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IN THE NAME OF AMBEDKAR...

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Dalit narratives are the oppositional voices that question and subvert dominant social, historical and literary discourses. These narratives talk not only of the oppressions and struggles of a community but also are an assertion of their rights. They not only denounce mainstream cultures that have eroded Dalit histories, but also lay rightful claims to their own literary, historical, social and political spaces. The call for laying such legitimate claims was initiated by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Mahad Satyagraha in 1927 where he claimed the Dalit's rights to use water from public wells.

Ambedkar, who was a 'forgotten' leader of modern India, was resurrected to the public domain in the recent past as a result of Dalit mobilization across the country. A Dalit from very humble origins, Ambedkar holds two Master's degrees (one in Arts and the other in Science), two doctorates (one from Columbia University and the other from London School of Economics and Political Science). Battling against all odds, he further became a barrister-at-law from Grey's Inn, London. With such credentials unimaginable for a Dalit, especially in those days, sadly enough we know him only as the architect of the Indian Constitution. Our school history text books have so far refused to acknowledge him otherwise.

Ambedkar's commandment, "Educate, agitate and organize" is about acquiring knowledge and organizing a common mission to move towards a revolution in society. These watchwords are taken over by the Ambedkarite movements across the country in recent history, especially in spaces of public education. This burgeoning rise in Ambedkarism is the result of a Dalit-Bahujan struggle to

recognise the significance of Ambedkar, among other things. What we understand is that the contemporary Dalit mobilization emerges as a threat to the dominant culture through the creation of alternative subversive spaces. We also see a dire urge among the right wing groups to stake claim over Ambedkar's legacy out of compulsions from the changing times.

The relevance of Dalit literature in these trouble-torn times cannot be overlooked. Dalit writers have contributed greatly to the recovery of the subjugated knowledges of the marginalized folk through their life writings, political manifestos and fiction, all of which record history from below. And, Ambedkar remains an undeniable source of inspiration for all of them who have taken the Dalit Movement far towards his goal. This movement upholds Ambedkar's idea of 'reconstructing the world' by abolishing the oppressive power structures which is a huge blow to the casteist Indian consciousness. The movement is about a subversive politics which awakens the conscience of all who look forward to social justice and equality.

As such, there is a need for all of us to seriously consider Ambedkar's ideals at this juncture as we face fascist attacks from all quarters. Today, we witness formidable challenges to the Brahminical hegemony, posed by writers, activists, intellectuals and students waging their resistance in their own ways as evidenced in the ongoing massive unrest in Una, Udupi, Chengara, JNU, HCU and EFLU. These have become the inevitable crossroads in history necessitating discussions, debates and dialogues that can hopefully take Indian democracy towards an egalitarian world as dreamt by Ambedkar. The articles compiled in this volume are our contribution towards fulfilling that dream.

Jai Bhim!

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In Search of Unseen Letters: Understanding Dalit Historiography

Jentle Varghese

I behold the histories of many races
Every history in Keralam was searched for,
There was nothing written on my race.
There was none on the earth to write the story of my race
And it was drowned in the abysmal
Darkness of the nether world[1]

Poyikayil Yohannan lamented the absence of 'his people' in the history of early twentieth century Travancore. He had searched every historical account on Keralam but could not find the history of his people, the untouchable slave castes of Kerala. His critique of the existing historiography anticipated the emergence of radical historiographies like the "history from below" in the west and the *Subaltern Studies* in the Indian context, which have raised questions about the absence of the lowest sections of the society in the histories written so far. Even so many years after Yohannan's critique of the mainstream history, and the emergence of radical historiographies, we cannot see any new "history" of the marginalised sections of Kerala.[2] This paper is an attempt to look at how history is an important area of the recently emerged Dalit Studies, which aims at offering a new perspective on Indian history and society. Looking at the limitations of history as a discipline and the various schools of historiography and their preoccupations, this paper aims at showing how Dalit historiography foregrounds Dalits as the active agents of social change rather than passive spectators.

Rethinking the Discipline of History

Historiography all over the world has undergone radical rethinking in the latter half of the twentieth century. The earlier practice of historiography has been criticised for being elitist, interested only in the lives and achievements of the upper strata of the society. As Eric Hobsbawm observes "the traditional historians concentrated on Kings and cabinets, wars and diplomacy, because they considered the actions of decision-makers among the ruling groups as the most important motive forces of History" (Lloyd xiv). D.D. Kosambi also makes a similar argument. He observes that in conventional historiography the "discussion eddies around obscure dates and deservedly obscure biographies of kings and prophets." He asks:

> But what is history? If history means only the succession of outstanding megalomaniac names and imposing battles, Indian history would be difficult to write. If, however, it is more important to know whether a given people had the plough or not than to know the name of their king, then India has a history. (10)

Rather than asking questions about kings and the elite groups, historians started asking questions about common people and their lives. These newly emerged questions necessitated the study of the marginalised sections of the society which led to a crisis in the discipline of history. History as a discipline depends on the archives. The subordinated groups like Dalits do not produce any archive since most of them are illiterate.. "They do not write but they are written about," as Shahid Amin puts it (xviii). Hence it became the responsibility of the historian to mobilise different kinds of unconventional source materials in order to write the lives of these people into history.

Thus a historian who studies Dalits could make use of oral history, songs, tales, folklores and myths. In the conventional historiography, these are not considered as sources for writing history. But that does not mean that these people are without a/any history. Hence, we have to devise different methods to write the history of these groups. As Dipesh Chakrabarty observes: "in mastering the stories of groups hitherto overlooked-particularly under circumstances in which the usual archives do not exist-the discipline of history renews and maintains itself" (98-99). Hobsbawm is of the opinion that the past can be accessed only through the questions we ask about it. "In a way, all historians, I think, must assume that what we are talking about is something real, something that is objectively there: namely, what happened in the past. At the same time it is not enough to do that since the past is only accessible via the questions we ask of it (105). Hobsbawm's observations are very significant for our purpose because the problem with the different schools of historiography in Kerala has been the absence of certain questions like identity formation and subaltern religiosity, which would have led to an alternative understanding of the social process in Kerala.

Historiography and the Caste Question

Various schools of historiography including the radical historiographies like *Subaltern Studies* have failed to address the questions of caste. This has invited criticism from many scholars who work on the marginalised castes. "In Indian historiography, Dalit struggles against untouchability and upper caste domination were frequently regarded as sectarian and pro-British, and therefore as anti-national" (Rawat and Satyanarayana 8). The main interests of the various schools of historiographies are anti-colonial struggles and nationalism. Sanal Mohan evaluates the position of modern Indian historians of various schools in his article "Beyond Subaltern Studies: Locating Dalit Studies":

The modern Indian historians irrespective of historiographical schools were preoccupied with anti-colonial nationalism. To them any movement that did not confront colonialism as the primary problem fell short of acceptance. Again, such movements were anti-national aberrations or to the most sophisticated scholars they were the expressions of a false consciousness. As a result of this, movements that articulated caste contradictions came to be viewed as a threat to nationalism by most nationalists. The leftists came to view such movements as a challenge to the working class unity. In fact various genres of historiography seem to have failed to analyse Dalit movements that developed in the colonial and post colonial phase. It is in this context that one needs to look at the possibility of developing another possible historiography of Dalit resistances as well as Dalit everyday life following some of the theoretical trends in critical social sciences. (114)

In other words, the various schools of modern Indian historiography tend to discuss the elite aspects of Indian history. The life world, the struggles and the agendas of the deprived sections of the society have never been the concern of historians belonging to these schools. Their central concern was the evolution of Indian nationalism and the Indian nation through anti-colonial struggles. It was in such a context that the Subaltern Studies emerged as a critique of the elitist historiography. It is an attempt to criticise the elitism in the historiography of Indian nationalism. According to Ranajit Guha, the historiography of Indian nationalism has been dominated by two kinds of elitism: colonialist elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism. Both these schools are partisan as they argue that Indian nation and nationalism are "predominantly elite achievements" (1). Subaltern Studies, on the other hand, while studying the "the politics of the

people" that is the non-elitist domain of Indian politics, the principle actors of which were "the subaltern classes and the groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country –that is, the people" (4) failed to seriously look at the question of caste. Sanal Mohan observes:

> One of the limitations of *Subaltern Studies* has been its silence on the question of caste even as caste remained the primary form of hierarchy and articulation of power in India. Although some articles in *Subaltern Studies* deal with tribal, peasant and working class movements and have their thrust on the question of resistance notwithstanding, the notable absence of efforts at theorising caste and hierarchy needs to be mentioned here as it would form one of the central issues of Dalit studies (2013: 103).

