was remitted by the government but there were no hostel facilities in the college campus and this situation forced her to stay in a private hostel outside her campus. She was only receiving a monthly stipend of Rs 315/- from the Scheduled Caste Development Department. This was not enough to meet her monthly expenses including hostel bill (Rs 1000/-), transportation charges and the cost of study materials etc. Rajani hailed from a poor Dalit family and her father was a daily labourer who worked hard to find the money to survive. He was unable to meet the expenses of Rajani's education. Thus, Rajani and her father approached the banks for a loan but they were denied. She visited the Indian Overseas Bank for the loan and the bank manager was not even ready to give her the application form for loan application. They got the application form finally after meeting the local MLA. Then only she could apply for the loan. Rajani, along with her mother went to the bank at least twenty times to enquire after the status of the loan application. However, later they were told that Rajani was not eligible for the loan because her family owns only 2.5 cents of land which does not meet the eligibility criteria for bank loan. The Reserve Bank of India stated in a circular on educational

loans that "any merit candidate might avail herself of a loan of up to Rs. 4 lakhs for one course without presenting collateral and without collecting interest on the loan until she secures employment."¹ But here, the bank denied the loan for Rajani who was eligible according to the Reserve Bank policy. Her merit was not considered in this situation and the bank demanded security from her which made it difficult for Rajani to continue her education. A landless (non-secured) Dalit woman who had merit was denied education loan by the bank manager. It continues to be extremely difficult for Dalits to get loans from banks, especially for the purposes of education for the bank demands security without which loan applications get rejected. Banks are suspicious whether Dalit students will be able to get jobs and repay their loans. Question of merit is an endless debate in India where people believe that Dalit students come to academic spaces only through reservation. This argument made by people of the non-reserved category negates the merit of Dalits and relates merit with caste. The upper castes' derogatory approach towards Dalit students in academic spaces have dangerously affected the education of the latter.

Caste has not been erased in India. It may seem invisible but has a disturbing presence among the privileged sections. Only the lower caste brings it to the public sphere who are forced to claim the resources from the state. The upper caste privileged argue that this is backward, embarrassing and unfair to those who have earned their position through talent and hard work. They defend merit as if it belongs to them only. Lower caste students access to higher education is not considered merit. Such defenses of merit come from their caste privileges and reproduces inequality. As Ajanta Subramaniam argues in her book *The Caste of Merit*,

¹ Reserve Bank of India - notifications, April 28, 2001, <https://www.rbi.org.in/SCRIPTs/NotificationUser.aspx?Id=369>.

The naturalisation of upper caste merit has not been opposed. The continuance of caste as a structural driver of opportunity and achievement has been highlighted in various ways during the 20th century by constitutional amendments, governmental efforts, and regional politics. Through these interventions, rival ideas of equality have been created that assume the historical accumulation of advantages and disadvantages rather than the formal democracy's level playing field.²

Here, Subramaniam makes a very important argument on the status of merit of upper castes. She criticizes the naturalization of upper caste merit where the presumed idea of the merit is decided by caste. Such a notion is predominant in India. Thus, it is very much present in the public arena and it judges people from lower caste communities and discriminates their entry into academic spaces, the very instrument for Dalits to acquire upward mobility. However, the criticisms against reservation come from such hegemonic naturalization involving complete denial of history exists (in the minds of people where caste is present).

Newspapers play a vital role in shaping public opinion especially when it comes to Kerala. Newspaper is part of the everyday life where people sit at tea shops and read newspaper and discuss the news. This is true even in the villages. The culture of tea drinking is very prominent in Kerala and if people are not able to individually subscribe to the newspaper, they access it from the public. Here the teashop becomes the public sphere for the laymen where they discuss all the news from the media and the gossip too. In this chapter, I look at the newswriting by four main newspapers such as “Malayala Manorama”, “Mathrubhumi”, “Deshabhimani”, “Madhyamam” and “Kerala Kaumudi”, which reported news about Rajani’s case.

² Ajantha Subramanian, *The Caste of Merit: Engineering Education in India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 21.

“Malayala Manorama”

“Malayala Manorama” claims to have the largest subscription among Kerala readers. It reported Rajani’s death like any other media of the day after the incident, including the protest against the government.

The headline of Rajani’s story highlighted the banks’ treatment towards her and her family. According to the report, Rajani was tired because the banks had repeatedly rejected her application for loan and ignored her.³ Rajani’s parents had taken a loan of only Rs 25,000/- from the Service Sahakarana Bank in their village *Panachamoodu*. The small amount could hardly meet the demands of the admission procedure. Later they approached the State Bank of India, Kudappanamood branch but they also refused on account of her family’s financial situation. Her mother was an office bearer of the women’s neighborhood groups and she approached the Gram Panchayat but they could not help because they didn’t have the provisions to loan big amounts. In the end, they approached Indian Overseas Bank’s Puzhanad branch for the loan but they too said no because of her financial status. This situation forced Rajani to fight to apply for the loan in the same bank. She had to get a recommendation letter from the local MLA. Only after that the bank agreed to give her a loan, provided the family could find two government employees as surety. Her family searched and requested people but none of the employees wanted to support her application. Rajani lost all hope to continue her education and ended her life. This report concludes that this situation had pushed Rajani to end her life given she lost her hopes to support her family by getting education and job in future.⁴

³ Correspondent, “Rajaniye Thalarthiyathu Bankukalude Avaganana,” *Malayala Manorma*, July 24, 2004, Thirvanathapuram edition, p. 3.

⁴ Resident Reporter, ed., “Sampathika Budhimuttu Karanam Vidhyarthini Athmahatya Cheythu,” *Malayala Manorama*, July 23, 2004, Thiruvananthapuram edition, sec. Cover Page, pp. 1-1.

The same newspaper had published an editorial on the protests which erupted following Rajani's death.⁵ This story completely contradicted the first story that had been published two days earlier. This editorial's title was "Entinu Keralam Chudanam?"⁶ which one may argue, both attracts and confuses the readers. The article stated that Rajani's death was a big shock to society. It talked about her family's financial situation and how it led her to drop out of her engineering course. It also mentioned that she could not find a way to continue her education with financial support which forced her to end her life. It went on to report the steps taken by the government such as setting up of a judicial enquiry. The editorial alleged that although the opposition party accepted the judicial enquiry, its students' wing was being violent and carrying out hooliganism in the name of protest. The protests were being seen as a conspiracy, well planned and motivated against the government. The protesters destroyed the government offices and burned both government and private vehicles. Banks were attacked. Strikes continued and educational institutions and banks were closed. The editorial places blame on the protesters for causing instability and violence. It also suggests that the government should come forward and suppress this violence against the people, their property and the government offices.

The editorial did not question the injustice which was done towards a Dalit student. Instead, it characterized the protest as vandalism. Rajani was studying in IHRD Engineering College which is self-financed. As a result, the protests turned against the self-financing colleges and their functioning. The editorial very strategically ignored the question of caste and gender. It described Rajani's situation as a poor student and what measures the government should take for such students. This chapter argues that

⁵ Editorial, ed., "Enthinu Keralam Chudanam," *Malayala Manorama* (Kottayam, July 29, 2004), p. 4.

⁶ It can be translated as "Why do they burn Kerala"

such an article distracts the people's consciousness from the real issue and towards the "plight" of the government in the face of "undemocratic" protests. It effectively reduces the seriousness of the death of a Dalit student. It effectively reduced the question of caste and gender to that of class whereby they turned Rajani's death to that of a poor student who could not meet her educational expenses. Such an argument does not create any discomfort among the people who do not have to worry about caste. Importantly, how does the story construct the "common people"? Here, common people are those who do not align with protests and social movements. Such an article creates a dangerous division between the protestors and the "common people".

Khalid Commission Report on Rajani's death

The Khalid Commission was appointed by the State Government to enquire in to the causes of Rajani's death.⁷ The report was finally published after two years of the incident and it says that the judicial enquiry was completed with their understanding of the facts. According to the Khalid commission report, the bank which rejected the loan application and the college administration were not responsible for Rajani's death. Instead, the commission suggested the government to consider Rajani's death as a disaster and compensate her family. The commission argued that Rajani died of suicide 17 months after the bank had rejected her loan application. Therefore, the rejection of loan application and Rajani's suicide were not related. According to the report, there was no evidence to accuse the hostel administration for Rajani's death and that the exact reason of Rajani's death is unknown. The commission listed out a few reasons for her suicide including poverty and related financial issues. The commission also found that

⁷ Sanu George, "Rajaniyude Athmahatya Vaypa Nishedham Karanamallennu Khalid Commission," *Malayala Manorma*, May 17, 2006, Thiruvananthapuram edition, p. 3.

Rajani had failed in nine papers during the course without explaining the causes behind it except the financial condition of her family.⁸

Khalid commission was appointed for judicial enquiry on Rajani S Anand's death during the time of UDF lead government in 2004. This report did not interrogate into the reasons behind Rajani's death and it effectively protected the accused from accountability. The bank officers, college administration and the hostel employees were found innocent in Rajani's death. The commission avoided the risk of going into the deeper questions of caste and gender. Here, the question of her identity and how it was related to her crisis was ignored deliberately. The report attempted to claim that Rajani's suicide was a natural death, calling it a disaster and connecting it to her poverty. The report on a Dalit student's death is arguably fabricated with hegemonic ideas and represents the interest of the privilege sections. The investigation and its report will effectively prevent Dalit students from speaking up about their issues in the academic space. The judicial report negated the question of abetment of suicide where Rajani was left with no option but to end her life and bury her dreams along with her. The report negates all the accusations against the banks, the college administration and the hostel and their involvement in the case. The report refused to comment on how her social location was responsible for the blockage of all her opportunities.

"Malayala Manorama" published the findings of the Khalid Commission twice, the first time in September 2006 and the second time on March 29, 2007. The contents of the two news reports are quite contradictory. The first time "Malayala Manorama" reported that according to the Khalid Commission, the previous government's policies were responsible for Rajani's suicide.⁹ According to the report, the Khalid commission found

⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁹ Correspondent, "Rajaniyude Athmahathya: Karanam Mun Sarkkarinte Nayangalennnu Khalid Commission," *Malayala Manorama*, September 20, 2006, Kottayam edition, p. 3.

that the UDF government's ambiguous educational policies in self-financing colleges resulted in Rajani's suicide. The report added that Rajani was the real victim of management of the self-financing college management and that the earlier UDF government was responsible for commercializing professional education. In this sense, the commission's report instructs the government to consider Rajani's death as a tragedy and therefore compensate her family. The news report further claimed exclusivity on publishing the findings of the commission's report which had not been produced even in the State Assembly. Eventually when the report was presented before the State Assembly during the LDF government, "Malayala Manorama" did not present a clarification of the findings.

The report was submitted to the government by Justice C Khalid Commission and the minister Kodyeri Balakrishnan presented it in the State Assembly on March 29, 2007. The first edition of the report was quashed by the LDF government.¹⁰ The facts about the politics of the judicial enquiry remained hidden and there was no clarification on the reasons as to why it was quashed by the LDF government. One may argue that "Malayala Manorama" was reporting the news for the sake of reporting and acted as voice of the UDF government.

"Malayala Manorama" had published a statement by the minister G Karthikeyan who while speaking at a public function blamed the LDF government for Rajani's death.¹¹ "Malayala Manorama" had chosen his statement as their headline and reported only that part of the speech which held the LDF government and their policies responsible for Rajani's suicide and that similar tragic incidents should not be repeated in society.

¹⁰ Coorespondent, "Rajaniyude Maranam: Khalid Commission Report Nirakarichu," *Malayala Manorama*, March 30, 2007, p. 1.

¹¹ "Rajaniyude Maranam Idathu Sarkkarinte Nayapalicha Moolam: Karthikeyan," *Malayala Manorama*, July 26, 2004, p. 3.

On the same day, they published another report, by John Mundakkayam, on the current affair's page, which discusses the local politics.¹² According to the title of the second report, protests are meant to harass people. Further, the judicial enquiry was declared unexpectedly by the UDF government due to pressure from the opposition. Mundakkayam claimed that the common people were relieved that the government deployed police to stop the protests. This news report is insensitive and exclusively written for the privileged who does not want protest and who have a "peaceful" life. Although the report claims to be apolitical, effectively, it takes a position against protest and any question along the lines of caste and gender, and represents the interests of the privileged classes. Thus, the people who were denied justice and who had struggled for justice become insignificant according to this compartmentalization of the people.

"Mathrubhumi"

"Mathrubhumi" is also a widely circulated newspaper in Kerala. It claims to be one of the leading newspapers in India, which was founded in 1923 during India's national movement for independence. They continue to follow their initial style, incorporating a patriotic tone in their writings. However, this chapter will look at how they discussed questions of gender and caste when it came to issues of Dalit women.

The news about Rajani. S Anand was published on the front page of "Mathrubhumi" like all other newspapers in Malayalam. The headline of this news was "education loan application was rejected; dropped out of course: student jumped off from the terrace of the office of entrance examination commissioner".¹³ According to the news report, a twenty-year-old engineering student died suicide from the pain of not being

¹² John Mundakkayam, "Karanamthedunna Samaram; Janathinu Peedanam," *Malayala Manorama*, July 26, 2004, Thiruvananthapuram edition, sec. Current Affairs, p. 8.

¹³ Mathrubhoomi 23red july 2004"Vidyabyasa vaypanishedhichu: Praveshanacommissionarudeofficinumukalilninumvidyardhinichatimarichu".p 1

able to continue her engineering course at a self-financing engineering college. According to this report, Rajani belonged to a family that engaged in the work of washing laundry. Readers can identify her caste, particularly that she belongs to a Dalit community. But they refrained from using the word Dalit. They also reported that she had not been going to college for one year. Thus, she approached the banks for an education loan. She lost hope when the loan application was rejected. This led her to become depressed and later die. Importantly, the report mentioned that Rajani was trying to apply for a Transfer Certificate and that the college administration was demanding Rajani pay her fees without which she could not apply for TC. This meant that Rajani had given up hope of continuing her studies at the engineering college and had applied for TC to try other options. This request was also denied by the college which shows the college administration is responsible for her death as well.

In the local news page of the same newspaper, another report talked about Rajani's hardship as an engineering student from a poor family. The title of the report was "Rajani had left her wishes and was gone".¹⁴ The report gives a clear picture of Rajani's family and their living condition. According to the report, the whole family, including Rajani, her parents and her siblings were living on two cents of land, in a small hut made with coconut tree leaves and without electricity. Rajani and her siblings depended on a kerosene lamp to study. She struggled against such adverse conditions to clear her Class X and XII exams and did so with distinction. Rajani's mother worked as a maid in houses to find daily income and her father was unwell. This worsened their situation because nobody from the village called him for physical labour. Under such circumstances Rajani was forced to approach the banks for the education loan but they

¹⁴ Coorespondent, "Mohangalkku Thunayillathe Rajani Yathrayayi," *Malayala Manorama*, July 23, 2004, Thiruvananthapuram edition, sec. Local News, p. 3.

rejected the application after visiting her house and observing the conditions of poverty that they were living in. The family clearly had no property to offer as surety against the loan. According to the report, the bank officials doubted Rajani's ability to find a job that would help her pay her debt to the bank.

Here, the poor living condition of the student is well reported and compels sympathy from the readers. However, feelings of sympathy for the poor is a normative idea which people accept as a social reality and forget the next moment. The report missed something significant here, that is the fact of the family's caste. Both the aspects of landlessness and homelessness are raised without talking about the crucial factor of her caste identity. At the centre of this story was a Dalit woman from a family which was being run by her mother, another Dalit woman. Yet the report, by foregrounding the question of class, has removed the fact of caste and gender.