Partha Chatterjee, one of the prominent figures in the *Subaltern Studies* group has recently observed that the recent developments require the study of the Dalit movements and other anti-caste movements which the Subaltern Studies did not address (2012: 44). Neeladri Bhattacharya's observation is also important in this context:

> The past does not come to us with a unitary truth embedded within it; the facts that historians mine do not ever speak with one single voice. As our perspectives change we look at the past in new ways, reinterpret events, discover new meanings within them, and pose new questions that could not even be formulated within the limits of earlier frameworks of analysis. So the historians tell different stories of the same past, refigure evidence in diverse ways in the act of rewriting history – an act that enriches our conceptions of the past (Bhattacharya 2003).

It is a well established fact that Dalit actors and agendas are absent in the mainstream history. Why is it so? According to Dipesh

Chakrabarty, it is not that the writers of the mainstream history consciously erase them form the written history. On the contrary, it is the very limitation of the discipline of history. During the process of writing history, certain pasts receive "lesser importance" in the historian's narratives."Such minor pasts are those experiences of the past that always have to be assigned an "inferior" or "marginal" position as they are translated into the academic historian's language" (100-101). Chakrabarty calls the pasts which have been subordinated to "lesser importance" as subaltern pasts. The subaltern pasts "do not belong exclusively to the subordinated subaltern groups or to the minority identities alone. Elite and dominant groups also can have subaltern pasts to the extent that, they participate in life-worlds subordinated by the "major" narratives of the dominant institutions" (101).

The pasts of the Dalits that have never been the concern of historiography are called Dalit pasts. As Satyanarayana and Tharu observe "Dalit pasts are subaltern pasts in the sense that they are structurally suppressed pasts, at variance with the logic of the mainstream, headed in other, egalitarian direction" (2011:44). Sumit Sarkar has admitted that historiographical elision has been most powerful of all in respect of caste, and yet it is precisely this dimension that has shot into unexpected prominence in the recent years (the 90's)" (1997: 359).

I am looking at three important observations on the absence of the pasts of the subordinated groups presented by Dipesh Chakrabarty, Sumit Sarkar and E. M. S. Namboodiripad. According to Chakrabarty, it is the limitation of History as a discipline that is the reason for the absence of Dalits in history. He also argues that it is not the subordinated castes only that have "subaltern pasts". For Sarkar, it is "historiographical elision". Elision is the 'deliberate act of

omission'. E. M. S. Namboodiripad is of the opinion that, caste and communal questions have to be subordinated (1981:15), a conscious action, in order to address more serious issues like that of nationalism. These three positions are important for the discussion of Dalit historiography. The limitation of the discipline or "elision" or subordination ultimately results in the absence of the marginalised sections of the society from history. This is why a new perspective is necessary to write the life of the marginalised sections.

Another important question is whether we can produce alternative histories using the same sources and theoretical perspectives as used by traditional historiography. If not, we need to have/devise/identify new perspectives and sources. It appears that the reason for the absence of the oppressed castes in history is the limitation of the discipline of history. At the same time, as people like E. M. S. argues, there is a conscious subordination of the questions of caste in order to address "more serious" issues. In short, we could say that both the discipline and its practice have led to the omission of oppressed castes from history. The above positions pose a strong case for Dalit historiography. The pasts of the oppressed castes do not figure in the projects of nationalism and communism. If the majority of the people, their lives, and their agendas do not matter, those groups have to challenge the dominant paradigms of historiography and write back their history/histories. This is the very agenda of Dalit historiography.

Bringing Caste to the Centre Stage: Dalit Historiography

The emergence of Dalit historiography as a critique of the radical historiographies' failure to address the question of caste is the most significant in recent times. The primary objective of Dalit historiography is to make Dalits the subjects of history, and to bring into discussion the anti-caste movements, leaders, struggles, initiatives, protests, movements and agendas. Satyanarayana has made an important observation about the claims of the Dalit –Bahujans about the history. According to him, "current claims by Dalit-Bahujans about history are being made as part of their attempts to conceptualise caste as a modern issue and to imagine a new egalitarian society. These claims, always equally about power, community and subjectivity, are not always made within scientific and rational modes or without challenging the discursive domain of the nation" (2009:485). For the Dalit-Bahujans, the claims about history are part of a political agenda for an egalitarian society. Sometimes the rational and scientific ways of historiography could not capture the complexities of the subaltern life. In such a context, the historical narratives on Dalits can use materials which the mainstream historiography does not consider as sources for writing history. Hence we could see that the myths, songs, beliefs and practices of the oppressed castes are being used to write the history of the oppressed castes.

Dalit historiography does not attempt to "include" the history of Dalits into the mainstream history; instead, it aims at offering an alternative understanding of the history, thereby, contributing to the contemporary struggles of Dalits for an egalitarian society. This is the political project of Dalit Historiography. As Aravind N. Das argues: "But the mere expansion of historical craftsmanship to include the masses in its scope of interest is democratic only in its form. In the name of academic custom, professional expertise and concern with examining complex interactions, such historiography too excludes active commitment to the mass struggles of the present (66).

The Kerala Scenario

In Kerala, the marginalised castes have become objects of serious academic study recently. As Gurukkal says, "The researches in the History of social processes of the marginal communities in

Kerala have acquired a higher level of conceptualisation heralding a breakthrough from the hackneyed anthropology of untouchables and tribes with the study of low castes' experience of colonial modernity (72)." The transformation from the anthropological studies of different lower castes to that of their experience, struggles etc. under colonial modernity is the important development in the history scene in Kerala in recent times, which initiated the practice of Dalit historiography.

Kerala, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, witnessed persistent struggles of the oppressed castes for social freedom, most of which have been left out of the modern history of Kerala. The historiography of modern Kerala overlooked the significance of the struggles, initiatives, interventions and the agendas of Dalits which had begun in the early nineteenth century itself. The major preoccupations of the writings on Kerala history, as K. N. Panikkar observes, have been the "chronology of dynastic History" "matriliniy" "landlordism" "peasant militancy" and "radical political movements". There have been a lot of studies on the "Kerala model of development" and "political transformation" (40). All these studies have the national identity of Kerala as their central concern. Panikkar further argues:

> Underlying all these issues, however, is a common thread — the formation of an identity which characterises the personality of the region. This identity is not solely cultural, but also derives from political institutions, social relations and economic production. This historical process is enmeshed in the development of nationality which was not contradictory but complementary to the growth of Indian nationalism (40).

Because of the inadequacies of the existing historiography, numerous leaders of the slave castes like Ayyankali,[3] Poyikayil Yohannan, Kurumban Daivathan,[4] Pampady John Joseph,[5] Kandan Kumaran and many others did not receive any serious academic

attention.[6] These movements and figures have been pushed into the periphery of history. The significant initiatives of such leaders have been interpreted as attempts at community reform confined to their respective communities. Dalit Historiography offers a new perspective that is necessary to study these movements.

It is a fact that there are not many studies on the marginalised castes in modern Kerala. What exist in the mainstream history are certain references, small discussions and sometimes even single line references. A look at the existing studies might give people the impression that people belonging to the lower orders of the caste society in Travancore had no activities, movements and agendas. It is as if they had been passive spectators of the changes that took place. Contrary to this impression, there had been a wide spectrum of protests, struggles, claims, demands, and revolts from the slave castes from the early nineteenth century, which have been pushed back to the peripheries of Kerala History.

In the dominant discourses of historiography in Kerala, the life world, struggles, protests, initiatives, agendas and the leaders of the slave castes have either been completely left out or ideologically re-interpreted, or romanticised. The existing studies fail to identify the political significance of these and the subjectivity and agency of the slave castes. They also fail to address the questions of identity, community and the self. In short, the historiographical model existing in Kerala does not allow Dalits to be presented with their political significance.

In this paper, I have tried to explore the idea of Dalit historiography. It emerged as a result of the mainstream historiographies' failure to write the lives and struggles of Dalits. Mainstream historiographies in their attempts to write the history of the nationalism or the peasant movements left out the movements, agendas and initiatives of Dalits. Most of these writings presented Dalits as passive spectators of social change. Dalit Historiography,

using diverse sources that the conventional historiographies did/do not use, presents Dalits as active agents of history rather than passive spectators. It places caste as the central category of historical analysis in India. Dalit historiography is part of the struggles of Dalits in the contemporary times for a democratic and just society. It offers an alternative understanding of the society we live in.

Notes

1   A poem by Poyikayil Yohannan, an anti-caste revolutionary, poet, preacher and the founder of the religious sect *Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha* (PRDS) in central Travancore in the early twentieth century. For a collection of his poems, see Swami and Anil 2008. For an account of the revolutionary life and thought of Poyikayil Yohannan, and the religious sect established by him the PRDS see Mohan 2015.

2   Some works were published recently on this topic. For a discussion of the social historiography of Kerala, see Gurukkal : 59-76.

3   Ayyankali was the most prominent leader to emerge from the Dalits in Kerala. For an understanding of his activities, see Chentharassery 2012, Abhimanyu 1990 , Ramadas 2009, and Mani 2013.

4   For a biographical account of Kurumban Daivathan, see Kunjan 1929.

5   For a biographical account of Pampady John Joseph, see Chentharassery 1989.

6   Poyikayil Yohannan is the only person who received serious academic attention. Others are remembered only through the writings of the Dalit writers, mainly biographical studies.

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Modernity, Nation-State and the Tribal Museum: A Case Study of Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum, Hyderabad

Rose Sebastian

Modernity and the Evolution of the Public Museum

The museum is more than a house of collectibles. It is a space for the codification of culture and abstractions such as Man, civilization, nation etc. It is a text with a narrative and a discourse, and hence needs to be studied from outside pure museological or archaeological registers. This paper is a political analysis, along the axes of modernity and nation-state, of the Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum in Hyderabad which houses the cultures of tribes of the region belonging to the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The tribal museum comes across as an interesting case in point due to reasons I will be elaborating on during the course of this paper.

Tony Bennett in his seminal work *The Birth of the Museum* traces how the modern European museum evolved from the private menageries and aristocratic collections into a modern institution of state to function as a pedagogic site and an instrument of governmentality (Bennett 1995). Initially a space of private, aristocratic ownership and limited access, the menageries were intended to showcase either things of pomp or objects that provoked wonder. It was in the late eighteenth century that the museum acquires its pedagogic nature when urban administrative authorities of European nations turned it to a public space, both in terms of ownership and

access. As part of the larger population management and crime control policies of the industrial Europe, the museum was reconceived as a space for instruction in history and civics.

This transformation of the nature and function of the museum is closely linked to three key features of modernity: the emergence of the nation state as a form of social organizing, the emergence of bourgeois public sphere, and the logic of social evolutionism. Bennet identifies the political rationality of the modern museum as the rationality of the modern state (ibid). The act of a national government taking over erstwhile aristocratic space and artefacts was symbolic of the decadence of the latter and the power of the state acting on behalf of the people. Like coffee houses, public libraries and salons, the early European public museum was based on the idea of public sphere which acknowledged the right of an individual to be part of it in his capacity as a citizen, and not a member of a class or clan. Also, the idle curiosity and chaotic nature of the arrangement of the contents in the aristocratic prototypes of the museum was replaced by a rationale of social evolutionism. The exhibits were arranged under different categories of modern knowledges, such as archeology, geology, biology, history etc. It provided a linear narrative of progress of the earth and the living world, especially the Homo sapiens, which placed the museum-goer (European, mostly urban) at the pinnacle of evolution.

Nationalist Discourse and the Museum in India

"Along with the national anthem, the national emblem, the national festival, a nation needs its national library, its national archive, and its national museum" (Singh 176).

Nations are not determinate products of given sociological conditions such as language, race or religion, neither are they

maintained by the everyday, face-to-face interactions of their members. They are imagined into existence (Anderson 1987). The national imaginary needs to validate, cement and repeat itself through ideologies and discourses, symbols and icons. A common, glorious past for the people often validates a nation and binds its citizens together. Nationalization of history during modernity had been crucial to the development of nation-states.

Museum being a site of 'authentic' history, it becomes necessary for nations to establish and maintain 'national' museums. National museums of art and history are "majority museums" (Clifford 1997), where "the best" of cultural forms and the "authentic" history of the nation is presented to instruct and shape an ideal citizen-subject. The museum was a colonial initiative in India. The national museum came to have added functions in the post-colonial, independent India i.e. to legitimise the state against both the colonial and monarchical rule, to create and/or celebrate a great and 'common' culture and past of an otherwise largely diverse demography(crucial to the integrity of the nation), to partake in the process of nation-building etc. Tapathi Guha Thakurtha and Kavitha Singh have pointed out how the establishment of a national museum was a key concern for the administrators of the immediate post independence period so as to own up and valorise its cultures and pasts which were subjected to the colonial judgement for centuries. Their further analysis show how national museums of art and history in India are largely informed by nationalistic historiography which attempts at forging a certain national identity. In writing the ancient past of the land, the nationalistic historiography follows the linearity of grand dynasties such as the Mauryas and the Guptas at the cost of many regional, non-linear histories. While narrating anti-colonial struggles, it prioritizes the singular, elite nationalist movement by appropriating or erasing multiple, independent resistances (Guha 1989). The National Museum

at New Delhi reflects and reproduces these selections and omissions in marking India's history.

The museum being a site of instruction not just in history but in civics as well, its temporality is not limited to the past but extends to the future. It envisages a certain future for the nation and contributes to the process of forming an ideal citizenry which is historically 'informed', with civic responsibility and a scientific, modern temperament.

The tribal and community museum is a late development in India which oriented itself towards the collection, preservation and display of cultures of non-elite strata of the society. They usually consist of life-size dioramas which represent their habitat, life-practices, rituals, food and clothing, art, weapons, economy etc. Its stance is, to some degree, oppositional, with exhibits reflecting excluded/ extinct experiences and lives. Most of the tribal museums are established and run by governmental agencies with an ostensible purpose of cultural inclusion of the marginalized.

Nation state is indisputably a modern phenomenon. Tribal life, which stands for the pre-modern, is definitely outside the narratives of modern state. The tribal past is not what the nation built itself on; the tribal mode of life is not what the nation wants its citizen to aspire for. If so, how do we understand the fact that most of these museums are established and run by the government? What are the rationales that constitute the state-run tribal museums in India? Why start a 'tribal' museum instead of including the tribal into the already existing national museum? What is the nature and conditions of the 'inclusion' that such spaces offer to tribal communities? Apart for the evident fetishization and romaticization of the tribal life style, the tribal museum in India is a site for many subtler cultural violations that need to be

studied in detail. I try to address them through a case study of a prominent, state-funded tribal museum in the city of Hyderabad.