On July 24 2004, "Mathrubhumi's" headline was "Rajani's suicide: judicial investigation will be done".¹⁵ This was a very important report on the state assembly's discussion on Rajani's suicide where her community was discussed. Chief Minister A K Antony of the UDF stated that there should be judicial investigation into the death of Rajani. S Anand, the student that belongs to a Scheduled Caste community. And that the culprits will be punished if they are found guilty under this judicial investigation. According to this report, the chief minister himself clearly declared that Rajani was admitted to the IHRD engineering college in Adoor in a merit seat. Her college fees was taken care of by the government and she was staying in a private hostel where she could not pay the hostel fee. This was the reason why Rajani approached the bank for education loan, who were not ready to give the loan in spite of the Reserve Bank's

¹⁵ Correspondent, "Rajaniyude Athmahatya: Judicial Anweshanam Undakum ," *Mathrubhoomi*, July 24, 2004, Thiruvananthapuram edition, sec. Cover page, p. 1.

advisory to grant education loans. Therefore, this issue would be discussed in the parliament for the attention of the central government at the national level. The news report documented what the chief minister had discussed in the state assembly. The Chief Minister's statement displaces all responsibility on the banks. He did not hold the college administration responsible for lack of accommodation facilities. Rajani's identity is revealed in this report as she hailed from Vannan community. "Mathrubhumi" did not take a stand with the government or the opposition party. Instead, it attempted to express sympathy for Rajani's family. Such style of reporting paints a hopeless picture of Dalit students like Rajani and their predicament. The same report quoted the opposition leader V S Achuthanandan alleging that the college principal who dismissed Rajani and the SC/ST Development minister M A Appukuttan were the culprits.¹⁶ The report also pointed to the rivalry between the ruling party and the opposition party.

On July 24, 2004, "Mathrubhumi", like other dailies, published many stories on Rajani. Page three featured five stories on Rajani's issue. Of these, the main story featured Rajani's mother along with Rajani's photo. According to the story, her mother had lost all her hopes.¹⁷ It retells Rajani's parents' narrative about the condition of their family and their daughter's struggles to achieve her dream. They revealed that Rajani wanted to continue her education at another engineering college,¹⁸ one which offered to sponsor Rajani and help her continue her studies. But the principal of the college where she was already admitted was not ready to give her TC.¹⁹ Rajani lost hope about her future, said

¹⁶ Resident Reporter, "Rajaniyude Athmahatya Judicial Anweshanam Nadathum," July 24, 2004, Thiruvananthapuram edition, sec. Cover page, p. 1.

¹⁷ Ibid., Ee Ammaykkini Pratheekshakal Bakkiyilla 3.

¹⁸ Paliyodu, Marry Matha engineering college came to know about Rajani and offered that they will take care of her fees and other expenses in their institution during her study.

¹⁹ Transfer Certificate which the previous institution is supposed to give allows students to join in another institution/course.

her mother Santha. She was also the only hope for the family to change the conditions of their life. But all such prospects were lost when Rajani died of suicide. This report also welcomed readers to view Rajani's life as one full of pathos and failed aspirations. Another story reported that left students' organisations had blocked the college principal in his office. The principal's version was different from that of Rajani's family.²⁰ According to him, Rajani was admitted to the course in a seat which was paid for by the Scheduled Caste Development Department of the Kerala state. And he claimed that college had not denied her TC, that Rajani did not apply for TC. The college principal's name, Cherian Sakkaria was revealed in this report. He claimed that Rajani's family was mistaken about the TC applications. It was argued that the principal was hiding facts to shift blame away from the administration, and that by making such false claims, the college was adding to the injustice even after her death. However, the newspaper "Mathrubhumi" had nothing more to say about it. At the end of this report, they wrote that Rajani was staying in a NSS²¹ women's hostel and they met the warden of the hostel as well. Rajani did not come back after going home on August 24, 2004 and she had to pay the rent only for one and a half months. The hostel warden reported that Rajani's hostel deposit of thousand rupees was still with the hostel account. "Mathrubhumi's" report shifted blame from the hostel administration, which was run by the dominant caste Nair Service Society, an organization that is also ideologically close to that of the newspaper. By shifting accountability from both the college and hostel administration, the report effectively denied any hopeful perspective about justice for a Dalit student's death.

²⁰ Correspondent, "Rajaniyude Maranam: Principalin Thadanjuvachu," *Mathrubhoomi*, July 24, 2004, Thiruvananthapuram edition, sec. Nattuvarthamanam, p. 3.

²¹ Nair Service Society is an organization formed by Nair community in Kerala

In the same page “Mathrubhumi” published another report about Rajani’s funeral.²² They said that thousands of people came to attend her funeral, including politicians, people’s representatives and the common people from different places. They also wrote that Rajani’s family did not have enough land to bury her body. So, she was buried on her relative’s land. This showed how poor her family was. She struggled and studied in this condition and only moved to the hostel after joining the engineering course where she was unable to pay her hostel rent. Another report in the same page was about Rajani’s struggle.²³ Rajani, the report claimed, was very strong and she had never shared the stories of her difficulties with people. Even her hostel inmates, who knew her to be a fun person, did not know much about her personal life. The hostel warden also claimed that Rajani was often moody but would change the subject when asked about her difficulties. Her inmates in the hostel found that she liked Hindi poetry and she wrote some poems in Hindi which she never showed to anyone. The poems were found only later. They also said that Rajani did not find the Engineering course interesting and was looking forward to doing something else. She also did not speak to boys in the class. The report seems contradictory and confusing as it tried to paint Rajani as a good and morally clean student, who wasn’t really interested in her studies. This report is a narration from her friends, classmates and the hostel warden. The public definitely learned who Rajani was but only after her death. However, the report did not specifically cite why she was disinterested in her studies. Therefore, “Mathrubhumi”, in addition to other papers failed to point to the specific basis of her suicide.

²² Correspondent, “Rajanikku Ayirangalude Asrupooja,” *Mathrubhoomi*, July 24, 2004, Thiruvananthapuram edition, p. 3.

²³ *Ibid.*, 3.

“Mathrubhumi’s” Editorial on Rajani’s death

“Mathrubhumi” had published their editorial on Rajani’ S Anand’s death and related issues. This chapter will look into it deeply to understand how their approach towards this issue was politicized by the newspaper “Mathrubhumi”. The title of the editorial was “Vidhyarthiyude Jeevathyagam Padamakumo?” or “does the student’s life and sacrifice teach a lesson?”²⁴ In this editorial they continued to write about her financial status. The author compared this incident of to that of farmer’s suicide where utter helplessness without any source of financial support forced them to death. Rajni’s situation was not unknown to her college administration. Everybody including her teachers, classmates and friends were aware of her financial insecurities and that she failed to meet her expenses, forcing her to drop out the course for a period of one year. “Mathrubhumi”, in this editorial, stated that Rajani ended her life to draw the attention of the public to issues of poor students like herself who were meritorious and aspiring but opted suicide because no other option was left for them. It was therefore the public’s responsibility to support those like Rajani. In this editorial “Mathrubhumi” newspaper went on to criticize the educational system and the problems in the field of higher education, especially that of the self-financing colleges and professional courses. It also pointed out the pathetic situation of students from economic deprived classes and further suggested that the government offer better educational facilities to make higher education more inclusive. “Mathrubhumi” had only once noted that Rajani belonged to

²⁴ Editorial. “Vidhyarthiniyude Jeevathyagam Padamakumo?.” *Mathrubhoomi* . Kozhikode, July 24, 2004.

a Dalit community called Vannan²⁵ but the rest of the reports focused on her financial struggles and not her caste and gender. Another report on the same day covered all the protests against the government on Rajani's issue.²⁶ It was in this report that "Mathrubhumi" used the word Dalit to describe Rajani for the first time. The presence of Dalit organisations in the protests forced them to make this acknowledgement. None of the politicians and news reporters focused on the question of caste and reduced her death to an issue of class. However, the demands of the Dalit organizations clearly mentioned that Rajani's death was not just an economic problem and that the caste question is significant in her death and life, and needs addressing. The newspaper reported that Bharatheeya Dalit Sahitya Academy had demanded that the government should give a compensation of rupees one crore to Rajani's family. The Yuvajanatha Dal, youth organization (associated with Janata Dal party) also demanded that the education minister²⁷ should take the moral responsibility of her death. Yuvajanthadal clearly stated that Rajani being a Dalit student was very important. They introduced a completely different way of seeing the issue. Kerala Mahilasangham also participated in the protest and expressed their views on the issue. This report was about the protest and the newspaper had collected the statements of many organizations' leaders who had been part of the protest. The demands were listed in this report alongside the names of the organization and their leaders. Further, the newspaper concluded the report by quoting the Indian Overseas Bank's version of what happened with Rajani's loan application. The bank had expressed their condolences for Rajani's death and the regional manager²⁸ gave an explanation through a press note. They completely denied

²⁵ One of the Dalit community from Kerala who's caste occupation was related to washing clothes.

²⁶ Correspondent, "Vidyarthiniyude Athmahathya: Vyapaka Pradhishedham," *Mathrubhoomi*, July 24, 2004, Thiruvananthapuram edition, p. 13.

²⁷ Nalakthusoopy was the educational minister during that time

²⁸ Joginder Paul

the fact that the bank did not accept Rajani's loan application and justified their position. According to the bank management, Rajani had applied for bank loan on January 19, 2003 at Indian Overseas Bank, Puzhanadu branch, but this branch was 16 kilometers away from Rajani's house. Therefore, the bank had suggested her to apply to the nearest branch of the bank. After this the family did not approach the bank again. Therefore, along with the college and hostel administration, the bank was also refusing to take any responsibility.

The newspapers continued to report the protest which was happening after Rajani's death. An anti-protest piece, similar to the one published in "Malayala Manorama" was published in the local pages of "Mathrubhumi" as well. The report was titled "the city has turned into a battle field: The violence was well organized".²⁹ This story contradicted the line adopted in the earlier stories on Rajani's death. The report described how organizations participated in the protests from morning to evening. The protests were made to look like planned vandalism that affected the public. Although the report claimed to take a neutral position, it was clearly posed against the politics of protest and social movements.

"Mathrubhumi"'s reporting style on this issue was contradictory and confusing. Although they reported on her caste identity, they focused on the pathos of poverty, and completely avoided the question of caste in their editorials.

²⁹ Correspondent, "Nagaram Kalapabhabhoomiyayi; Akramam Asoothritham," July 25, 2004, p. 3.

“Kerala Kaumudi”

The headline of Kerala Kaumudi’s front page news on Rajani’s death cited that she did not get educational loan for paying her fee for self-financing course: “poor engineering student jumped off from the 6th floor and ended her life”.³⁰ According to the report, Rajani was dismissed from her college because she was unable to pay the fee. As a result, she approached the bank for loan. “Kerala Kaumudi” reported this vital aspect the very day after Rajani’s death. The photograph of the spot where Rajani’s body was found along with her sandals were published on the front page as well. Rajani’s suicide note: “I am going from this world” was also cited.³¹ The story further reported that she had applied for her transfer certificate from the college but the administration refused it. Rajani’s loan applications were also rejected by the bank and other financial institutions because Rajani’s family did not have enough land and property to show as security.³² The report also revealed that Rajani’s family did not even have enough money to apply for electric connection in their house. This point may have been included in the report to show Rajani’s economic background and how she had struggled and raised herself to reach to that position by her will. It was also disclosed that Rajani was offered a sponsored position by the Mary Matha engineering college, Vellarada, which is why she was attempting to take a transfer from the IHRD engineering college, Adoor. All doors had been closed to her, forcing her to take her life.

On July 24, 2007, “Kerala Kaumudi”’s front page news was critical of the bank management for refusing Rajani’s loan. The title of the story clearly stated that the bank

³⁰ Coorespondent, “Swasrayafeesinu Vaypalabhichilla: Araam Nilayilninum Chadi Eirdhana Engineering Vidhyarthi Jeevanodukki,” *Kerala Kaumudi*, July 23, 2004, p. 1.

³¹ Correspondent, “Njanpokunnuee Lokathuninnu,” July 23, 2004, p. 1.

³² It is not mandatory for the education loan according to the reserve bank policy.

went against the policy of the Reserve Bank.³³ According to the report, many nationalized banks in Kerala were refusing education loans to poor students on account that they could not provide security against the loan. The report also mentioned that the banks were not following the policies of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) regarding the education loan which stated in its circular that there was no need to provide security for education loan applications up to rupees four lakhs.³⁴ In spite of the banks receiving the circular, the bank managers were not following the rules. Such tendencies of the bank managers are against the protocol of Reserve Bank of India and affects the future of students such as Rajani who are trying to study along with struggling with the realities of their life. “Kerala Kaumudi” published the circular, which was also displayed on the website of Indian Overseas Bank. Arguably, “Kerala Kaumudi” was reporting truthfully on the circumstances that led to Rajani’s death.

“Kerala Kaumudi”’s reports on the protests also showed understanding of the protesting students’ rage and the ensuing violence.³⁵ The report was able to recognize the emotions that led to the protest. The report on the chief minister’s statement about judicial investigation on Rajani’s death was different from the other newspapers. It brought forth a different perspective on the procedures in state assembly discussions.³⁶ “Kerala Kaumudi” wrote that the chief minister’s declaration of judicial investigation was done in a very dramatic manner. The chief minister’s declaration was sudden, given that the government had initially stated that the Revenue Secretary would investigate

³³ Balachandran, “Vidyabhyasa Vaypa Nishedhikkal: Reserve Bank Nirdhesathinu Virudham,” *Kerala Kaumudi*, July 24, 2004, p. 1.

³⁴ Reserve Bank of India - notifications, April 28, 2001.
<https://www.rbi.org.in/SCRIPTs/NotificationUser.aspx?Id=369>.

³⁵ Coorespondent, “Vidyarthi Roshamirambi: Akramam Vypakam,” *Kerala Kaumudi*, July 24, 2004, p. 1.

³⁶ Coorespondent, “Judicial Anweshanam: Kuttakkare Veruthe Vidilla: Mukhya Manthri,” *Kerala Kaumudi*, July 24, 2004, p. 1.

the case. The latter was something that the opposition had opposed. It was clearly mentioned in this report that the final decision by the chief minister was in response to the pressure from the opposition party who demanded for the judicial investigation. It was also unexpected for the opposition party that the chief minister agreed to their demand and thus they dropped their plan to walk out from the state assembly. The report therefore gives the readers a clear understanding of the conflict between the government and the opposition and the significance of judicial enquiry.

“Kerala Kaumudi” also published a story titled “Rajani: The first martyr of self-financing education business.”³⁷ It quoted P K Sreemathi teacher³⁸ who spoke at the state assembly meeting. According to this report, there was a clash between the ruling party UDF and the opposition LDF after her speech especially when the chief minister A K Antony said that discussion on this particular issue must be stopped now and that investigation would continue.

The report gave a complete picture of the arguments which happened on the issue. The opposition party accused the government’s new regulations on the issue of fee structure in the professional courses as a reason for Rajani’s death. However, neither the newspaper nor the opposition wanted to talk about caste and gender. The opposition party led by left parties wanted to use Rajani’s issue to fight against the government and remove them from power.

The newspaper discussed Rajani’s personal issues in the same page. This story dealt with Rajani’s financial status and how she ended up dying of suicide. An interesting story on this page was one about Rajani’s father.³⁹ It was different from other

³⁷ “Kerala Kaumudi,” *edtl*, July 24, 2004, p. 4.

³⁸ Member of state assembly

³⁹ “Muttatha Vathilukalilla; Aarum Sahayichilla,” *Kerala Kaumudi*, July 24, 2004, p. 3.

newspapers where they tried to focus only on Rajani's mother's hardships, thereby giving readers the misconception that Rajani's father Mr. Shivanandan was somehow incapable, helpless or irresponsible. "Kerala Kaumudi" painted the picture of an encouraging man. Rajani's father Shivanandan used to work as a helper along with construction workers and he did construction work of Mary Matha Engineering college, Neyyattinkara, who later accepted Shivanandan's request and offered Rajani to study in their college without any fee. This was not mentioned in any other newspaper.

"Kerala Kaumudi" had another piece of writing on Rajani's life at hostel which focused on her sense of self-respect.⁴⁰ It was written by the journalist Pradeep Kumar. Rajani never shared her personal problems with hostel inmates, including the warden. But they told the newspaper that they had witnessed Rajani weeping alone and many of them thought that she might be suffering from home sickness. The report also pointed out that Rajani used to talk to another inmate, who was also a recipient of the grant for reserved categories about her anxieties regarding continuing the course. It would then appear that Rajani was comfortable sharing her worries with another person who was going through the same struggles. Rajani received her grant money for the year 2002 only in 2003, during which time she was already staying at the hostel. "Kerala Kaumudi's report was empathetic of the conditions faced by a Dalit student.

"The case should be registered under Murder"

This was the title of "Kerala Kaumudi"'s editorial.⁴¹ The article clearly explains the struggles of a poor meritorious student and holds the government, bank and college responsible for Rajani's death. It called Rajani's death a murder. The editorial also

⁴⁰ Pradeep Kumar, "Athmabhimanam Kathu Muriyilurnnu Thengi," *Kerala Kaumudi*, July 24, 2004, Thirvanathapram edition, p. 3.

⁴¹ Editorial, "Kerala Kaumudi," *Kerala Kaumudi*, July 24, 2004, p. 4.

showed consciousness of the anxieties of parents of poor students, who were struggling to study. The editorial also argued that there was no hope for justice under the judicial enquiry and that the investigation would attempt to protect the culprits of institutional murder.

One of the interesting facts reported by “Kerala Kaumudi” newspaper was enough to understand the moments before her death on the same day. According to the title of the report, Rajani fell to her death after a long wait at the office of the Commissioner of Entrance Commission.⁴² Witnesses happened to see Rajani having lunch at the office canteen and sitting on the stair case till 3 pm. It is very evident that Rajani had been waiting to solve her issues and she wanted to continue her studies but without any support system, she approached death. Workers on a mobile tower saw her walking on the terrace and immediately informed the fire and rescue station but she jumped from the terrace by the time the rescue team reached the spot. She died on the way to the hospital. It is unknown whether the enquiry committee spoke to the witnesses who had seen her in her final moments. On the same page “Kerala Kaumudi” reported the statements of CPI district secretary according to who, the governments’ unethical educational policies and the bank manager’s refusal to accept the loan application were the reasons that led to the death of the student Rajani.⁴³ According to another report on the same day the DYFI state secretariat made a public statement holding commercialization of education as the primary reason for Rajani’s suicide.⁴⁴ DYFI claimed that Rajani was a martyr representing the people who were betrayed by the privatized educational system. Both left organizations did not speak about Rajani’s

⁴² R Abhilash, “Maranathilekku Kooppukuthiyathu Kathirippinu Oduvil,” *Kerala Kaumudi*, July 24, 2004, p. 6.

⁴³ Correspondent, “Rajani Vikalamaya Vidyabhyasa Nayathinte Irayennu,” *Kerala Kaumudi*, July 24, 2004, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Corespondent, “Vidyabhyasa Kachavadathinte Durantham: DYFI ,” *Kerala Kaumudi*, July 24, 2004, p. 6.

identity as a Dalit woman student and how caste shapes spaces of higher education. The Left organisations are also responsible for the ways in which caste is erased from discussion.

The protest intensified because no action was taken against the culprits who were responsible for Rajani's death. On July 25, 2004 "Kerala Kaumudi"'s front page was filled with reports on the ongoing protest, demanding the resignation of the government. These reports describe the intensity of the protest which was mainly led by SFI, the student wing of CPIM. A march towards the chief minister's residence was organised and the protesters were stopped by police. The report described in detail the nature of the protest and the destruction of public property following the violence.⁴⁵

"Kerala Kaumudi" reported the education minister's statement regarding the suspension of the college principal who refused to give Rajani's transfer certificate and instead disclosed to media Rajani's marks and attendance.⁴⁶ This immediate response from the college principal was criticized as "inhuman". Thus, the minister of education was forced to take action against the college principal. The report clearly showed how the college principle was misguiding the people by giving the impression that Rajani was not a meritorious student. The report clearly shows that the principal could have granted her the transfer certificate. This would have helped Rajani continue her studies in another college.

"Kerala Kaumudi"'s editorial on the discussion after Rajani's death⁴⁷ clearly showed that the ministers of the government were attempting the strategy of character

⁴⁵ Correspondent, "Prakshobham Kooduthal Rooksham," *Kerala Kaumudi*, July 25, 2004, sec. Cover Page, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Correspondent, "Adoor Swasraya College Principiline Suspend Cheyyan Nirdhesham," *Kerala Kaumudi*, July 25, 2004, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Editorial, "Kerala Kaumudi," *Kerala Kaumudi*, July 25, 2004, p. 4.

assassination to shift blame from themselves. The ministers insisted that there should be an enquiry in to where Rajani had gone two days before her death. This insistence came even after the government conducted a virginity test on Rajani's dead body. The opposition party argued that the postmortem report claims that Rajani was a virgin. Still the government attempted to blame Rajani's character. Both the government and the opposition party leaders were misogynistic in their arguments. It was significantly argued that the question of virginity is insignificant in Rajani's death by suicide due to institutional discrimination and apathy. It was also argued that the government should have looked at the reasons for her death instead of trying to establish that no one was responsible for her death. The editorial demanded that the ministers owed an apology to Rajani's family for their unethical arguments. This writing shows solidarity and empathy towards Rajani and her family especially by criticising the politics of power of the ruling party and the ways in which they attempt to disrespect and demoralize the poor. In conclusion, the editorial also warns the government that the power they hold will not last forever.

The readers' page in "Kerala Kaumudi", titled, "Janasradha"⁴⁸ published a readers' response to the article. This note was written by Dr. S Satheesan from Kottayam, an MBBS graduate from the Government Medical College. He wrote about his experience as a Dalit student from a poor family, staying in a government hostel and how they struggled during their studies. He writes that the situation of students in the government hostels is terrible. Therefore, one can imagine how a poor student from the scheduled caste background struggles in a private hostel where she is supposed to pay the fee every month. He also demanded that the authorities who did not show justice to her

⁴⁸ Correspondent, "Athmahatya Cheythittum Nallavakku Parayathavar," *Kerala Kaumudi*, July 29, 2004, sec. Janasradha, p. 9.

while she was alive should stop maligning her after her death. The note clearly articulates the financial and psychological trauma undergone by Dalit students.

Evidently, “Kerala Kaumudi” made a detailed intervention in Rajani’s case. They covered almost all the reports on this sensitive issue and they brought it up as a media which tried to do justice to the cause. The well circulated Malayalam newspapers such as “Malayala Manorama” and “Mathrubhumi” (which is already discussed in this chapter) failed to discuss the issue in the same manner. However, “Kaumudi”’s circulation was limited in comparison to “Malayala Manorama”, “Mathrubhumi” and “Deshabhimani”. Therefore, it is difficult to understand the impact of “Kaumudi”’s reports on the readers of Kerala.

“Deshabhimani” on Rajani’s death

“Deshabhimani” also reported Rajani’s news on their front page. According to their report a self-financing college student jumped off from the building and died because she was unable to pay her fees.⁴⁹ The “Deshabhimani” reporter pointed out that the bank denied the education loan to Rajani and she jumped off from the building where the office of the Commissioner of Entrance Examination had been located. The newspaper called Rajani a victim of the education business. This report also mentioned Rajani’s financial burden and how her family struggled to meet her educational needs. Later it goes into the factual description of the situation which led Rajani to die of suicide, including how she dropped out of her computer engineering course in the first year itself because she was unable to pay her tuition fee and the hostel fee. This report

⁴⁹ Coorespondent, “Feesdakkan Gathiyillathe Swasraya College Vidhyardhini Kettidathil Ninum Chadi Marichu,” *Deshabhimani*, July 23, 2004, p. 1.

brings the attention to the public that the bank and the college are equally responsible for Rajani's death.

"Deshabhimani" reported⁵⁰ that Rajani's suicide notes, written in her note book specified that her family members were innocent. The note reflects upon Rajani's deep hurt at failing to realise her dreams. According to the report, Rajani was always a studious girl and got first class position in her class ten examinations and distinction in her class twelve examinations. She also took admission in a management seat in the self-financing engineering college. According to "Deshabhimani", Rajani's brother who discontinued his studies after plus two and started working as a painter to support Rajani's education said that she expected to become an engineer and support her family in future. Thus, she studied so hard and got a good rank in the entrance examination. However, she was unhappy that she did not get a seat in a government college and she was forced to pay fees. This was unexpected for her and the family though they tried hard to fulfill her needs. One can understand from these reports how a poor student has to struggle to achieve their dream while competing with students who come from financially sound background with proper training to qualify the entrance examination. In this report, "Deshabhimani" described in detail Rajani and her family's struggles to complete her higher education.

On July 24, 2004, "Deshabhimani"'s front page was covered with reports and images of the protest that were happening across Kerala. The reports of the protest focused on the Student Federation of India, the students' wing of the leftist CPI (M). The stories were clearly critical of the UDF government. "Deshabhimani" described Rajani's death as murder of a financially poor engineering student by the educational policy of the

⁵⁰ Coorespondent, "Swasraya Vazhiyil Nirasrayayai Rajani Madangi," *Deshbhimani*, July 23, 2004, p. 3.

UDF government.⁵¹ They wrote about Rajani's funeral⁵² and how the whole village was filled with people from different places. This report included a color photo of Rajani's house which was situated on only two cents of land. The image spoke about Rajani's life and her fight for her future. The image alone was enough to understand the family's financial background and their struggles for survival.

According to "Deshabhimani", the educational minister Mr. Nalakathu Sooppi's statement about Rajani was inappropriate. The minister spoke to the media at a press conference in Delhi about Rajani's issue.⁵³ In his response, he blamed Rajani for her death. He argued that she did not have enough attendance. As a result, she was unable to write the exam. He further revealed that Rajani could only pass one paper in the exam. She failed her other papers. His statement was meant to shift blame from the government on to Rajani. He gave the impression to the public that she wasn't a good student. "Deshabhimani" expressed their disagreement with this statement while concluding their report. "Deshabhimani" supported Rajani's cause and accused the government for her death. The report on the protests was also widely reported by "Deshabhimani". However, they also wrote positively about the contributions of the Left party leaders.

The anger against the government was increasing day by day and "Deshabhimani" represented the demands of left political parties in all their writings on Rajani. They took this as an opportunity to attack the government and it appeared to work really well. One of the interesting reports was about the left parties' demands for the resignation of

⁵¹ Correspondent, "Rajaniyude Maranam: Samsathanam Prathishedhagniyil," *Deshabhimani*, July 24, 2004, p. 1.

⁵² Corespondent, "Swapnangal Bakkiyakki Rajani Erinjadangi," *Deshabhimani*, July 24, 2004, sec. Cover Page, p. 1.

⁵³ Correspondent, "Rajnai Classil Kayariyirunnilla," *Deshbhimani*, July 24, 2AD, p. 4.

the education minister and the Minister for Scheduled Caste Development.⁵⁴ It mentioned very clearly that the education minister Soopi and the Scheduled Caste Development Minister M A Kuttappan must take responsibility of Rajani's death and therefore resign. The demand of the Scheduled Caste Employees' Union was also included in this report. This demand was in response to an arbitrary order given by Kuttappan to stop financial support for Dalit students across self-financing colleges. They referred to the minister as "Harijan minister", clearly a deliberate derogatory reference, while at the same time referring to students as Dalit. The report implied that Kuttappan did not have the merit to be a minister. However, such derogatory references also don't take in to account the role of political parties in choosing Dalit candidates only for electoral purposes and then to appoint them only as Ministers of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Development.

In the editorial, "Deshabhimani" had raised very important questions about the issues related to Rajani's death.⁵⁵ They called Rajani's death a murder by the education system, given that self-financing education was an initiative of the UDF government. They argued that the educational system did not welcome students from poor family backgrounds and focused instead only on students from economically sound families. Economically privileged students are also eligible for education loans from the bank. The then government only gave financial support in the name of tuition fee but the student's needs were not met with this support alone. Poor students also need to find money to buy books, study materials, travel expenses, accommodation and food. Therefore, the government should be responsible for conducting an enquiry into such cases where students from scheduled caste and scheduled tribe categories are dropping

⁵⁴ Coorespondent, "Sooppiyum Kuttappanum Rajivekkanam," *Deshabhimani*, July 24, 2004, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Coorespondent, "Sooppiyum Kuttappanum Rajivekkanam," *Deshabhimani*, July 24, 2004, p. 3.

out of their studies. Thus, the government was found answerable for Rajani's death. "Deshabhimani" pointed out that Rajani's suicide brought attention to the shocking reality of students who suffer from similar issues. The editorial criticized the governments' failure to address students' as well as farmers' suicides. It argued that Rajani's death was not mere suicide and it in fact was a murder. It accused the chief minister, the education minister and social welfare minister Kuttappan and the IHRD College as the main culprits. "Deshabhimani" newspaper criticized the government in all their reports. This got the attention of the public. One of their reports⁵⁶ argued that Rajani's suicide had disturbed the people to such an extent that it threatened the new educational policy of the government that received the court's permission to start self-financing colleges all over Kerala.

"Madhyamam" Newspaper

"Madhyamam" published the news of Rajani's death on their front page but not as their title story. According to the title of the report, an engineering student jumped off from the building because she could not pay the fees.⁵⁷ The report explains that an engineering student had committed suicide by jumping from the seventh floor of the Office of Entrance Examination Commissioner. It clearly mentioned that Rajani discontinued her studies because she was unable to pay her hostel fees and that she was trying to join in another self-financing engineering college to continue her studies. Interestingly, the title obscured the significance of the building (entrance examination commissioner's office) from where she jumped off. The report thus failed to highlight the primary cause of Rajani's suicide in the title itself. The symbolic value of the

⁵⁶ "Kooriruttinte Kadilakki Oru Rajani," *Deshabhimani*, July 26, 2004, sec. Kani, p. 4.

⁵⁷ Correspondent, "Fees Adaykanayilla; Engineering Vidyarthini Kettidathil Ninnun Chadi Marichu," *Madhyamam*, July 23, 2004, sec. Front line, p. 1.

building where Rajani, a poor engineering student, struggling to continue her studies, was held up by other newspapers such as “Deshabhimani” and “Kerala Kaumudi”.