Case Study: The Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum, Hyderabad

The Nehru Tribal Museum located at Masab Tank, Hyderabad is a public museum, conceived, funded and managed by the government. It aims at the collection, preservation and display of tribal life in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The exhibits are arranged on three floors, over various galleries.

The first scene that strikes a visitor at the Nehru museum is an installation of the Meriah ritual, a practice of human sacrifice which existed among the Khond tribe, placed at the centre of the first hall. We will be discussing the significance of this installation under a separate section. The initial displays on the ground floor are a set of dioramas representing tribal life-practices such as fire making, hunting, gathering, hut-thatching etc, accompanied by placards describing the processes and techniques of those skills (These tribal knowledges are transferred over generations alithically through practice, which necessitates a representative format of a diorama combined with a description for the comprehension of the modern, mostly urban, visitor-subject). Adjacent to those dioramas are four busts representing the evolution of man- Australopithecus Africanus, the Neanderthal man, Homo Erectus and Homo sapiens. The hunter-gatherer nature of tribal life is not presented in its own right, but in juxtaposition with an essentially European, modern thesis of evolution to imply the 'primitivity' of the former. Values and epistemes of modernity constitute the criteria for the evaluation of systems which are different from it.

These exhibits are followed by a series of photographic documents which present an interesting pattern. They begin with

photographs of the physical features of various tribes and go on systematically to study their nature of settlement, dressing styles, deities, festivals, dances, tribal occupations, economy, methods and techniques of cultivation, initiatives by the government to introduce literacy, improve health and entrepreneurship, and finally, the introduction of science and technology to modernize the tribal. If one follows the series, one could see that the representation tribal life marks its entry within the discipline of anthropology and 'progresses' onto the register of ethnography and then onto that of sociology. The final stage is the stage of the nation-state where the government steps in to 'improve' the quality of tribal life through science and techniques of modernity. This logic of evolutionary progress of the modern public museum which we have discussed in the introduction marks tribal life as primitive, as something that needs to be left behind in order to be participants in and beneficiaries of the state. Also, as stated earlier, tribal culture is presented through and only through the prisms of modern *savoirs* or practices of knowledge.

The first floor of the Nehru museum consists of mainly dioramic renderings of the photographs exhibited on the ground floor. Largely ethnographic in nature, the dioramas on this floor manifest more signs of 'civilization' vis-à-vis those on the ground floor. They signal a transition from unpolished to more refined and sophisticated tools and utensils, from a system of hunter-gatherers into agriculture and the emergence of an internal economy, market exchanges, art etc.

A strong undercurrent of nationalistic discourse becomes evident as we reach the second and the final floor where charts display the literacy rates among various tribes, health care facilities available to them, demographic details, geographic mapping of the distribution of tribal population over the states etc. These are narratives of state intervention into tribal life in order to 'better and civilize' them. The language of state intervention into the tribal life is the rhetoric of progress and modernization. What is noticeable here is the investment of the nation in the tribal life to create a body of knowledge surrounding it, to know the tribal better which would, in turn, facilitate better governance and assimilation. The final displays show how tribal life has been yoked to the master narrative of nation and development. Also, the museum which began by representing tribal groups of Andhra and Telangana such as the Chenchus, the Lambadas, the Porjas etc ends the display by a series of descriptions and photographs under the title "Tribes of India". Thus, the tag of nationhood holds together mutually unrelated tribal groups of the subcontinent. This correlation and the resultant comprehensiveness of elements are important for the nation form wherein an element can be present only as part of the whole. The museological narrative of evolutionary progress over the first two floors merges with the narrative of the nation on the final floor, proving Bennett's argument that the political rationale of the modern museum is ultimately the rationale of the nation-state.

On the Meriah Ritual

A dioramic representation of the *meriah* rite, a practice of human sacrifice among the Khond tribe of Odisha, forms the visual centre of the Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum in Hyderabad. The installation occupies a key architectural position in the museum complex, as it is placed in the middle of the ground floor and is the first thing that one comes across as one enters the museum. The stairs to the higher floors wind around the *meriah* installation, making it visible from any floor. This comes across as a curious case to investigate as this key positioning of the *meriah* ritual within the exhibitionary complex implies at several binaries that constitute the rational of the latter, such as primitivity-modernity, barbarity-civilization, superstition-scientific knowledge etc.

Meriah was practiced by the Khonds to ensure good agricultural yield by appeasing the Earth Goddess with human blood. The victim was called a *meriah*, who, on the day of the ritual would be tied to a pole before he /she was cut into pieces by the priest and the villagers. In his work *Sacrificing People* Felix Padel offers an elaborate study of the colonial interventions during the nineteenth century to put an end to this 'barbarous' act of violence. Though he acknowledges the violence involved in the *meriah* rite, he criticizes the European, Christian sense of moral and civilizational upper handedness with which the colonial administrators suppressed the same. Padel argues that self-assumptions of European modernity and enlightenment often gloss over the violence inherent in their faiths, practices and institutions. While violence of the *meriah* rite was explicit, that of the former was subtler and under the name of governance and progress.

What are the implications when a representation of a tribal practice of human sacrifice, long put to an end by the colonial administration forms the visual centre of a public museum? The *meriah* rite holds the same connotations in its relation to the nation state, as it did to the colonial government- that of primitiveness, superstition, barbarity and backwardness. The state, which sees itself as modern, rational, working according to rule of law and progress-oriented, is posited as the binary opposite of the system represented by the *meriah* ritual and as an alternative/better form of social organizing. The *meriah* rite not only becomes the entry point for the state into the domain of the tribal, but also serves as a defining factor of tribal mode of living, overlooking its many facets. A long foregone, occasional practice of a particular tribe is turned into an overarching symbol of tribal value system. The repulsion invoked in the visitor by the *meriah* ritual ideologically translates a validation of state intervention at various levels. The visual centrality of the *meriah* installation at the exhibitionary complex can be thus seen as its semantic centrality.

It also raises questions about the nature of inclusion facilitated by initiatives such as the public museum. If social inclusion was the real rationale behind the establishment of the tribal museum, why conceive it as separate from the existing national museums of culture and heritage? Tribal is not part of self-representation of the nation. The tribal past is not part of the glorious, common heritage that the nation built itself on. Nor is it a mode of living in sync with the logic of the nation. Hence, it is represented by the nation as belonging to the past, a past that needs to be left behind. In order to be part of the nation state and national community, it becomes necessary for a tribal to disown/ erase his indigenous way of living. The inclusiveness offered by the nation-state to a tribal is conditioned upon a certain forgoing of the culture of one's community. The meriah installation becomes the symbol of all that needs to be left behind in order to be included in the nation.

Thus, the popular idea of the tribal museum as a space for the cultural inclusion of the marginalized communities is to be contested. Current museological practices facilitate an epistemic violence by discourses of modernity and nation state on the tribal mode of living, which forms the ideological ground for violations on many other levels. The interesting aspect of the 'inclusion' offered by such spaces is that they do not imagine the tribal an essential part of the idea of nation. The logic of government-run tribal museums is not the oft-repeated 'unity in diversity', but a strategy to exclude by undertaking the agency of representation and setting the criteria of judgment. The tribal is marked as primitive, as predating the temporality and rationality of the nation, as dependent and requiring the intervention of the state, excluded from the 'authentic' space of the national museum and housed in separate spaces.

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Post-Colonial Justice and the Question of Adivasi Rights: Muthanga Land Struggle in Kerala

Narayanan M S

Muthanga was the major struggle the Adivasis have ever had in the history of Kerala for asserting their identity and autonomy. It represents the emergence of the autonomous Adivasi movement and leadership. Here we see the Adivasi became more conscious of the questions of land and political identity. The most significant impact of Muthanga Land Struggle was that it changed the nature of the public sphere in Kerala. The public sphere in Kerala never showed any concern to the cause of Adivasis earlier. Muthanga roused the conscience of the public sphere. After this, the public became aware of the seriousness of the problems Adivasis have been facing.