A story on the third page described the pathetic situation of Rajni’s family.⁵⁸ It gives a clear picture of their financial struggles, especially in trying to meet the needs of Rajani’s education. One can understand from this report that the family had a lot of hope on Rajani because she fought against her situation and studied hard to fulfill her dreams. This report too focused on Rajani’s poor economic conditions as the reason for her dying of suicide.

On the third day of Rajani’s death, “Madhyamam”, like other papers covered the protests. The “disturbing” images on the front page showed students from left groups pelting stones at the police and burning vehicles.⁵⁹ The captions appear to mislead the public about the intention of the protestors. The cover story was about the government’s decision to conduct a judicial investigation⁶⁰. “Madhayamam” reiterated that the primary reason behind Rajani’s death was her inability to pay hostel fees. It appears that they deliberately erased the responsibility of the college administration and the bank. They further misrepresented the issue by reporting that the tuition fee in IHRD engineering college for scheduled caste students was free and stay in the hostel was also free if they chose to live in the government hostel but Rajani chose to stay in a private hostel. “Madhyamam” did not mention that no government hostel was present in the town where the college was located. Rajani was given only rupees three hundred per month by the government which was not enough to cover her residential

⁵⁸ Correspondent, “Rajani Poyi: Nirardhramaya Vidhyabhyasa Lokathuninnu,” *Madhyamam*, July 23, 2004, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Correspondent, “Rajani Poyi: Nirardhramaya Vidhyabhyasa Lokathuninnu,” *Madhyamam*, July 23, 2004, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Correspondent, “University College Inu Sameepam Palayam Roadil Policinu Nere Kalleriyunna Sfi Pravarthakar and Samarakkar Kathicha Maruthivan,” *Madhyamam*, July 24, 2004, p. 1.

expenditure. They also mentioned that the college had returned the balance amount to the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students. “Madhyamam” clearly represented the interests of the state.

Kuttappan’s statement on the issue was given in the front page.⁶¹ It claims that the government had spent Rs 1,14,907 for Rajani’s education. It included her tuition fees of two years, special fee and the examination fee. According to the minister, she was given Rs 2410 as her stipend and the lump sum grant to which she was entitled. This minister argued that the actual reasons behind Rajani’s suicide were unknown, and that she was staying in a private hospital which had no connection with the college. According to him, the hostel warden had said that Rajani had debts with the hostel and had failed nine out of ten of her papers. Interestingly, while “Madhyamam” reported that Rajani was unable to pay her fees and that led her to commit suicide, Kuttappan claimed that she in fact owed money to the hostel.

The editorial on Rajani’s death raised many questions on the issue of self-financing colleges issues and the struggles of students from poor family backgrounds.⁶² According to the report, students from rich backgrounds can afford coaching that helps them get seats. Poor students get seats without any coaching. “Madhyamam” was discussing an important issue at the right time; that of unequal distribution of resources between students of different backgrounds in self-financing colleges. The editorial still deflected blame from the college and the government, and spoke largely about Rajani’s poverty. This editorial discussed other issues where students were suspended by the college because they could not pay the tuition fees.

⁶¹ Correspondent, “Rajanikkuvendi 1,14,000 Roopa Nalki:Manthri Kuttappan,” *Madhyamam*, July 24, 2004, sec. Cover Page , p. 1.

⁶² “Madhyamam,” *Madhyamam* (Kozhikode, July 24, 2004), p. 4.

The protest against the government, the banks and the IHRD engineering college quickly intensified and some were critically injured. But “Madhyamam”’s report, while focusing on the violence of the protestors, did not dwell on the actual reasons⁶³. “Madhyamam” appeared to operate as an instrument of the government by shifting blame away from the government, hostel administration and the banks.

Chithralekha

Chithralekha, a Dalit auto rikshaw driver from Payyannur, Kerala has been facing collective violence from the members of the left-wing political party Communist Party of India Marxist (CPIM) since 2004. She started working as an auto driver in 2004 in Payyannur, located in Kannur district which is famously known as the birthplace of Communist Party of India (M) in Kerala. The male auto rickshaw drivers at the workplace who were part of CPIM’s trade union CITU attacked Chithralekha’s auto. She did not get any support from other colleagues when she reacted to the violence; they instead supported the attacker because he belonged to their political party CPIM. Chithralekha spoke about the incident in her interview which was published in “Madhyamam” weekly.⁶⁴ She bought the autorickshaw in 2004 and applied for membership at the CITU trade union at Edattu autorickshaw stand. Receiving membership to park auto at a specific stand is mandatory in Kerala. They gave her the membership after three months and discriminated against her even after she became a member. The CITU members started abusing her verbally. They made casteist comments by particularly referring to her by her caste identity. They expressed their anger at the social mobility of a Pulaya woman. However, Chithralekha ignored their

⁶³ Correspondent, “Parakke Akramam: Theeveypu,” *Madhyamam*, July 25, 2004, sec. Cover Page, p. 1.

⁶⁴ Venu Kallar, “Thozhilidathile Peednam: Chithralekha Avar Vidathe Pinthudarukayanu,” *Madhyamam*, February 8, 2010, pp. 10,15.

comments because the autorickshaw was the only means of income that her family had for survival. In 2005, she faced a series of attacks including damages to her vehicle. The CITU trade union blindly protected the man who had done it. Chithralekha questioned this act and they threatened to burn her and her auto. Once she complained to the police, the trade union members refused to admit to the act and started demoralizing Chithralekha, calling her an alcoholic and a prostitute. They also collected signatures on a petition and submitted a counter complaint to the police. Police took a “neutral” stand in this issue. They told Chithralekha they would warn the offenders and ensure that this would not happen again. But the trade union members started attacking Chithralekha physically the very next day when she went to work. The unit secretary of CITU along with other members pulled Chithralekha out from her autorickshaw and threatened her of murder if she continued to work in the same autorickshaw stand. Chithralekha took a strong stand in this and resisted the attack but she was attacked again the same day for protesting against the violence. Chithralekha got injured and was admitted to the hospital. Following a police complaint and court case, the accused was sentenced to a month of imprisonment. Chithralekha was granted a compensation of Rs. 25000/-. CPIM also protested at the police station when the accused Rameshan was being held by the police.⁶⁵

Subsequently, Chithralekha had to stop working at the same autorickshaw stand and she was mentally depressed which affected her and her family’s survival. But the trade union members of the CPIM continued to attack her. On December 30, 2005, Chithralekha’s autorickshaw was burned by the trade union and they threatened to burn her too. Consequently, a movement grew to demand justice for Chithralekha. It drew the attention of the public and media. Chithralekha got support from tv channel Asianet,

⁶⁵ Ibid., p 12-13

activists and organizations. But CPIM wanted revenge and did not stop attacking her. The SC/ST Development department stopped giving her the financial installment for the construction of her house. The local Grama Panchayat in Edattu, through which she received the money was led by the CPIM. They gave her only the first installment of fifteen thousand rupees and stopped the rest. They forced her to leave Edattu and move to Payyannur. None of the trade unions of Payyannur agreed to give her membership. It took four months for Chithralekha to get membership and permit to drive in Payyannur. In the new place, her upper caste neighbors would not allow her to use their well to draw drinking water. According to an interview given to a TV channel, they came over and abused her for accessing the well.

On January 20, 2010, Chithralekha and her husband were attacked by the same trade union members for parking their auto on the road side when they went to a medical store to get medicines for their son. The union members and the police accused her of being a drunk. The police and other members of the union had also physically assaulted Chithralekha. She and her husband were detained overnight at the police station without filing a case. Police told the media that she was drunk and had created a public scene. Chithralekha was admitted to the hospital immediately after because she was suffering from vaginal bleeding as a result of police brutality.⁶⁶ Almost all newspapers published the version of the police.

According to Chithralekha, “the newspapers who wrote about the issue were in support of the police and the trade union. For instance, “*Deshabhimani*”⁶⁷, owned by the CPIM

⁶⁶ Venu Kallar, “Thozhilidathile Peedanam: Chithralekha Avar Vidathe Pinthudarukayanu,” *Madhyamam Weekley* February 8, 2010, pp. 10-12.

⁶⁷ Coorespondent, “Pothunirathil Bahalam Vachatinu Auto- Rikshaw Driver Chithralekhaikkum Bharthavinum Ethire Case,” *Deshabhimani*, January 21, 2010, Kannur edition, p. 3.

and the “Kerala Kaumudi” published the news.⁶⁸ These reports focused on demoralizing Chithralekha as an alcoholic and an immoral woman. The big newspapers were not even aware of the issue.⁶⁹ Chithralekha and her husband were targeted by the CPIM since they got married. Her husband Sreeshkanth was beaten up by CPIM members the very night he got married to Chithralekha, a Dalit woman. It must be noted that Satheesan belonged to a non-dalit Ezhava community and was raised by a CPIM family, popularly referred to as party kudumbam or party family.⁷⁰ The conventional party families among non-Dalit communities are also very casteist. They follow Hindu religion and are against inter-caste marriage between Dalit and non- Dalit communities. “Madhyamam” newspaper published a special story on Chithralekha’s issue in February 2010 titled as “Chithralekhayaude Jathiyum Jeevitha Samarangalum” (Chithralekha’s Caste and Life struggles) written by feminist writer C S Chandrika. It addressed the question of caste and gender in Chithralekha’s issue. This story describes Chithralekha’s protest against caste and gender from the beginning when Chithralekha was trained as an auto driver as a beneficiary of the project Kudumbashree. Kudumbashree was introduced in Kerala by the state government in 2000 with the aim of eradicating poverty. As part of this agenda, they introduced self-employment programmes for women and trained them to be able to start their own vocation. Chithralekha was amongst those who received training and could buy the autorickshaw on subsidized loan as part of this scheme. C S Chandrika criticized the government’s project Kudumbashree as the government gave training to the poor women and sent them to the streets without following up on their struggle to survive in such gendered

⁶⁸ Correspondent, “Bahalamundakkiya Autodrivarum Bharthavum Police Pidiyilayi,” *Kaumudi Flash*, January 20, 2010, Kannur edition, sec. Cover Page, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Venu, *Thozhilidathile Peedanam*, 15.

⁷⁰ Party Kudumbam is very popular in Kerala especially in Kannur district where CPIM was formed first time in Kerala. There is no space for individual political consciousness in the party families. The family members must follow the family’s political party. This is applied to CPIM only.

and casteist spaces.⁷¹ Two other women from Chithralekha's place had also stopped working as autorickshaw drivers because of the violence from the trade union members. The government trained them but failed to provide support to resist violence.

"Madhayamam" also reported Chithralekha's struggle in 2015 that titled "Uru Vilakkiyavarkku Jayam; Chithralekha Nadu Vidunnu"⁷², written by Raveendran Ravanewasram. The report describes Chithralekha's struggle as a Dalit women who had been protesting against caste violence at the workplace towards her and which made her boycott her village forcefully by the CITU trade union members. "Madhyamam"'s report showed sensitivity towards her issue. According to the report, Chithralekha was leaving her village Edattu, Payyannur because of the continuous harassment from CPIM and its trade union members. After ten years of her relentless struggle, she was forced to leave the village where she was born and brought up until she became an auto rickshaw driver. Chithralekha was sitting in protest in front of the Kannur district Collectorate for seventy-seven days when she finally decided to leave her place because the government ignored her protest and justice was denied to her. Her family was also not spared. She was surviving with her family by following her mother and grandmother's occupation ie weaving mats with palm leaves after her auto rickshaw was burnt by the trade union. But the violence against her continued in different forms. They blocked the way to her house and attempted to murder her husband Srishkanth. The political revenge did not end there and they attacked her sister's husband with a sword. He was severely wounded. Chithralekha's house was also demolished by the trade union. They faced four more attacks. However, there was no protection for

⁷¹ C S Chandrika, "Chithralekha's Struggle," *Madhyamam*, February 11, 2010, sec. Nilapadu, p. 4.

⁷² Social boycott against Chithralekha led to leaving her village because of the pressure from the perpetrators.

Chithralekha and her family. Instead, the trade union filed a counter case against them for attempt to murder which resulted in the police arresting her husband Srishkanth. He was placed in police remand for thirty-two days. Further, the CPIM led local self-government stopped the funds allotted to Chithralekha's family for construction of toilet. And she was arrested and jailed for questioning a government officer on the same issue. Further, CPIM leaders organized a march against Chithralekha, effectively asking to control a Dalit woman. Chithralekha protested in front of the District Collectorate in 2014 while demanding the right to live and she ended her protest once the collector agreed to withdraw all cases against her but the police did not accept this. Subsequently, she began protesting in front of the collectorate with the support of Human rights organizations and citizen groups but this protest was not taken serious by the government authorities. Thus, she was forced to leave her place in Edattu.⁷³

Further, "Madhyamam" newspaper published a report titled "Chithralekhaye Sahayikkan Punaradhivasa Samithi" on January 13, 2015. According to this report, a new rehabilitation committee was formed to support Chithralekha to buy land and construct a house in Kannur town. The funding for the five cents of land and the house would be collected through public contribution and they constituted a committee to implement the decision with opening a bank account for the fund raising.⁷⁴ These two reports got the attention of the UDF led government. Thus "Madhyamam" included a new report about in their section called "Madhyamam Impact", covering the new decisions of the government.⁷⁵ This report discussed that Chithralekha's fight for justice got an attention from the government that the chief minister Oommen Chandy had

⁷³ Raveendran Ravaneswaram, "Uru Vilakkiyavarkku Jayam; Chithralekha Nadu Vidunnu," *Madhyamam*, January 12, 2015, Kozhikode edition, p. 4.

⁷⁴ Correspondent, "Chithralekhaye Sahayikkan Punaradhivasa Samithi," *Madhyamam*, January 13, 2015, p. 6.

⁷⁵ Correspondent, "Chithralekhaikkku License Labhichu: Pattayam Mukhya Manthri Nalkum," *Madhyamam*, January 1, 2015, Kozhikode edition, p. 3.

agreed to grant the pattayam (documents of the land) of five cents of land which was offered for Chitrahlekha. The chief minister had given the permit for her autorikshaw and given an autorikshaw by the district collector following the order of the chief minister Oommen Chandy.

Chengara Land Struggle

Chengara land struggle was one of the most significant anti caste movements in Kerala. Chengara land struggle popularly known as Chengara Samaram was started under the leadership of Sadujana Vimochana Samyuktha Vedi⁷⁶ in June, 2006 in Koduman estate which comes under the ownership of Plantation Corporation of the Kerala state government. The LDF led government had the discussion with the leaders and came to the conclusion that each family will be given one acre of land. But this contract was not implemented by the government. As a result, the movement started from the Harisson Malayalam estate in Chengara. The movement demanded five acres of agricultural land for each family and fifty thousand rupees for the construction of their house. In 2009 the movement was compromised by accepting government's offer that the land will be given according to the category of people. This was implemented in 2010 by giving them land and financial assistance for house construction.

However, the Sadhujana Vimochana Samyuktha Vedi leaders had to compromise with the government's offer because the protesters were subjected to continuous violence from the ruling party's trade union members. The government promised the protesters land for the people in different places in Kerala which was called as Chengara Package. But the government's promises did not meet the protesters demand. The land was given to the families in different districts of Kerala and most of the families did not accept the

⁷⁶ An association of people from the oppressed castes and classes.

land because the land was not fit for habitation and farming. Further, 700 landless families had decided to settle in the Chengara estate until their demands were accepted by the government. They still live in the Chengara estate by challenging the government's claim of being a "progressive government".

In 2008 August, five Dalit women were kidnapped and raped in the estate godown by the trade union members of CPIM. Saleena Prakkanam who is a notable leader of the Dalit movement in Kerala, also the secretary of the Chengara Samara Samithi during the movement says that women were kidnapped and brutally raped by the goons who are also working in the estate⁷⁷. The women could not file the complaint after they were victimized by the horrific crime out of fear and because they were unsure of justice. Further, civil society organizations have spread awareness about the issue to the public through protests demanding the arrest of the accused⁷⁸. The Dalit women's collective "Panchami" had organized a public meeting and protested at the district headquarters Pathanamthitta demanding justice for the survivors. "Malayala Manorama",⁷⁹ Pathanamthitta edition had reported this public meeting with an image of the protest. It was the only news report on this issue to appear in a Malayalam newspaper. There was complete silence from the Malayalam newspapers for bringing this issue to the public. There have been events of injustice and brutality against the protesters to end the movement.

Laha Gopalan, the leader of the Chengara land struggle spoke about the rape case in his interview which was published in "Mathrubhumi" weekly in 2011. According to him, the Women's Commission and the Scheduled Caste Commission had visited Chengara

⁷⁷ Saleena Prakkanam, "Chora Manakkunna Kadu," *Pachakuthira*, November 12, 2012, pp. 24-26.

⁷⁸ K A Shaji, August 23, 2008, <https://kashaji.blogspot.com/2008/08/shameful-repression.html>.

⁷⁹ "Chenarayil Sthreekale Akramichathil Prathidhedhichu," *Malayala Manorama*, July 24, 2009, Pathanamthitta edition, sec. Local News, p. 9."

during the movement to enquire about the violence that happened against the protesters. According to him four Dalit women were kidnapped and raped brutally in the Harrison estate godown and two Dalit men were also kidnapped and beaten up at the same godown by the estate workers who were the CITU union members⁸⁰. There was no further action against the culprits on these two cases until now.

DHRM Movement

The Dalit Human Rights Movement was started in 26th December, 2007 to assert the rights of Dalits. The movement aimed at the social mobility of Dalit communities and their first intervention was to conduct house campaigns in Dalit colonies against substance use. They also made their community aware about rights. They argued that their organization DHRM is based on the ideology of Ambedkar and Ayyankali. The members of DHRM participated in their public meetings and protests and wore black tee shirt with Ambedkar's image on it. This was the most controversial movement by Dalits and much of the controversy was connected to misunderstanding, distorted portrayals and attempt to discredit the movement. The Malayalam newspapers labeled them as "Dalit terrorists" and created a fear among people.⁸¹ This was propagating everywhere during that period when the police and the government accused the people in the movement for murdering a non-Dalit man who lived near their colony. Since then, there was a series of police brutality in the Dalit colony and Dalit men were arrested by police and tortured for accepting the responsibility of the murder case. Dalit women had to take their children and leave their homes from out of fear. Police, the

⁸⁰ Mathrubhoomi Weekly, *Mathrubhoomi Weekly*, April 2011, pp. 10-16.

⁸¹ Correspondent, "Varkkala Kolapathakam: Dait Theevrvadam Keralthil," *Malayala Manorama*, September 26, 2009, Pathanamthitta edition, sec. Cover Page, p. 1.

government and the Sivasena party members had the same position against DHRM. Police raided Dalit colonies in search of Dalit men who were working with DHRM.

During the raid in her colony Perumpuzha in Kollam district, Suja, a Dalit woman who has been supporting the DHRM movement since her husband began working for the organisation, was taken to the police station. She was pregnant for four months and after six years of marriage, she and her husband were able to conceive. When she confessed that she was pregnant, she was beaten up by female cops at the police station. She was injured in the stomach. She was experiencing vaginal haemorrhage as a result of this inhumane behaviour. She was held in the police station for three days and nights, deprived of food and water. Suja stated in her statement that she was verbally and physically assaulted by police officers. The police, both men and women, accused her of joining the movement in order to sleep with DHRM activists. They also refused to provide for her fundamental needs, which a pregnant woman should receive.⁸²

Dalit women who had protested against Sivasena's brutality in their colony in front of the state secretariat were physically assaulted by Sivasena workers in front of the police, and no action was taken against them. They threw stones at the demonstrators, and a pregnant woman named Suja was assaulted by them, leading to her arrest by the police. The officers assaulted her dignity while interrogating her at the police station. She later had to undergo surgery and lost her child. There was no reference of any of these issues in Malayalam publications, and there were no reports of violence against Dalit women. Instead, they concentrated on the DHRM movement and its actions, continuously attempting to portray them as a terrorist group. The CPIM-led LDF government has had a pattern of suppressing the Dalit movement.

⁸² M K M Jaffar, "Police Nadathiya Bhruna Hathyayude Kadha," *Madhyamam Weekly*, March 15, 2010, pp. 9-11.

“Mathrubhumi” wrote multiple reports under the title “Varkalayaile Kolapathakam”⁸³ on the DHRM organization in their page for local news “Nattuvarthamanam”. The discussions on these news reports were about how DHRM is a terrorist organization. The reports persistently defamed the organization by using abusive language like “Kuthazhinja jeevitham”⁸⁴ which means “Immoral life” to explain the life of people in that particular Dalit colony. According to the reports, police got the information from the local people that DHRM activists have murdered the sixty year old man and injured another man for the public attention, thus police is in search of the accused persons from the movement because the particular Dalit organization has influences in many Dalit colonies all over the Kerala state. This is why DHRM members were accused given that there were no witnesses. Further police raided Dalit colonies to find the men and the women were subjected to the violence from the police. The case of Suja is one among them.

In the same report, “Mathrubhumi” tried to find a link between DHRM and some religious terrorist groups. This demand was raised by various political parties including the BJP’s state president P K Krishnadas. To validate this argument “Mathrubhumi” collected some data from the local people which stated that the organization had secret meetings in the nights; they distribute pamphlets and deliver speeches which contains communal politics. Their lifestyle is also steeped with immorality. This way of functioning of the organization had created fear among the people. This report can influence people creating the perception that the said organization is in fact a terrorist group. “Mathrubhumi” subscribed to what BJP state president was talking about DHRM organization. At the same time, “Mathrubhumi” used “the people” to refer to

⁸³ “Varkkalayile Kolapathakam,” *Mathrubhoomi*, September 26, 2009, Thiruvananthapuram edition, sec. Local News, p. 14.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, *Dalit Sanghatanaye Kendrikarichu Anweshanam*, p 14.

the local people who are not from the Dalit colony. Their politics and alliances with the political party were not mentioned here and one can say that it is hidden purposefully to deliver their interest to the people. The report also brought another question that the organization has a tendency to approach the police station to get the bail for their members when they got arrested by the police on the complains against them. This made the police suspect that the Dalit organization has committed the murder for revenge because the police was not considering their bail applications in the previous cases in the colonies. This report clearly says that there was a suspicious situation against DHRM and they strongly assert that they believe the police and others opinions. This is how police and the media had spread the hate towards the Dalit organization.

Consequently, the situation became worse and many DHRM activists were arrested by police for interrogation. According to the news reported by “Mathrubhumi” titled “the police refused DHRM activists’ attempt of surrendering at the police staion”⁸⁵. This report reveals the incident at the Ernakulam police station where many DHRM activists went to the police station to surrender and the police had refused to arrest them because there were no complaints against them and they were told that they should report to the Varkkala police station if they want to prove their innocence in relation with the murder case. At the same time, 20 DHRM activists were interrogated by police according to this report.

This attempt of DHRM activists can be analyzed as a protest in response to the police raid in Dalit colonies which led to the arrest of many activists and created fear among Dalits. “Mathrubhumi” wrote about this incident in police’s language where protest was an unnecessary act for the police. The murder happened in Varkkala in Trivandrum

⁸⁵ Correspondent, “DHRM Pravarthakarude Keezhadangal Sramam Police Nirasichu,” *Mathrubhoomi*, September 30, 2009, Thriuvananthapuram edition, p. 7.

district but the police had interrogated DHRM activists across the state. This situation might have led the activists to approach the police to arrest them and prove their role in the murder case. This was a shameful incident for the police because this protest raised a serious question behind the motive to hunt and arrest DHRM activists. However, “Mathrubhumi” did not address this act by the DHRM activists as protest, instead they reported the incident and wrote police’s narration in the report.

“Manorama” newspaper had reported the news about the arrest of the DHRM activists in their front page which mentioned that the police had arrested three accused including the main accused in Varkkala murder case.⁸⁶ The detailed report on DHRM had been published in the same newspaper with the title “ Police investigating the link between dalit organization and the terrorist groups”⁸⁷. According to this report, police is under pressure to investigate the roots of the organization which was started three years back. All mainstream newspapers discussed the organization’s motives and how they function to create a picture of a “dangerous Dalit organization”. The language they used to write about DHRM was derogatory and which is evident in all the news reports, discussed in this chapter. Dalit women’s position and the violence towards them for being part of the DHRM community was not taken into consideration in any of these reports. However, the facts related to the violence was highlighted by the magazine “Madhyamam weekly”.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Correspondent, “Varkkala Kplapathakam: Mukhya Prathi Ulppede Moonnuper Koodi Arrestil,” *Malayala Manorma*, September 30, 2009, Pathanamthitta edition, sec. Cover Page, p. 1.

⁸⁷ Correspondent, “Dalit Sanghatanayude Theevravadha Bandham Thedi Police,” *Malayala Manorma*, September 30, 2009, Thriuvananthapuram edition, p. 15.

⁸⁸ Jaffar, *Madhyamam Weekly*, p, 9-11

Conclusion

This chapter has focused upon the major discussions on violence against Dalit women who were part of anti-caste movements and who raised the questions against caste system. The chapter analyses four cases which got the public attention through the media reports. Hence, it is important to see how these news reports were caste and gender sensitive in their depiction and representation. It is clear that the caste and gender politics of representation in the majority of the news reports deliver the selective facts for the readers filtered through their own perceptions about caste and gender, leading to the erasure from news reports and larger public discourse.

Conclusion

In the present research work titled “Caste and Gender Politics of Representation in Print Media: A Study of Malayalam News Writing on Violence against Dalit Women in Kerala”, an attempt has been made to examine the presence of caste and gender discourse in Kerala and how it is shaped by the print media. For this analysis five Malayalam language newspapers were selected; “Malayala Manorama”, “Mathrubhumi”, “Dehsbhimani”, “Kerala Kaumudi” and “Madhyamam”. These five newspapers are amongst the most popular and widely circulated newspapers in Kerala. The news reports on selected cases of anti-caste movements and Dalit women’s struggle for justice has been taken for analysis to understand how violence against Dalit women have been discussed in these news writings.

The first chapter titled, “Introduction and Conceptual Framework” gives the introduction of the study and the theoretical framework as a useful initiation in to the research. The second chapter attempted to discuss the major theories and frameworks of gender, collective violence, politics of representation and intersectionality that inform this thesis.

In the second chapter, the study focused on contemporary feminist politics of Kerala in the context of the history of feminist movements in the state. This chapter gives an overview of how women’s organisations have emerged in Kerala’s public sphere and the politics of such women’s organisation. This chapter argues that Dalit women’s question, which are contemporary to the cases of violence selected for this research, were not taken seriously by the feminist organisations of Kerala. The chapter also critically analyses the notions of the homogenised category of women produced by the politics of feminist organisation in Kerala, and establishes how it excludes and

discriminates the experiences, subjectivity and identity of the Dalit woman, who are subject to both caste and gender-based violence.

In the third chapter, the study brought the history of print in Kerala. It not only discusses the history of the newspapers in Malayalam but also comes out with a picture of the political economy and the cultural capital of the various communities in Kerala. This analysis helps to understand why questions on caste and gender are ignored by the newspaper industry. Thus, the history of the print culture of Kerala only remains as the history of certain dominant communities who possess cultural capital and who can decide the content of the news writing, thereby excluding the cases of caste and gender violence.

Chapter four is the major chapter of this thesis which goes into detailed analysis of Malayalam newswriting on caste violence. The chapter focusses on selected cases of anti-caste movements in which Dalit women have been attacked by the perpetrators of violence to silence the movement, and the cases of Dalit women who fought against caste system and injustice towards them. Through analysis of the cases and news writing on violence, this research has attempted to confront the politics of the representation in the contemporary Malayalam news writing. The chapter has further analysed the use of language and meaning-making in the said news writings, which have failed to appropriately and effectively uphold issues of caste and gender violence in the public sphere of Kerala.

The caste and gender-based violence against Dalit women discussed in this study problematizes the popular and historical imagination of the state of Kerala being amongst the most modern and progressive states in India. The research effectively attempts to destabilise its status as a proposed model for other linguistic communities

or states in India to learn from or follow. The cases of violence against Dalit women in Kerala became an occasion to consistently confront the abusive remarks that spring from the Savarana patriarchal imagination of Dalit women, as we see in the instance of the struggle of a Dalit woman like Chitralkha. Following those stereotypes, many of the leading Malayalam print media were hesitant to publish reports in favour of Chitralkha's cause. Dalit student Rajani S Anand's suicide was discussed in these news writings as a tragic outcome of the financial problem of a poor student and ignored Rajani's identity as a Dalit woman and her struggle for right to education. The heinous crime which happened during Chengara land struggle where Dalit women were kidnapped and gangraped by the perpetrators of violence was not discussed by these news reports, rather it remained as a small news about a protest by a Dalit women's group on this issue. Not a single report was found in the archive on the state's violence against women who were part of the DHRM movement. It is clear that the Malayalam news writings did not pay attention to these cases of caste and gender violence. However, there were exceptions to the rule in the form of a few writings on caste and gender by "Madhyamam", which is explained in the fourth chapter.

The cases of caste and gender violence, selected for this research are based on the time period before the presence of social media engagement. The print media's role in making a public opinion and shaping the image of society which is popularly known as "prabudha keralam" (progressive Kerala) was very important in Kerala's society before social media coming into existence. Social media has offered a platform for the people to express their views and this platform has been used by the people who lack the privilege of writing into mainstream media. Thus, the historically marginalised sections became active in the social media platform which challenged the existing print media culture. Further, the discussions on caste and gender have been present in the social

media platforms and it created a new media culture. Many media houses in Kerala have changed their politics after coming of social media because they were forced to adapt to the new situation presented by social media and the new articulation and expression. The selected cases in this research can be analysed differently if these issues were discussed in the social media and this study recommends the future possibilities to conduct the extensive research on caste and gender-based violence through further engagement with the discourses emerging in social media as well as the new media platforms.

In conclusion, this thesis would also like to argue that it is imperative for feminist politics to address the specific nature and question of caste and gender-based violence against Dalit women. The recognition and redressal of caste and gender-based violence may create the possibilities of mass mobilisation of Dalit women without the barriers and fracturing of sub-caste. Moreover, political consciousness is necessary for Dalit women to intervene in the Dalit community organisations. Political conscious can only develop through sustained political education. This thesis suggests that drastic change should happen through political and social mobilisation of Dalit women. Society constructs public consciousness about Dalit women through media images, and as we have seen, contemporary production and representation of Dalit women in mainstream media constructs the Dalit woman as largely a victim of class. They do not recognise the agency of resistance and empowerment that already exists amongst Dalit woman. Legal implementation of the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act can reduce the percentage of violence against Dalit women, and create further sensitisation towards the crimes against Dalit women.