Post-colonial society didn't do any justices to Adivasi community and the State denied all their constitutional rights. In this paper I am trying to analyze the assertion of Adivasi rights in Kerala. I would consider the contemporary Tribal struggle for land as a failure of the post-colonial state to deliver justice to subjugated communities. I am also examining how the Muthanga Land Struggle (2003) deal with states restitution of alienated tribal land and post-colonial justice on it. Muthanga Land Struggle is a struggle for self assertion by Adivasis who have their own organization, leaders, members and agenda and it also challenge the notion of post-colonial justice.

Tribes in Kerala: An Introduction

'Adivasi' is a term used to refer to a heterogeneous set of aboriginal and indigenous groups in India. The term refers to a group of people sharing the same customs, language, religion, etc. According to Article 366(25) of the Constitution of India, Scheduled Tribes (ST's) are 'such tribes or tribal community or part of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be scheduled tribes for this purpose of this constitution'. 'Tribes' in Anthropological literature generally have been defined as communities that are more or less homogeneous, having a common government, a common dialect, and a common culture (Xaxa, 2006: 22).

According to the 2011 census, the Adivasi population constitutes 1.45% of the total population in Kerala. Around 35 different Adivasi communities live in different parts of Kerala. They include, Adiyan, Aranadan, Hill Pulaya (Mala Pulaya), Irular, Kadar, Kanikkar, Kattunayakan, Kochuvelan, Koraga, Kudiya (Melakudi), Kurichiyan, Kurumans (Mullu Kuruman, Mala Kuruman), Kurumbas, Maha Arasar, Mala Arayan, Malai Pandaram, Malakuravan, Malasar, Malayan, Mannan, Muthuvan, Palliyan, Paniyan, Ulladan, Uraly, Mala Vedan, Ten Kurumban (Jen Kurumban), Thachanadan Moopan, Cholanaickan, Mavilan, Karimpalan, Vetta Kuruman, Mala Panickar, and Paanan. Most of the Adivasis depend on forest resources for their day to day life. The Government has introduced many land and forest policies for the development of the Adivasis. These policies made the Adivasis daily wage labourers and alienated them from their traditional life. Most of the Adivasis share their habitats with the neighbouring states of Kerala like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

Muthanga Land Struggle and the Question of Adivasi Rights

Muthanga Land struggle was led by the Adivasis of Kerala and the demand was "the right to live in the land where we are born, till death". This struggle was led by Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha, an autonomous Adivasi organisation working for the right to live in their home land. The real story of Muthanga is one of brave struggles by the Adivasis in the face of betrayal and repression. This is the first Adivasi struggle in the history of Kerala demanding the implementation of Adivasi rights. The history of the struggle begins with the introduction of the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction on Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act, 1975 by the State government. The government did not implement the 1975 Act. The non-adivasis who are politically organized communities, opposed the 1975 Act and they forced the Government to amend this Act. Instead of implementing 1975 Act, the government amended it in 1996.

The Land Question and the State Policy

Muthanga Land Struggle (2003) emerged from the failure of post-colonial state's development policies for the Adivasi's in Kerala. The government of Kerala introduced many policies for the development of the Adivasis but they never showed any interest to implement these policies. In 1957, when the first government came to power in Kerala, that introduced several projects for the upliftment of the working class people. These policies did not help the depressed people like Adivasis and Dalits, but did help the non-adivasis or non-dalits.

The legal battle between Adivasis and the government began with the introduction of the Land Reform Bills in 1960s. These Bills supported only the non-Adivasi peasants and it caused the alienation of Adivasi lands in different parts of the state. Most of the Adivasis are agriculturalists and they practiced the shifting cultivation method until

the introduction of forest policies by the Colonial government. When Adivasis started settled agriculture, the non-adivasis had already taken the land for lease and later they appropriated it. The history of the land alienation of Adivasis began from the first half of the Nineteenth Century, when the migration had taken place into the Adivasi regions.

In 1960, the central government appointed a constitutional committee headed by U N Dehbar, for studying the Adivasi issues in the country. This Commission was appointed under Article 339 of the Constitution. Dehbar Commission recommended that all tribal land alienated since January 26, 1950 -the day the Constitution came to force- should be returned to the original Adivasi owners. The meeting of the Kerala State ministry on April 1, 1975 passed a resolution that the legislation for prevention of land alienation should be undertaken immediately. The Legislature introduced a Bill for the prevention of alienation and restoration of alienated Adivasi land in 1975 called, Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction on Transfer of Lands and Restoration of Alienated Lands) Act, 1975. This Act proclaims that all transactions of Adivasi lands during 1960-1982 are illegal and invalid. This Act also says that all alienated lands are to be restored to its original Adivasi owners. There is also a provision that the Adivasi owners have to pay the amount, if any, they received for the transactions from the encroachers along with any amount spent for on the land by encroachers before commencement of the Act. On behalf of the Adivasi beneficiaries, the Government would advance this compensation amount as loans which are to be repaid back in 20 years. Transfer of lands from Adivasi to non-adivasis was also prohibited from 1982 (Bijoy, 2003: 1981).

Since 1975, when the Act was passed, the state government had delayed the formulation of the rules to implement the Act. The 1975 Act was also included in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution

and was made unchallengeable in any court of law. While Government delayed the 1975 Act, a Public Interest Litigation filed in Kerala Hight Court by Dr. Nalla Thampbi Thera, a social activist, in 1989 for the implementation of KST Act 1975 (Raman, 2002: 917). The High Court of Kerala issued a writ of mandamus on 15 October 1993 giving six months time to the government to dispose of the pending applications before them and restore the lands. But the non-adivasi peasants forced the government to amend the Bill. Government said to High Court that this law caused the tension between the Adivasi and non-adivasis and non-adivasis demanded that the law needed to be changed. In 1996, the government brought an ordinance for amending the 1975 Act, but the Governor did not approve it. On 18 August 1996, the High Court issued a final order that by 30 September 1996 the authorities should affect the delivery of possession of alienated lands for/to the original owners- Adivasis. The High Court had come down against the state government for "lack of will" to implement the Act. But the government requested more time for implementing it. The LDF Government hurriedly managed to pass an Amendment Bill on September 23, 1996, in the Assembly, known as Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction on Transfer of Land Restoration of Alienated Lands) Amendment Bill, 1996. In the assembly 140 members belonging to both the ruling LDF and the opposition UDF parties supported the Bill, except veteran communist Ms Gouriamma. Opposing the Bill, she said, this was the foremost reactionary Bill ever introduced in the Assembly since the formation of the Kerala State in 1957. The Bill also met stringent resistance from Adivasis and their supporters outside the Assembly with C K Janu and Red Flag leaders staging indefinite hunger strike in front of the Assembly (Bijoy 1330).

The amendment to the KST Act 1975 was sent to the Central government for the clarification of a few points. At the same time the High Court gave the last date, 23 September 1997, to the state and

central government to complete the formalities. Then the High court ordered the state government to implement the original Act as assent by the President was not forthcoming. The President returned the Amendment Act without his assent in March 1998. Again the Kerala government amended the 1975 Act in 1999, known as Kerala Restriction on Transfer and Restoration of Lands to Scheduled Tribes Bill, 1999. As per this Act, only land in excess of 2 hectares will be restored, while alternate land would be given elsewhere in lieu of alienated land of up to 2 hectares. The Adivasis did not accept this and they demanded that the alienated land must be restored.

The immediate reason of Muthanga land struggle was the starvation deaths of the Adivasis. In the mid July 2001, 32 starvation deaths were reported from the Adivasi areas of Palakkad, Kannur and Wayanad districts. It brought the plight of Adivasis to the public and a large scale agitation against the government started. Under the leadership of Geethanandan and C K Janu, the *Adivasi Dalit Samara Samithi* made refugee camps in front of the residence of the Chief Minister, A K Antony and later they made huts before the Secretariat at Thiruvananthapuram on August 30, 2001. The 48 day long agitation was ended on 16 October 2001 with an agreement by Chief Minister A K Antony. This became a historical Adivasi struggle in Kerala history and Adivasi Dalit Samara Samithi successfully negotiated their demands. The significance of the agreement between the Adivasis and the government is the shift from 'restoration of alienated lands' to 'allotment of alternative land'.

The Agreement

The major constituents of the agreement with the government are the following:

1. Five acres of land to all family having less than one acre of land. To begin with, 42,000 acres of land of between 1-5 acres would be distributed and the work would begin from January 1 to December 31, 2002.

2. A master plan would be made before December 2001, to be included in the 10th five-year plan beginning from 2002.

3. A cabinet decision to include Adivasi areas in V schedule and a proposal would be made which shall be sent to the centre for further notification by the President. Meanwhile suitable legislation would be made by the State Government to protect the land and culture of the Adivasis inhabiting these areas.

4. The Supreme Court Judgement related to the case pending on the 1975 Act would be abided by the Kerala government.

5. A Tribal mission would be constituted to carry out all the above headed by a senior IAS officer.

6. In the formation and implementation of Programmes for the Adivasi their active participation would be assured.

7. Considering the large number of landless Adivasi families in Wayanad, the State Government shall yearn to identify lands to be given to them especially vested forests with Central government's permission on a time bound basis for distribution as well as settlement.

In January 2002, government officially identified a few acres of land for the distribution to landless tribes. The government's report sent to the NHRC in April 2002 states that 568 families had been provided 1,308 acres of land since January 1, 2002 when the Chief Minister along with C K Janu commenced the first land distribution at Marayoor in Idukki district. The government distributed only 1.06 percent

of the identified land within the first 4 months of the 12 months and they claimed that they have completed the task.

The major part of the land identified for distribution was in the Forest areas and others were under the revenue department. Both Revenue Department and Forest Department expressed their unhappiness to distribute the land to the Adivasis. Forest Conservation Act 1980 stands as a legal barrier in de-notifying and transferring the forest lands to the Adivasis. This Act stipulates that it prohibits any encroachment into forests since 1980. Consequence upon the 1980 Act, the state and central governments consistently violated the laws and their own orders with regard to the regulation of the rights of Adivasis.

The Tribal Mission, which was formed on part of the agreement between Adivasis and government, was a failure. The Mission did not declare any Adivasis regions in Kerala as a 'Scheduled Area' under Schedule V of Article 244 of the Constitution. As a result of the Tribal Mission's failure to declare 'Sheduled areas' it has not been possible to give effect to the provision of Panchayat's (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) through required legislations at the State level thus denying the enlightened provisions therein from being implemented in Kerala. The Kerala government says that, the Scheduled Areas in other Indian States have the areas having majority of tribal population. In the Kerala context it is difficult to declare the Scheduled Areas, because, there are no areas having majority tribal population and they are scattered also. PESA passed in 1996 became a law on December 24, 1996. The provision of PESA 1996 essentially empowers the Adivasis at their more functional unit, the Gram Sabha, to take full responsibility to decide and implement matters on certain defined subjects. The dead line of the agreement was over in December 2002 and the government did not do anything on that agreement.

On August 25, 2002 thousands of Adivasis from all parts of the state gathered at Manathavadi, Wayanad and constituted a sixty member Tribal court. This Tribal court decided to establish their rights over land by occupying it since the government failed to keep the promises given to the adivasis in their agreement. In October 2002, Adivasi Dalit Samara Samithi again started their struggle against the government. During the agitation time Adivasi Dalit Samara Samithi formed a state level organisation called Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha (AGMS). It had representation from all Adivasi communities in Kerala.

The aim of the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha was to get the land for all landless Adivasis and implement various Land Reform Acts passed by the Kerala State government. They also demanded he implementation of Constitutional rights. Adivasi Dalit Samara Samithi took initiatives to solve the Adivasi issues in the state. Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha (AGMS) was an autonomous Adivasi movement in Kerala and they demanded self governance and the implementation of the V Schedule. The slogan of the AGMS was "*the right to live in the land where we are born, till death*". The structure of the AGMS is that, first there are *Oorusabhas* at the grass root level which stand as the decision making body of each Adivasi at the local level. The representatives of the *Oorusabhas* constitute the state presidium of the AGMS. This forum frames the policies and takes decisions on behalf of the AGMS. Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha has more significance in modern Kerala society, because this movement led the Adivasis to the historical land struggle in Kerala.

Muthanga Land Struggle and the Assertion of Rights

On January 4, 2003, around 1,100 Adivasis from different parts of Wayanad district, entered into the deforested area of Muthanga

Wild Life Sanctuary. Muthanga is a border place of Kerala and Karnataka State.

In Muthanga, the Adivasis selected the land in a section of eucalyptus plantation owned by the State Forest Department. They consciously avoided the natural forest areas. Various Adivasi communities, Paniyar, Adiyar, Kattunaikar, and Uralis moved to Muthanga. AGMS had given an advanced notice to the state government saying that they would be occupying the deforested land in Muthanga. The selection of the eucalyptus plantation as *samara bhoomi* (struggle land) demonstrated the Adivasis ecological concerns as well as their attempt to avoid direct confrontation with the State Forest Department, which would have arisen, had they occupied a natural forest. Through the Muthanga Land struggle the Adivasis demanded that the government should restart the land distribution.

In *samara bhoomi*, the land was divided into plots of about three hectares and allotted to each individual family. In each plot a house was constructed with bamboo and grasses. The families lived in these houses and cultivated cassava, taro, yams, banana, etc. Wells were dug to supply drinking water. The plots of different Adivasi groups were intermixed so as to allow for closer contact among them. It could also help them to break the historical hierarchical social practices, promote egalitarian relations. The aim of the intermixing of plot formed the unity among the Adivasis (Dilip Raj 122).

The houses were allotted according to the number of families. The households were divided into 24 *oorukootangal* (village groups), and members were elected from each *oorukoottam* to form an *oorusabha* (village assembly). The *oorusabha* was responsible for supervising the day to day activities of the community. Each family should contribute 250 Rs and 25 Kg rice for running the struggle and

including the purchase of food items, solving any problems which might arise. AGMS also prepared some protocol in the *samara bhoomi.* They did not allow outsiders to enter the *samara bhoomi* without their permission and they strictly prohibited the consumption of alcohol in the *samara bhoomi.* The leaders conducted meeting in two days and analysed the progress of the struggle. The Adivasis remember that, the life in Muthanga gave hope to them about the new social life. A young Adivasi woman says:

> It was a life we never experienced before. All Adivasi communities were living in harmony and co-operating in various activities. We were busy preparing the field and cultivating crops during the day. At night we kept vigilance to protect the crops from wild animals. Children's were reading and studying. We taught our language to the children, told them stories. We sat in groups and remembered our histories. We discussed and debated over future strategies. We had given up alcohol. There was no wife- beating either. We learned to respect others in the community. We were advised and helped by the volunteers. It was a life we had dreamed for our future. (Raj 121)

The Adivasis were very careful in the contact with forest officers. The forest officers continuously provoked and threatened the Adivasis to leave the forest. Adivasis made the check -posts for restricting the entrance of outsiders to the *samara bhoomi.* When the forest guards came the Adivasis allowed them to use the check posts. Muthanga was allegedly an Adivasi 'homeland' where various 'temples of Adivasis-*kavu'* had been discovered.