Greater involvement in the public sphere is another way to mobilise Dalit women because in the Kerala context the upper caste women groups largely occupy the public

space. Therefore, a different perception needs to emerge regarding the public sphere, that perception can accelerate the mobility of Dalit women. Finally the Dalit woman has to take up the leadership of Dalit movement to break the patriarchal structure of the movements. Through that leadership, they can start a new debate on their issues. Such movements can transform the feminist politics in Kerala with the acceptance of diversity and it can pressurise and challenge the media culture. Further, it offers a possibility of producing the caste and gender sensitive writings on Dalit women.

The study analysed that the lack of sensitivity on caste and gender violence is the primary reason for the invisibility of Dalit women issues in the public sphere. Thus, the study recommend that the feminist writings from India needs engage in researching Caste and Gender that offers Dalit feminist scholarship as well.

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Appendix

**Gender and Caste Encounter with Travel Writing:
An Analysis of Existing Women's Writing and Travel Experiences of Dalit Women
from Kerala**

Prameela K. Prabhakaran

Abstract

Women of the Dalit communities face the double burden of caste and gender oppression; their position differs from other women's in the Hindu caste system. This paper is an intervention into the limitations of feminist academia and politics, which have failed to take in to consideration the intersectional framework to understand how caste complicates the Dalit woman's subjectivities and experiences. The paper critically analyses contemporary travel writing from Kerala and places them in the context of the oral histories of three Dalit women and their relationship to travel, thereby redefining women's travel not only as a question of freedom and choice, but as one intrinsically linked to caste labour, migration, education and economic freedom.

This paper discusses the travel experiences of Dalit¹ women in Kerala (the southernmost state of India). Dalit women face the multiple burdens of caste and gender oppression. Thus, Dalit women's position differs from other women in the Hindu caste system. Being different from other groups because of such multiple oppression makes it a separate issue of concern for feminist politics and academia. As a gender studies scholar, I consciously attempt to create an intervention on Dalit women through my research. In this paper, I look at the social position of Dalit women in Kerala as a way to understand

the present situation and find ways to initiate future discussions on Dalit women's travel experiences and memory in feminist discourse and analyses, and understand how identifications of caste and gender are significant in these experiences. At the outset, I would like to mention that the travel experiences that my research takes into account are not written and published. In this paper then, I critically look at the politics of the scribing culture, which is dominated by the privileged sections and is marked by the absence of travel writing by Dalit women. It is also an attempt to produce knowledge through engagement with the "travel writing" of Dalit women.

This paper also contests the existing notions of womanhood based on gender alone. As Lovely Stephen argues, "the status of an individual in Kerala society is based on two factors: caste and gender. Access to knowledge, wealth, and power depends on these factors. Reactions on issues and their analysis are also based on the same two factors" (Stephen 284). Therefore, I argue that Dalit women and their travel experiences have to be looked at differently within the feminist discourse. This is the time when certain kinds of travel experiences of women from privileged sections are being celebrated in Indian societies. They are happening in the name of freedom and are seen as revolutionary acts by those women who can choose to travel. The nature of these travel writings is associated with leisure and "wander lust". Laura Godsoe's argument on French white women's travel writing is very important in this context. She has argued that those women have undoubtedly benefited from their privileged class position as "eccentricities" of this sort were more acceptable for a woman from an elite family than for a woman from a lower class (228).

The same argument may be applied to people in India who occupy an analogous position in society. Thus, this paper would engage with the existing debates on women and travel writing in Kerala and the complex array of travel experiences which have been represented in Malayalam writings. Representations in cinema and print are, likewise, celebrating women's travel, which simultaneously raises questions of gender and freedom. This paper will compare Dalit women's travel experiences with those of others. As Sara Mills holds, "not all the travel writing is judged to be factual; some travel accounts have been categorised as literary travel writing or as literature, and therefore the

way these texts are read is different” (108). This paper discusses the travel accounts of women that cannot be categorised alone as factual or literary travel writings. However, it is important to see the observations of the writers that are not interpreted according to their social locations and therefore do not come under the criticism of feminist discourses in Kerala. Hence, this paper focuses on the intersections of caste and gender through a historical understanding of the travel experiences of women and their feminist politics.

Intersectionality is a key concept to analyze the categories of caste and gender. It helps understand the relationship between categories that are socially constructed – in this instance, caste and gender – and it also analyses the inequality between social groups. Thus, this paper also uses intersectional analysis to understand how travel experiences are different among different women. It is very important to look at how caste and gender act in intersections of a particular society and how the notions and questions towards such society form the mainstream public consciousness. It is very important to study intersections within and between communities to understand different power structures and how they perform in terms of gender and caste. Intersections between socio-cultural categories cannot be discussed without taking into account the theoretical understanding of intersectionality. McCall notes that “feminists criticizing intersectionality is a major contribution to social theory”. She defines “intersectionality as the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject of formations” (1171). It can therefore be argued that Indian feminist politics also should engage with intersectional identities and our lived experiences related to caste, class and sexuality, thus addressing the complexities in the women’s question.

Feminist criticism creates a space to question the hegemony and marginalisation of various social groups and the dynamics of intersections between them. Anandita Pan’s intervention into the analysis of caste and gender through “Mapping Dalit Feminism” reveals the contemporary debates on anti-caste struggles. For Anandita, “Dalit feminism as an intersectional standpoint looks at how the systems of caste and gender function. The focus on the process and functionality of systemic oppression expands our understanding of how these systems operate in other instances as well. As an intersectional standpoint, Dalit Feminism does not restrict its conceptual understanding only to Dalit women. As a

theoretical framework, it provides a lens to reinterpret any text/event from a caste- gender angle” (2021). In India, Dalit feminism has brought up the issue of caste and gender through autobiographical writings which breaks the victim/agent binary through engagement with the everyday life of Dalit women. Dalit feminism has critiqued mainstream feminism’s limitations in failing to address the Dalit women questions in the movement itself and organised solidarity for a feminist movement which recognises the intersections of gender and caste. Thus, intersectional analysis is the central mode of interrogating women’s experiences in this paper, thereby focusing on different experiences and the oppressions that shape their identity. As a critical Dalit Feminist intervention, this paper takes in to account autobiographical experiences of travel which have not been discussed in published travel writings.

Caste and gender: conceptual framework

Indian society is structured by the Varna system; therefore, the logic of caste underlies the existing social hierarchies. Caste plays a vital role in the social and cultural life of women in India, irrespective of their caste and class position. The origin of Indian caste has been debated several times by scholars. As B. R; Ambedkar states, many scholars have studied the origin of caste as a “labour of love”. Ambedkar argues that “Caste is a parcelling of an already homogenous unit, and the explanation of the genesis of caste is the explanation of this process of parcelling. It is true that caste rests on belief but before belief comes to be the foundation of an institution, the institution itself needs to be perpetuated and fortified” (1917). Caste system in India is built on the basis of Hindu ideology. Social, cultural, and economic power in India is enforced by the caste logic of Hinduism. Caste and Varna system have been normalised in India, along with the planned labour system which is imposed on the lower caste by the upper caste people. Dalits were kept as slaves for the upper caste and they were denied a dignified life for centuries. Historically, Dalits were seen as unclean because they continued to live as the lower strata in Hindu society and all rights were denied to them, including access to public spaces and the right to wear good clothes and personal hygiene, therefore, making

them impure untouchables in India. They had to keep distance from mainstream society and their duty was to serve the caste.

Ursula Sharma argues that caste is conceived as unequal and different in Indian society. The classification of caste has been glorified in relation to ethnicity. Thus, the perceived relationship between caste and ethnicity has been internalised by Indian society. This strategy made people accept caste as part of their culture. Moreover, such a strategy ensured that caste continued to remain a silent force while making a significant mark in the cultural life of the people of India. Interestingly, this acceptance of the caste system has been the privilege of one section of Indian society. Hence, they continued to practise it for their stability and dominance over society. Ideologically, caste has been dissociated from the idea of equality; thus enabling the creation of a hierarchical society on the basis of the caste logic of inequality. It breaks the internal connections between people in society and erases their historical consciousness.

Louise Prakash has discussed the notion of Dalit women's freedom. According to her, the overreaching strength of the Dalit community is that Dalit women customarily enjoyed considerable freedom, both spatially and temporally. One is not arguing that Dalit women were equal to Dalit men; but as one moves down the social order, one can recognise the comparatively free existence and operation of Dalit women, for instance, in the absence of dowry exchange and the consequent dowry deaths that plagued the women of upper caste communities. Some emerging voices have been demanding that the dominant castes should learn from Dalits the principles and practices of providing freedom to their women (232). Dalit women's notional freedom in the domestic sphere is widely celebrated both in women's movement and the Dalit movements. This paper will engage with such notions which reduces Dalit women's question when it comes to gender and Dalit discourse. It discusses the ambiguities on freedom from subjugation and freedom to liberation in quest of Dalit women in detail.

Kalpana Kannabiran argues that caste has formed the centrepiece of sociology for close to a century now. "While the practice of caste has been opposed and consistently resisted by movements in the country, caste as a knowledge system in sociology has tended to follow the well-known paths of a depoliticised social anthropology, creating

sharp disjuncture between social practice and knowledge systems within the academy. Further, the disaggregation of social practice in the curriculum of sociology, into various “topics” and “papers”, by situating caste for instance in Indian society or in social institutions, and the politics of caste within social movements, erases the potential for a radical pedagogy, and renders invisible the radical politics of anti-caste movements within the academy even while “teaching” them” (Kannabiran 160). She critically looks at how caste places as a discourse in sociology. The question of caste has been ignored in the pedagogy of sociology when it rises as a domain in sociology. Kannabiran argues that the trajectories of caste and its practises are not a primary concern of Indian sociology when it is taught in the academia. She further contests the intellectual practices of Indian sociology where the caste question has been erased by negating the anti-caste movements as the centre of methodological apparatuses.

Kalpana Kannabiran analyses homogeneity and how it was discussed in academia. She argues that no social group is completely homogenous across regions and time. Hence, the Dalit community is not homogenous either. One common thread which connects the Dalit community is the experience based on caste that historically marked their cultural, linguistic, regional, national and ethnic diversity. Kannabiran argues that Ambedkar used the word ‘Dalit’ in his writings, speeches and anti-caste struggles to “unify” the Dalits and their experience for a common anti-caste cause. Kalpana has criticised the initiatives which attack caste in the academia but ignore the contributions of the anti-caste movements and thereby fail to take in to account the differences in the Dalit community. The locus of this paper is to deconstruct the notion of homogeneity from the core of its essentialist arguments. Historically, social movements have erased the early and substantial activism of Dalit feminists who have been part of these movements. Thus, this paper will intervene into the complexities of feminist politics of India. However, the old forms of inequality do not exist anymore because caste society has transformed, and yet not disappeared immediately. However, the reality remains that caste determines the forms of privilege and deprivation in Indian society. The public presence of caste has increased in India, because of challenges to it by anti-caste movements and writings. Moreover, the lower castes, especially Dalits are continuing the struggle to claim public space and destroy caste. This is the foremost challenge to the contemporary caste system

and the particular sections called *Upper Caste* those who wish to continue their control over lower caste people with the help of their caste privileges.

Caste in Kerala: historical background

Kerala practised casteism and untouchability in different forms; untouchability and unsee-ability have been its most inhuman forms. The lower castes were forced to maintain a given spatial distance from the higher caste people. Dalits were kept away from public places and roads and they were not allowed to see any upper caste person. They were not allowed to enter temples and its surroundings. Slavery also existed in Kerala, and Dalits were slaves of the upper caste people and were treated like livestock, bought and sold openly. Dalit women were treated worse. They were prohibited from wearing clean and tidy clothes; they were not even allowed to cover the upper portion of their body, needless to talk about ornaments (Alexander 1072).

The brutal nature of slavery has had direct bearing on Dalit women's oppression in Kerala. Yet it has been ignored by the majority of social scientists. Slavery as a historical experience for Dalit women is different from any other kind of women's experience. Even after the promulgation of anti-slavery laws, slave trade still existed in Kerala. The peasant communities were allowed to stay alive and multiply but they did not have effective control over the means of production. On the same piece of land, the peasants held inferior rights and the landlords held superior rights. The powerful landlords barred the weak and helpless peasant communities from exercising their rights and made their life impossible. The untouchables could not use public tanks and wells; even if they owned a piece of land, they could not function independently in production. Dalits have been the peasant labourers in India for centuries and still the situation has not changed. The majority of agricultural labourers are from Dalit communities. Dalit women were slaves in the past. Even after the abolition of slavery in Kerala, such practices continued to exist till the early 1990s. Dalits had no option but to continue under their masters. Rice was a form of wage given to agricultural laborers. Slavery and slave trade reportedly existed in Kerala's past and it was not practiced in other parts of India. Thus for

centuries, caste was experienced differently by Dalits in Kerala, who were subjected to a system of slavery by the upper caste dominated social system. They were forced to engage in agricultural and other menial works for their upper caste masters. All members of Dalit families had to commit their life as slaves and they had to protect their master's paddy fields and other properties, while themselves living a life of misery, unfree, unpropertied and homeless. They were not treated as humans. This pathetic life of Dalits had changed with relentless struggles against caste discrimination under the leadership of Ayyankali, Poykayil, Yohannan, Pampadi John Joseph² and their contemporaries.

The movement against casteism in south Travancore was led by the *Channar* untouchables in 1926. After 1926, the elite among *Ezhavas* had changed their names to *Nadars* as per an order issued by the Government of Madras. This movement, which initiated the struggles for the right to decent and modest dressing against the upper caste people, forcefully implemented a clothes ban on the *Channar* Christian converted women. This became a great social movement known as the *Channar* mutiny for the right to cover the chest. *Channar* women were supported by the Christian missionaries about the need to revolt against social injustice based on caste discrimination. Dalit women led anti-caste struggles such as *Kallayummalayumsamaram*.³ This struggle was against the caste norms which were imposed on Dalit women. They were not only restricted from covering their breasts but also prevented from wearing white cloth on their body. They used stone malas (chain/necklace made of stones) to cover their breasts as well as ornaments. A large number of Dalit women participated in this struggle and they broke the stone chains and wore *jumber* (blouse). This was a collective revolutionary act by Dalit women to fight against caste. Dalit women also led the struggle for their children's formal education. These agitations were the stepping stones in the history of anti-caste struggle as well as women's liberation in Kerala. As Sharmila Rege points out, serious debates on class versus patriarchies have emerged. However, the political parties did not address the issue of Brahmanism in India. In Kerala, leftist parties organized struggles against landlords but these struggles expressed class interest alone and ignored the caste issue. Dalit women suffer from cultural alienation because of exclusion by the civil society in Kerala. The Government implemented certain programs for the promotion of

these marginalized groups but the circumstances for the suppression of the Dalits and the Dalit women continue to persist.