On 18 February 2003, AGMS caught 19 temporary forest workers and one photographer as hostage. These workers had conflict

with the Adivasis and set fire in the forest. They started to beat up the Adivasis. The real incident was that the forest workers were setting fire to the forest. At that time the AGMS activists caught them and kept captive. They said that they would release the forest workers only after the visit of the District Magistrate and he collect the evidence of the fire. The Forest Department already planned this firing arson for evicting the Adivasis from the *samara bhoomi.* According to Geethanandan, "the forest officer's officials have deliberately set ablaze the forest area taken by us, and thousands of Adivasis had a narrow shave as they were trapped in the raging fire. It was a dirty plan by the Forest department for a mass slaughter. We didn't take into custody any police officials or forest officials" (2003: 25). Later AGMS released these captives.

The struggle was going smoothly and peacefully but after one month, on 19 February 2003, the government of Kerala sent the police to evict the Adivasis camping in Muthanga. On 19 February, around 800 policemen entered the forest at six in the morning and declared that the Adivasis should leave the forest immediately. The police began to shoot without any warning. They didn't fire into the air. They shot straight at the Adivasis. They asked Adivasis to leave, but the Adivasis refused it and they were not ready to leave the *samara bhoomi* without a single piece of land. They remained standing in front of the huts they built. The police fired to the dry grass which had been gathered to thatch the *Anganwadi* (the pre-school child care centres) hut. The parents went running to take their children. That is the reason why Adivasis came together. Police fired 18 round leaving many dead and over hundred injured (Janu 446).

While the government officially announced that, in the shootout, two people were killed, one Adivasi and one policeman. But the

unconfirmed eyewitness' accounts put the number of people killed up to 20 and many injured. The police said that the Adivasis had weapons and they attacked the police. The media shows in some pictures that the Adivasis carrying the bow, arrow and sickle. Janu writes that, bow and arrow are the traditional weapons of the Adivasis and they carry it where ever they go. They did not use the weapons against the police (2011: 447). Adivasis stayed in Muthanga only for 44 days. They expected that the police would come; even that arrest would happen. But they never expected a firing. The Adivasis who stayed in Muthanga did not have weapons. For a whole month government scanned the locality, sending police and forest officials. They could not find even a cracker. Muthanga firing is a blemish in Kerala history.

AGMS and other Dalit organisations demanded an inquiry by a sitting Supreme Court Judge into the Muthanga incidents, and the resignation of Chief Minister AK Antony for raising baseless allegations against Adivasis in the state as a cover- up for the conspiracy to deny the constitutionally guaranteed land to the landless Adivasis. AGMS argued that they were entitled to occupy forest land being landless, indigenous people under article 244 of the Constitution.

The state government refused to order a judicial enquiry into the incident. The opposition LDF has seized the moment and went on with calls for *hartal* (strike) after *hartal* and relay fasting by MLAs in front of the Sectariat. From the pressure of opposition, the government ordered to enquire the incident by Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Since CBI is a government agency, and here the culprit is the government itself they did everything in favour of the government. They did not even file a single case against the police and state. Instead all the cases charged have been against the Adivasis.

CBI has filed altogether 7 cases. In another 7 cases were filed by the forest department, till now 380 people have been charged with different accusations. CBI mainly concentrated on two cases in Muthanga one is the death of a police constable Vinod. Second is the conspiracy of the Adivasis to encroach the reserve forest area in National Wild Life Sanctuary. They consciously avoided those brutal attacks on Adivasis. Forest department filed cases against Adivasis for the encroachment of the wild life sanctuary and cutting down the eucalyptus tree and blocking the way of the wild animals . They also alleged that the Adivasis set the forest on fire.

There are 183 Adivasis accused in the CBI report. Among them around 10 are women. Some were having children with 4-3 months old. The case against the Adivasis is filed in the Chief Judicial Magistrates Court at Ernakulum that approximately 400 KM away from Wayanad District. Every month all the 183 accused are to appear in the court. If anybody fails to appear in the court for three consecutive terms the court would issue arrest warrant against him or her. Then AGMS had to arrange bail for them. In order to get the bail also they should produce land revenue receipts. Since the Adivasis are landless people they were unable to produce these documents.

Adivasis in Muthanga struggle say that the land in Muthanga is their home land. They raised the slogan right to live in the land of their birth until their death. One of the aims of Muthanga Land struggle was to declare that Muthanga is the self governance/autonomous area of Adivasis. The Muthanga struggle was not only the struggle for land, but also the political emergence of a broken people. The police firing in Muthanga was actually not against the Adivasis but the political organization of the Adivasis. The government was scared of the formation of Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha. If the Adivasis are organized

under the autonomous movement, it would be a challenge to the political parties, so the state tried to demolish the movement from the beginning itself.

The historical importance of the 2001 struggle is not that it could make an agreement with the government. The significance is the formation of Adivasi autonomous movement AGMS against the state. Muthanga land struggle marked a historic moment in the Adivasi life of Kerala. They were able to re-engage with the state, the media, the intellectuals and the larger Kerala society in ways that had not been possible hitherto. These struggles put into place new ways of thinking about land as a resources and a community's right. In *samara bhoomi* the Adivasis declared that, "*either we will gain land, or we will die there*". In the struggle Adivasis realized that they are victims of the political parties. The political parties do not want that Adivasis to become a self-sufficient community who could stand on their own feet.

To sum up, the Muthanga land struggle represents the emergence of the autonomous Adivasi movement and leadership ad it is the reaction to the post-colonial state and their development policies. The significance of Muthanga Land Struggle is that, in the history of Kerala, Muthanga is the first Adivasi revolt for autonomy of Adivasis. Muthanga Land Struggle raised the question of autonomy in the public sphere of Kerala. Muthanga created the situation for the self-assertion of autonomy through their own organisation, leaders, members and with their own agenda. Muthanga struggle developed a political platform of Adivasis in modern Kerala Society. This land struggle also shows that, how the post-colonial society behave to socially marginalized community and how the state power system denying the right of a community to live in their land.

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Untouchability: Tracing the Process of Making and Being Made

Gladin Rose

Dalit literature has become a major genre of writing that expresses the age old suppression and oppression faced by the lower castes, especially the category named 'untouchables'. Many writers from this marginalised category have selected writing as a medium to express their untold stories and experiences. In India, dalit literature has been provided a space for raising voices of protest against callous discriminations based on caste. Presently, it has been developing in to a full-fledged genre of literature with its diverse contributions from various writers and from different realms. For instance, Sharan Kumar Limbale, the noted writer of this genre, has provided analytical reflections on his life through his masterpiece work *The Outcaste* (*Akkarmashi* 2003*).*

The Outcaste is an emotionally touching autobiography of a half-caste who was born into a mahar (dalit) community and unveils the traumatic experiences he suffers at various phases of his life. An autobiography is, in fact, an expression of one's own life journey and involves a poignant portrayal or disclosure of something hidden under the bottom of heart; a serious opening of one's own untold truths, the traumatic or pleasing experiences of previous life. Nevertheless, an autobiography is the remembrance or re-living of one's own past and old memories. As Limbale says, "I have put in words the life I have lived as an untouchable, as a half caste, as an impoverished man"

(ix). Hence, topics related to the existence of an untouchable need special mention. Before analysing the importance of the word 'untouchable', it is necessary to look at how it was formed and transformed over the years. Needless to say, the formation of this particular category is based on the division of caste.

Etymologically, the word 'caste' originated from Portuguese and Spanish '*casta*' and from the Latin *castus*, chaste'. In the beginning, in English language 'cast' was used in the sense of race. In India, the word was introduced by the Portuguese in the middle of the fifteenth century. The word 'caste' with a French spelling was widely used in India from the seventeenth century (Dumont 21). As Thapar mentions, caste originated in accordance with the economical division of labour. In her view, it was the Aryans[1] who divided the society for the smooth running of the state. They assigned each duty to a certain set of people and this division later evolved into the caste system or Varna system. According to this system, priesthood was assigned to Brahmans, who were also considered as the heads of the society. People who defended the country belonged to the warrior caste or *kshatriya* caste. Those people who did business were categorized as *vaisyas* or the trader caste. The fourth caste was the *shudra* caste and comprised of people who worked as menial servants. These castes are also divided into different clans and sub clans. Later, this division became the structural framework of Hindu religion (Saraswathi 34-35).