Feminist politics and travel writing in Kerala

Feminist scholarship in Kerala has largely focused on *Malayalee* women and their social mobility. “Malayalee” refers to the people of Kerala, a term that erases the social and cultural diversities among the Malayalee communities and aims at producing a nationalist consciousness among the people. The so-called Malayalee culture has historically denied the question of caste and caste-based identities in Kerala. The well-known historian Sreedhara Menon stated that “It is true that inter-caste barriers in Kerala have broken down and caste consciousness is less pronounced in the minds of the people of the present generation, but it is doubtful whether the caste system can be said to have died out completely”. He argues that caste has entered another arena (75). Here, Sreedhara Menon’s argument contradicts the actual state of caste in Kerala. He argues that, while caste continues to be a social reality in Kerala, it does not exist in the minds of the people. This argument is popular amongst the people of Kerala and effectively negates all experiences of caste amongst Dalits in Kerala society. Therefore, Menon’s argument on caste cannot be considered plausible, sociologically and historically. How can one measure caste and its intensity, while at the same time accepting that the caste system has not died completely in Kerala. However, his argument has been used to refer to Kerala society as a progressive state in India and celebrated by the people of Kerala. This popularized idea of “less caste” made an impact on the people, forcing them to say it even if they practise and experience caste, which challenges the unified idea of the Malayalee. J. Devika and Binitha Thampi note that “women belonging to communities that benefited from the high tide of reformism – the new elite – in early twentieth century Kerala moved out of their homes to spaces of paid work, and into the emergent public and politics” (1150). These studies have discussed widely the relationship between modernity and the coming out of women (especially upper caste women) to public spaces; however, they do not critically describe the privileges of physical travel and the freedom which they acquired during this transformation. In this paper, I question how such choices to “become” modern women are embedded in the larger social context of a particular time.

A notable number of travel writings that have been published in Kerala have been written by women from that state. These writings are the experiences of the privileged women who could travel along with their male counterparts to European countries even during the colonial period. This kind of writing is filled with their descriptions that reflect the quest for “knowing” foreign countries. For instance, the women wrote about the food culture, the dress code, geographical differences and the beauty of the countries they were visiting. These women, who are mostly upper caste, have remained completely silent about the social contexts of the countries they were travelling through at the time. Although the narrative style of such writing clearly reveals the woman as the writer and the narrator, one can sense the ignorance of political consciousness in these travel writings.

Kamala Suraiyya’s (also known as Kamala Das) *Kerala Sancharam* may be recognized as a feminist travel writing. Based on her travels, it was sponsored by the Kerala state Government towards the documentation of tourist places in Kerala. This travel was documented in 1976 and was unpublished for a very long time until 2009. Kamala Suraiyya brings many discussions on gender in this writing rather than producing a so-called official document. She writes: “a serious conversation is not possible with Kerala men because their thinking and eyes focus on women’s breasts and their waists. We have to wear a *burkha* to prevent that or we should dress like a man” (Madhavikkutty 7). At one point, she compares herself to a rich man with whom she had a conversation as part of her official visit. While describing this conversation, she compares herself to a housewife who suffers to make basic kitchen necessities possible. Through such a comparison, she locates herself as a victim when the reality is that she is privileged enough to travel as a state’s guest throughout Kerala. She does not acknowledge that she was travelling as an official representative and guest of the state government which enabled her to occupy such a position, clearly of privilege, during that time. It is possible to say that her selection was based on her cultural capital as a renowned writer, as the daughter of a writer from a Brahmin family. She does not engage with her privileged position as an upper caste woman who got the opportunity to travel throughout Kerala during the period of India’s political Emergency in 1975-1977, imposed by the then Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi, India’s first Prime minister. The period was

marked by widespread curtailment of civil liberties, including cancellation of elections, press censorship, and human rights violations including mass sterilisation. Instead, she sees herself only as a woman who is unqualified by any other social categories. However, her travel writing does engage with gender politics in a way that other existing travel writings by women during that time do not. Kamala Suraya's writings are based on her experiences and her expressions of fearless love and sexuality had a deep influence on many women and on feminist politics. However, the question of caste is not addressed.

Contemporary feminist politics in Kerala has undergone a great transformation in the understanding of gender, which has been visible in recent travel writings as well. The existing women's organisations in Kerala are concerned with women and gender issues even though the issues of Dalit women remain the same. Here, women's organisations which are part of mainstream political parties treat women as one category while consciously maintaining silence about caste and Dalit women issues but they engage with gender question without addressing the issues of caste and gender. To understand this nature of women's movements in Kerala, it is imperative that we specifically focus on caste and gender in feminist politics. The difference in the plight of the Dalit women from that of women belonging to other segments is based on the specific experience of the former. All women do not share the same experience and the nature of oppression is bound to be different from that the Dalit women are met with. Dalit women's issues are in many ways different from the women from the other social categories because Dalit women have been treated as the lowest in the society and their vulnerability as the most discriminated in the caste system creates a situation in which the inequality based on caste and gender is produced. This is very critical to the general notion of the global feminist community in which the question of caste and gender is less discussed. The Indian women's status is largely discussed in the feminist scholarship as a homogenous category under the rubric of South Asian women. Most analysis of the women question has been subsumed by the pre- and postcolonial frameworks of analysis, which do not take into account the intersection of caste and gender. The specific issues of Dalit women have in fact been subsumed within class-based analysis.

In this paper, I particularly choose two instances of recently published travel writings by women in Kerala. These are *Penyathrakalvi* (2017) (*Women's Travel*) edited

by Geethanjali Krishnan and Rani Padminar: *Malayalisthreekaludekaivittasancharnalvii* (2016) *Unconfined Travelling of Malayali Women*), edited by Dileep Raj. The above mentioned are collections of travel experiences of women from Kerala. The book *Penyathrakal* (Women's Travel) enquires how women's travel experiences are different from the celebrated travelogues written by men. Geethanjali Krishnan points out that women's travel writing has been manipulated largely by the market that is controlled by men. Changes were made to the writings according to the dominant male views and made marketable. She discusses what a traveller means to her and how they relate to the places that they travel to. People who just visit a place do not write travelogues. For her, the place is a "dream world for a travel writer because they feel the place is their home and their world" (Krishnan 13). She argues that conditions of marriage anyway compel women to adapt to a new place and live their life within a new atmosphere. A newly married woman must accustom herself to the new space such that she fights and compromises to live there because she is taught to think of any place and time, where she is sent (69), as her own. Hence, Krishnan argues that women are better equipped to write travelogues. I find this argument quite problematic in that she tries to feminize travel and claims that women can travel and write better than men.

Here, by using the category of women as a whole she ignores the differences among women. Placing women as the better travellers with their repressive socialization and marginal position in patriarchal society without relating it to their privileged locations does not engage with the feminist politics of the time. Instead, it claims women are a homogenous category and they all share the same experiences as women irrespective of their cultural positions. Such attempts to feminize travel do not participate in critical feminist analysis. Feminist politics is not just about the conversation between the binary of women and men, rather it should engage with the social and political locations of people to problematize the differences – which does not deny the multiple experiences that constitute one's identity. Thus, travel writing reflects the author's sensibility and the style which allows the readers to understand its politics as well. Here, Geethanjali Krishnan does not engage with the social locations of the women which she discusses in her book in detail, and the collection of writings does not engage with diverse identities of women. Further, according to her definition of travel writing, travel is

a choice, which women take as their own with some amount of happiness. She uses the metaphor *dream world* for the place where a traveller visits and she says that the place becomes their home and their world. I critically look at her comparison of a place as a dream world. A place becomes a dream world for a person when they travel with dreams, especially when they can decide to travel where they want. This imagination defines the travel and place in a hegemonic understanding where travel writing becomes authentic and particular for a certain category of women.

Penyathrakal engages with different travel writings by women written in different periods. In fact, it gives us images of culture and people's life from the traveller's view. The editor's ideas of a dream world are drawn from the narratives of women who travelled outside Kerala. They describe the cultural life of the people and the beauty of the landscape which they visit. The book engages with women and their sufferings at the place where they visited. Most of the writers discuss their exposure to places outside Kerala and India and they bring in their comparison to people in Kerala. I understand this is not different from the travel writings, which already exist; only that it is written by women without engaging in gender politics apart from their observations on other women in their *dream world* and "themselves" as well. This tendency in travel writers was very common and it was accepted as well by the readers previously but the situation has transformed where gender politics has to be discussed critically in travel writings in this time. It is very important to see the gender analysis by women travellers in their writings which will contribute to the feminist scholarship. Geethanjali Krishnan observes Hindu mythology and women's travel in a very interesting way. She argues that women belonging to royalty and aristocracy who travelled for their husbands are glorified in Indian mythology. These narratives did not take into account that *Asura*⁴women were also travelling and they were doing so independently without men or purposes that involved men (46). This I read as a deliberate tendency in Hindu mythological texts to demoralize/demean *Asura* women who did not travel with men. These Hindu religious texts portray *Asura* characters in a derogatory manner. This has effectively compartmentalized people and their cultures and enabled descriptions of *Asura* women as immoral. This has effectively created a framework of reference for upper caste women

who travel without socially legitimized male company to be compared or equated with the morally reprehensible *Asura* or Dalit woman.

In her article “Women and Economics of Travel”, Krishnan writes:

[T]ravel is always related to money and freedom whether it is men or women. A lot of refugees travel from Asian and African countries as the result of war and religious politics! Helpless people became the scapegoat by other’s faults and decisions in their life. *Malayalees* do not have such travel experiences because they have never gone through such political situations in their place. They do not lose their home, nor their homeland (43).

This observation by the author completely ignores the historical understanding of Kerala. She sees *Malayalees* as one category and analyses the *Malayalee* experience as one. This tendency of examining *Malayalee* experience⁵ as a shared one does not open up any discussion on caste and travel experiences and it ignores the existing history of gulf migration and the people who are largely known as Pravasi Malayalees. Thus, her comparison merely remains as the *Malayalee* experience that precludes any nuanced understanding of the cultural history of Kerala.

Krishnan observes that women’s travel writing needs financial assistance. She says that “women who have authored travel writings receive financial assistance from a particular source or do so as part of their profession or they travel along with their husbands and children. Others travelled only as part of their spiritual travel. Along with financial assistance, freedom and time are the important factors which women need to write about their travel” (Krishnan42). I agree with her argument that women can author their travel narratives only when they have support in the form of money, freedom, and time. It is clear from her words that the existing travel narratives of women are written by this category of women who could afford certain things, thereby making their travel possible in the first place. This understanding seems to encompass her experience and understanding of the travel writings of women from Kerala. I argue that *Penyathrakal* gives us the travel experiences of women who had the choice and the financial wherewithal to travel and these privileges become part of the feminization of travel in

many writings in this book. I have tried to find caste and gender engagements in existing travel writings by women but I have largely not found any, especially in the published works. This reveals how travel experiences by women in Kerala creates its own boundaries through preconceived notions of travel and women who travel, and this boundary excludes the possibility of any critical engagement with its own politics.

The book titled “*Raanimar Padminimar: Malayalithreekaludekaivittasancharangal*” (*Unconfined travelling of Malayali women*)⁶ is a collection of feminist writings, produced through the framework of liberal politics. This book is a collection of travel writings by women from Kerala and edited by Dileep Raj. This book focuses on women who have travelled alone and their experiences. The title of the book itself is very political and is closely connected with the writings. The book largely discusses women’s travel experiences in relation to freedom and gender. Most of the writers have written about their first travel experiences as a woman. Some of the articles in this collection discuss family and patriarchy in society, expressing dissent to patriarchal families where women were not allowed to travel alone. The experiences of the authors vary from each other but the idea of freedom and joy is the one common factor, which is found here as well. In this paper, I examine how caste has been discussed in this “very political feminist writing”.

The question of caste is only used (directly in words) in one writing by Kani Kusruthi.⁷ She talks about how she was asked about her caste identity and her father told her not to respond to such questions. She obeyed his words. In her narration, she recognizes that people were skeptical about her caste and religious identity because her skin color is brown. However, Kani had the option to not reveal her caste since she does not belong to a lower-class family. She describes her social background in her writings, identifying that she received her political orientation from her liberal parents. I think that her experiences of travel did not require her to break any domestic barriers. She also talks about her grandmother’s anxieties about her dark skin and how that makes her look like a *pandy*,⁸ when she wears dark colored dresses (Kani 11). This clearly displays the casteist patriarchal notions that women have also internalised. Her descriptions of her family reveal that she comes from a privileged family, revealing also her cultural identity. Subsequently, this narration does not allow the readers to understand her caste identity.

This peripheral idea cannot engage with caste politically, especially the way in which she has discussed caste in her writing. Liberal politics and caste contradict each other mostly because the former often has the tendency to not deal with caste and neither do they question the privileges of liberal politics. Speaking against caste and its discriminatory practices itself is a revolutionary step in India towards annihilation of caste but this social responsibility has been taken by Dalit organisations. The author, instead, has chosen to speak about the racial prejudices against colour of skin, which is a global issue, ignoring the more immediate discourse and practices of caste.

In this book, it is quite difficult to understand how questions of caste and gender are being engaged with since the writers do not speak about their caste locations and the implications of it during travel. They connected the relationship with family and themselves as individuals. The narrations in the book speak of travel, as if determined entirely by the individual with complete erasure of the caste question. However, I choose one Dalit woman's travel writing from this book to look at how caste is being discussed in this article. For this analysis, I take Vaikhari Aryat's⁹ article, which is titled *Veetilninnum Purathekkulla Vazhikal (The Ways from Home to the Outside)*. She critically looks at patriarchal notions on women and the public place. She talks about how her mother restricted her from going out of the home without the company of men. Her mother told her that women who go out alone especially to spaces such as the cinema and the theatre are considered "bad women". She says that knowing this she wanted and decided to be a bad woman when she travelled alone for the first time in her life to Delhi. Her narrative is about how she experienced her freedom when she was beyond familial control. Her travels outside Kerala introduced new experiences to her. She talks about the kinds of questions Malayalees asked her on the train to Delhi about her travels as well as who she was. They assumed that she was a nurse and was going to Delhi to find a job. She in fact accepts the assumption only to avoid further questions. She says sarcastically that it was thanks to their notions that a black thin weak girl could only be "good" for a nursing job that she was saved from having to speak further lies (Vaikhari, 88).

Here, black skin is understood as a marker of caste identity. She concludes from this that these were the ways in which the *Malayalee* public consciousness created such assumptions about black skinned women. Although she was a postgraduate student in a

university during that time, it is this public consciousness and markers of her identity that compel her to “manipulate” their assumptions to avoid further disturbing questions. Her experience in Delhi was memorable for her (as she claims in her writing) especially when it came to its nightlife and the freedom that she felt there. One can see her excitement at being a woman who could make her travel possible outside Kerala. Vaikhari Aryat discusses a political situation of that particular time when Soumya¹⁰ was raped and killed in a train when she was traveling from workplace to home on 1st February 2011. This created a fear among her family members and many others. This situation brought in a protectionist regime that further affected women’s freedom. Vaikhari’s narrative focuses on that particular time and the connections she makes with her travels and the sense of determination with which she completed her journey. Her writing engages with the contemporary politics of gender in which notions of protection and safety further the patriarchal agenda. Her entire travel note in fact considers the question of gender seriously and critically. However, she continues to remain distant from the fact and issue of caste. Her writing then is produced within a context that limits itself within the discursive construction and reception of the theme of the book, which focuses on Malayalee women. She therefore produces herself as a *Malayalee* woman like in the other narrations in the book, rather than placing herself and her writing within the caste and gender discourse.

Raani Padminimaar and *Penyathrakal* are contemporary publications of a time when there are a lot of discussions happening in Kerala on gender in general and caste in the Dalit assertion movements as well. Dalit women who have written in the book such as Vaikhari Aryat did not relate her travel to caste in her writing though she observed the ways her physical appearance is received by the public. It is understood that travel for women means freedom and breaking from the moral consciousness of the family. This idea is well articulated in many of the writings in the book. Subsequently, one can say that breaking those barriers make women further determined to travel and experience their own space within a larger public. *Penyathrakal* is intense in its focus on how women see things differently when they travel. It was an attempt to challenge the aesthetics of travel writing which men have consistently dominated. The travel writings

from this book distance themselves from caste and gender discourses in their focus on glorifying women's travel (as opposed to those by men) as a distinct entity.

Dalit women's Travel: a forgotten category

This paper contests the existing culture of travel writing in Malayalam language – that privileged with the experiences of individuals belonging at the intersection of the dominant class, caste and gender. It is very important to look at the intersections to understand the different power structures and how they perform in terms of gender and caste. Therefore, I focus on what travel means to Dalit women in association with their caste identity. The travel experiences of Dalits in general and Dalit women in particular are associated with the social history of caste and the struggles of Dalit assertion as well. Thus, this paper focuses on the intersections of caste and gender through historical understandings. Here, I try to bring travel stories narrated by two Dalit women in Kerala. I will also be writing about my own travel experiences : I discuss three Dalit women and their travel experiences, including myself. This analysis is a biographical one because the other two Dalit women who are included in this discussion are from my family itself. They are my mother Syamala and my grandmother Thaali. It is very important for me to engage with the narratives and memories of Dalit women who I know personally. The experiences related to travel are also part of my social location and existence.

The first narrative: that of Thaali:

Thaali¹¹ was an untouchable Dalit slave and she used to work for the upper caste landlord for years. She is the one who explained untouchability to me, through a song. She sang “*enidikkinoravilukollame... meloottukarikkuennekanumbamcharidiokkanam!*” The lyrics, when translated, say that the upper caste likes the rice flakes which I make but they feel like vomiting when they see me. This song was sung by Dalits to express their anger against the upper castes. This is the only song I remember though she used to sing many until her death. Here, I recollect and share her experiences of her travels. She would spend her evenings telling us, her grandchildren, these stories. According to her:

We walked miles and miles across the paddy fields, canals and the jungle to reach our destination – for work. We were not able to find the difference between home and work because we would sleep after work and then wake up in the morning and work again. We would travel along with our children and belongings and set up a hut at the paddy field where we worked days and nights. The landlord would offer us more paddies if we agreed to sleep with him and we would be punished if we refused to. We carried a sickle along with us to cut the bushes to make a path for ourselves” (Thaali).

Thaali narrates the social situation of her past and this gives us a picture of the life of Dalits in general and Dalit women in particular. They did not choose to travel; it was forced on them. They were compelled to travel barefoot for long distances and work without rest. This is the time when Dalits were not allowed to walk on the public paths and roads and enter into the market and other public spaces that were “owned” by the upper castes. This is how the upper caste maintained control over public spaces and reproduced caste hierarchy. Thus, the situation made their travel even harder. They were forced to work in paddy fields and denied access into public spaces and unsurprisingly Dalit women were harassed sexually by upper caste men. As Sanal Mohan observes:

Most of the lands used to be controlled by the upper caste, while the slave caste labourers, who were slaves juridical till the mid nineteenth century, carried out the actual cultivation. As a result of this, the untouchable slaves continued to exist in the same structural position for a very long time, even after the abolition of slavery in 1855 in the Travancore region of Kerala. (123)

Thaali lived at a time when slavery was abolished but continued to be practised illegally, that is, to exist in different forms until Dr. B R Ambedkar drafted the Indian Constitution which criminalised any form and practice of untouchability practices towards Dalits based on their caste.

Syamala’s narrative¹²

Syamala was a Dalit domestic worker who worked in upper caste houses on the basis of daily wage. She says about her travel:

I worked at a Syrian Christian¹³ house as a servant for five years continuously and I walked four kilometres to catch the bus to reach my work place every day. My day started early in the morning at 4 a.m. I finished all the work at home by 6 a.m then stepped out for work. I was forced to work more than ten hours a day because an upper caste family would pay me only RS. 60 for a day's worth of labour. I travelled daily to the town on foot, a distance of 8 kilometres. I had to face obscene comments from upper caste men and even young boys on my way home from work and so I tried to reach home as early as possible. People made stories about me when I came home late. I was always worried about my daughters, left alone at home, because my husband left us some years back which forced me to take up work as a domestic servant. To avoid this, I used to hire an auto rickshaw for thirty rupees which is half of my daily wage to reach home because I thought I should not give opportunity to others to look at me and my daughters badly.

This is the narration by a Dalit woman who used to work as a domestic servant during the late 1990s and until 2007. Walking eight kilometres during the day and working and maintaining home for a Dalit woman does not give the happiness of a trip. She travelled to make money for survival and had to work overtime without any extra payment. Her travel is assigned to her to reach her work place and go back home. Syamala's experience clearly shows how Dalit women are treated in Kerala by upper caste/non-Dalit men. Dalit women in the public are mostly seen as bad women and easily accessible. Her narration breaks down the constructed notion of Dalit women and freedom. Here, Syamala, as a domestic worker, is not just a labourer and she does not work in multiple houses as in urban areas. She worked for an upper caste family for years and only served them from morning to evening. I understand this as a form of slavery where the upper caste search for a servant woman in Dalit colonies and make them work only for that family. The breaking of earlier caste practices where Dalits were not allowed to enter upper caste's premises is also evident. But now Dalit women are working in upper caste houses. For me, this definitely marks the history of caste in Kerala but also reminds us that Dalit

women entering in upper caste houses do not necessarily find freedom from caste and its practices.

Thaali and Syamala belong to two different generations: Thaali lived when slavery still existed and Syamala is alive now, in our own time. But the similarities of their experiences cannot be ignored; they share the cultural history of their community. Also the travels of Thali and Syamala are different from the travel writings which have been published in the form of print.

My narrative

I started travelling alone to other places for my studies. I travelled as part of my education, employment and for picnics. I travelled with my upper caste/ elite friends many times and went to shopping malls and many places. I faced curious questions regarding my caste identity only from *Malayalee* passengers in the train and this makes me avoid conversation with co-passengers when I travel from/to Kerala. The questions on my caste identity disturbed me a lot and I would get agitated when such questions were raised; in turn, my responses irritated those with questions. I can cite incidents where I experienced caste prejudice during my travels. For instance, I had to deal with the discriminatory attitude towards me and my family in a restaurant in Hyderabad, the same city where I was studying. There is an incident, which I want to discuss here, when I had gone to a restaurant with my friends in a highly populated tourist place and we had a good time over there. Later I travelled to the same place and visited the same restaurant again with my family. This time we were denied seating in the family section. The restaurant staff asked us to go downstairs and sit where the lower class men sit and eat. They instead gave space to the fair skinned, well-dressed, elite-looking women who came after us. My sister and I had to question the owner and their caste arrogance and left the restaurant without eating their well-known tasty food. This was a humiliating experience for us: we could afford to go to such restaurants but they reminded us of our caste position by denying their service and ignoring our existence. Such situations force people like me to behave accordingly because caste shapes our behaviour and ways of existence.

I will conclude with an experience with friends while travelling (during the research course on “Researching the Contemporary” in Delhi, India’s capital city). I travelled with

a group of women friends to Dharamshala, Jaipur, Amritsar and Delhi (famous tourist destinations in India). One of the members of the group was upper caste and her casteist mindset became evident through her controlling behaviour during the travel. Right from the beginning, she insisted on assuming leadership of the group and its activities, which entailed that the rest of us follow her directives without question, disagreement or discomfort. I observed her dominating behaviour throughout the journey. I was the only one who was older than her in the group. The other two women were from a Dalit community and there was another one from an ethnic group from North east India. I was new to the group and became close with them only after we met at the workshop venue though four of us had already been studying in the same university campus. Her arrogance was often underlined by her fear of losing her dominant position before a largely non-upper caste group and in particular before a Dalit woman who is older than her. Her discomfort as I avoided her controlling attitude was evident. I felt that she consciously tried dominating someone who is from the lower caste. I had either to ignore her or react in the many situations when she tried to dominate me. Her behaviour reflected her need to teach Dalit women ways to conduct and educate themselves in “new” places. She called me “crazy” when I travelled alone in Delhi at night and Agra. I found her attitude to reflect a patriarchal mindset: she would be comfortable traveling only with all kinds of protection and safety and on the other hand she could not imagine that a Dalit woman would have the confidence to travel alone. She clearly subscribed to the notion that women should not travel alone and should be conscious of their safety as if it were a duty. I was able to travel with the group only because the fellowship gave us a stipend. Interestingly my own notions are shaped by the idea that women can only travel if they have the money to ensure that they can do so safely.

Caste plays an important role in friendships. The Upper caste friends behave towards Dalit women with a preconceived notion, where they believe that Dalits do not know anything and there is a continuous desire to dominate the person who is from Dalit community such as me. This of course made my travel unpleasant when I travelled with her. Her presence made my travel experiences unpleasant. This incident forced me to be conscious about my identity whenever I travelled with upper caste friends, although I did not have any similar experiences after this trip. I was raised by a single mother, working

as a domestic labourer. This meant that I needed to take up responsibilities at a very young age. As a result, traveling alone has been both necessary and comfortable for me. This has been significant in shaping my travel experiences and my presence as a Dalit woman in public spaces. Thus, travel has become not just a movement from one place to another; other factors intervene in it. Dalit women's travel is not just a choice or a manifestation of a desire to travel; it is closely connected to their caste. Thaali's and Syamala's travel narrations break prevailing ideas about travel because their travel was for the purposes of survival and livelihood. I therefore argue that travel and travel writing cannot be fixed into a particular genre of writing which ignores the caste experiences of Dalit women and their travel.

Conclusion

I brought these three narrations together in this paper to critically engage with how Dalit women's travel experiences encounter caste and gender differences. These differences can be in multiple forms such as the idea of travel and the need to travel, as well as notions about Dalit women's freedom and their bodies. In this ontological analysis, the narratives by Dalit women from three generations provide three instances of travel where the aspects of caste and gender become crucial rather than mere "subjects of story-telling". This clarifies my journey to becoming a feminist scholar from Dalit community, carrying this knowledge that women from my family shared with me and showing the upward mobility of Dalit women. This social mobility is significant in these analyses, but also in Vyikhari Aryat's writings. Thaali represents Dalit lives in the past and Syamala's narration ushers to their mobility, although she is still forced to follow the hierarchy in which caste status dominates. Vaikhari Aryat and my own experiences further show the upward mobility that we have achieved through education, despite our different class backgrounds.

Caste and gender encounter in Dalit women's travel has a complex history which is associated with the struggles of Dalits and their fight to annihilate caste. As a Dalit feminist scholar, I have chosen a political position to discuss these issues in an Indian context where Dalit women are constantly reminded of their identity in social engagements. Existing travel writings like *Penyathrakal* and *Ranimaarpadminiamaar*

introduce women's view of travel in order to decentre the privilege of hegemonic travel writing. However, these two books fail to accentuate the need to historicize the analysis of gender and travel writing. In this paper, I have argued that the travel experiences of women (and for those matter men) are shaped culturally and socially and cannot be studied individually. Christa Cowman and Louis A. Jackson argues that "women's identities and subject positions can be understood more fully if we explore the intersections of the physical, the material, the cultural and social: those processes of remembering and re-membering, telling and re- telling, and their relationship to the passing of time"(32). Vaikhari's travel writings are different from the travel narrations of Dalit women which I discussed here. I have shown that Dalit women's experience is different from that of other women and cannot be placed within a homogenous understanding of the same because caste persists and does so in new forms. Caste shapes our behaviour and ways of existence. As Sara Ahmad argues, "we must admit to the differences that we cannot name – as well as those we cannot not name" (94). The travel experiences in this paper cannot be named as the only "authentic" experiences of Dalit women but again, I strongly argue that the encounter with gender and caste makes Dalit women experiences different, whether it is travel or any other presence of Dalit women in a given place. The relationship between caste and gender is very much visible in Indian society and is reflected in every sphere of people's life.

Notes:

¹Dalit community comes under category of untouchable people by the Hindu Varnaa system and Dalits were treated as untouchable slaves for centuries according to this caste system. It is still practices in India in its different forms.

²Ayyankali, Poykayil Yohannan and Pambadi John Joseph were the contemporaries who fought against caste and its inhumane practices in Kerala during British rule in India.

³Kallayum Malayum Samaram was the historical protest led by the leadership of Ayyankali and massive Dalit women threw the *kallumala* (stone necklaces) which they used to cover their breast and wore the blouse.

⁴ Asura is a category of people in Hindu mythology . They ae described as black-skinned people who are very violent in nature while Devas are their anti-thesis: they are the gods and fair skinned people. Asura women are portrayed as female demons in Hindu religious texts.

⁵I use the term Malayali experience here as the prevailing and dominant idea which people largely accept in Kerala. There is a tendency to ignore such discussions on the cultural differences of the people.

⁶ The introduction of this book is written by the actor Reema Kallingal, who acted as *Raani* in the movie *Rani Padmini* which was released a few months before the publication of this book. The film *Rani Padmini* is about two women who met each other on an unplanned trip in their life and enjoyed the trip together and later became friends. The film in a way occasioned this book that brought together a collection of narratives of women who opted to travel alone.

⁷ This is a theatre artist from Kerala who also works in the film industry as an actor, playing roles of women from subaltern communities. She won the state government's award for best female actor for her performance in the Malayalam film *Biriyani* in 2020.

⁸ This is a derogatory term used by Malayalees (known as people from Kerala) to name Tamils, especially as a comment on their skin colour and lifestyle.

⁹ Vaikhari is a Ph D Scholar in University of Hyderabad. She identifies herself as a Dalit queer feminist in her writings on social media.

¹⁰ Soumya is a lower caste/class woman from Kerala who was raped and murdered in the train, while she was travelling from her workplace to home.

¹¹ Thaali is my grandmother who worked as a slave in the early 20th century and died in 2001 when she was 96 years old.

¹² Syamala is my mother who worked as domestic help in upper caste houses for fifteen years to survive as a single mother of two girl children after her husband abandoned her.

¹³ This is the upper caste community in Kerala who claim to have been Brahmins in the past and who later converted into Christianity. The community still follows the practices of caste towards Dalits, just like Hindu dominant castes.

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14 November 2017

To,

Prameela K P

Ph D. Scholar

Centre for women's studies

University of Hyderabad

Gachibowli

Hyderabad

Subject: Invitation for the Second International Dalit Studies Conference

Dear Ms Prameela KP,

As you know the Second International Dalit Studies Conference is being held at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi from **22-24 January 2018**. This second Conference follows upon the earlier Dalit Studies International conference (2008), held at University of Pennsylvania. That conference was an attempt to bring together academics and intellectuals for a productive conversation on new research agendas and resulted in the publication of an edited volume, entitled *Dalit Studies* (2016).

In this Conference, we plan to continue to explore caste inequality, human dignity, democracy and similar concerns, and to further reflect on the possibilities and challenges before Dalit Studies.

We are pleased to invite you as one of the selected participants to present your paper on **"Invisible/Unheard "Travel" of Dalit Women: An Anthological Analysis"** at the conference.

We at CSDS will be happy to provide round trip economy class air fare between Hyderabad and Delhi as well as cover your local expenses for stay and travel and to provide local hospitality during the period of your stay for the conference in Delhi.

It would be of great help for us if you could let us know of your travel dates at your earliest convenience, so that we could go ahead with booking your accommodation.

Looking forward to your participation in the Conference,

With best wishes,



(ADITYA NIGAM)

Member, Conference Organizing Committee



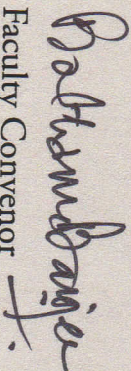
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