Similarly, Ambedkar's formulation of the caste system, included "within the religio-cultural framework of 'purity' and 'pollution'", and representing a "graded inequality in which castes are arranged according to an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt", is crucial, as Chakravarti states (7). This formulation of caste system is central to the understanding of the 'graded inequality'.

But according to Uma Chakravarti, caste is not only an opposition that lies between the notion of 'pure' and 'impure' but also an opposition that lies between domination and subordination, exploitation and oppression based on the unequal access to material resources (ibid 21).

As Anupama Rao notes, "caste is a religio-ritual form of personhood, a social organization of the world through the phenomenology of touch, an extension of the concept of stigma from the facticity of biological bodies to metaphorical collectivities such as the body politic, and most importantly, it is an apparatus that regulates sexuality" (6). She also views that the material forms of dispossession are mediated by the stringent control of sexuality and gender identity through the rules of kinship and caste purity (4-6). In a casteist social structure, 'untouchables' are those people who inhabit the low rungs of the hierarchy. The upper caste people refuse to touch and share water with them. Today, the untouchables are collectively called dalits. Dalits are considered pre-Aryan Indians. They found no place in the *varna* system which was the creation of Post-Aryan ancestry (Manorama 446). The term 'dalit' got currency in the Dalit Panther Movement where the intellectuals used the term as a constant remainder of lower caste people's age old oppression. It literally means 'oppressed' or 'broken' indicating "both the state of deprivation and the people who are deprived" (447). Foregrounding the image of purity and pollution, the dominant castes deliberately prevent the cultural upliftment of the dalits by imposing various anomalies in worship and in ways of life like occupation, skills, dress, food etc. Ruth Manorama states, "The main organizational forces of brahminical culture such as purity and pollution, the devaluation of manual work, conceptions of *svadharma*, Karma and ancestor worship built a low image of dalits and their culture" (447).

Through this narrative, Limbale expresses the humiliation he and his community have faced under the domination of the privileged class. This narrative unveils his disturbed past and his haunting obsession expressed as the perplexing question, "Am I an upper caste or an untouchable?"(38). From Limbale's account, it can be seen that different sorts of segregation had prevailed during his times. Since school days, Limbale states, the lower caste children were forced to follow the rules regarding discrimination. They were restricted to sit together with the upper castes. The allotted space for them to sit was at the entrance or the door step of the class. The lower caste students were like mere menial servants to the upper caste students and to the teachers. The teachers forced the lower castes students to smear the floor and walls of the school with cow dung paste on Saturdays. The heights of discrimination had constrained them from entering the temples. The anomaly in the treatment of religious practices of Hindu religion is evident in the words of Limbale, "Though branded as untouchables we too are Hindus by faith. We too are human beings. High-caste children from the village may visit the temple, yet we are forbidden."(4-5)

The memories of childhood were a haunting experience for them because of being cast as untouchables and accordingly they were alienated in every sphere of society. Poverty was their sole companion. The scarcity of adequate food and clothing made their life miserble. The level of segregation was also extended up to the river which was divided as upstream and downstream. The water in the upstream was allotted to the high-caste villagers to fill their water pots and to wash their clothes. Other lower castes collected water from the downstream. The water at the lowest end was assigned to untouchables.

They were facing discrimination since their birth because of being born into an untouchable caste. There was a clear cut line of segregation marked between upper castes like wani and Brahmin and the lower castes like mahar. In his childhood days he and his friends played separately and even ate separately sitting apart from the higher caste students. Sometimes the high caste girls offered food for them without touching them. So the sense of touch is important in the life of the higher castes.

The lower castes students were assigned the duty of collecting the left overs of the high caste boys and girls. It is heartrending to read Limbale's account about having the left overs of the higher castes by the lower castes students. He records, "when I got home I told my mother all this. Like the victim of a famine she said, 'why didn't you get at least a small portion of it for me? Leftover food is nectar'."(5)

It is interesting to note the modes through which upper castes practice segregation and untouchability. He illustrates one such occasion in his life narrative which shows the untouchability practiced by the mangs against the mahars. Once, Limbale and his friend, a mang boy named Arjya were playing together. When they entered Arjya's house to quench his thirst, his granny shouted, "Why do you play with that boy? Is there no one else in the whole village to play with? Don't give him water in that vessel. If he touches it, he'll defile it. Go away." (20)

It can be seen that pure/impure notion has been engraved in the minds of the people. The array of questions that looms large in the mind of Limbale, is relevant here. He asks, "Is one's caste more important than one's friend? Is caste more important than thirst? Wasn't Arjya a human being? If so, how could he make water impure by merely touching it?" (20)

Delineating another instance Limbale unveils the dark side of the caste system and its practice of untouchability. One day the writer and his friend Parshya insulted a girl named Shobhi of Wani caste (upper caste). As she belonged to the upper caste, she had insulted them many times in school and in village. One day they had seen her in a narrow path carrying water on her head. At once, she shouted at them to clear the path: "Mahars have become bold these days. They now dare to walk straight up to you. Can't you see I am carrying drinking water? Your touch will make it impure? (70)

In order to take revenge on her, Parshya and the writer blocked her way while she was carrying a bundle of food on her head. Infact, their plan was to rape her by way of taking revenge. But they didn't do that. Parshya says,

> So you call us Mahars, don't you? Your water gets impure if we touch it, if that's so then why doesn't this river turn impure? If a human being becomes impure by our mere touch then why didn't your colour change to green and yellow, as it happens when someone is sick and poisoned? Why didn't the food in your bundle rot? If you consider us Mahars then answer my questions, or we won't let you go? (71)

They considered her as a symbol of the caste system. Once he and his friend Parshya entered the temple of Ithoba and prostrated before the God. Seeing this, Parshya's father got enraged and annoyed because entering the temple was considered a crime for untouchables. There was a belief that any entry of that sort would make the God impure.

Apart from mere pure and impure notions, what strikes more are the notions of 'touch' and 'untouch'. Certain questions arise. Why have the upper castes been stringently observing the practice of 'untouchability'? What would be their intention behind the observance of 'untouchableness'? Similarly, it can be seen that the custom of untouchableness has been in practice both in the upper and the lower caste. Sundar Sarukkai's essay "Phenomenology of Untouchability" explains the aforementioned questions satisfactorily. He explicates the idea of untouchability by analysing both Indian and western philosophical traditions. He argues that untouchability is inevitable in Brahminhood. Once untouchability is engraved in the mind of an individual, it is hard to cross the presumption of untouchability. Moreover, Indian philosophers consider touch not as a contact but as a quality that inheres within the object. Therefore, untouchability is not about the notions of purity and impurity, but about the metaphysics of the body. So the impurity is not just in the body, but it is the body itself. The act of touching and being touched are two different entities. Hence, it is clear that being an untouchable indicates the inability of the person who touches rather than any inability of the touched person. Therefore, Sarukkai stresses the fact that the real site of untouchability lies in the person who refuses to touch the untouchable (41- 43) and refuses to be touched by the untouchable.

Through the phenomenology of untouchability, Sarukkai states that the untouchable loses the unity of the body when he is rejected by the touch of others. Therefore, he argues that the displacement of untouchability creates not just the outsourcing of untouchability but also a deliberate philosophical move of supplementation. This process makes untouchability a positive virtue for the Brahmins and a negative aspect for the Dalits.

Notes

1   Aryan theory:- "The basis of the theory was the equation of language with race. In Europe the major dichotomy was seen as between Aryan and Semitic and in India it became Aryan and Dravidian, with the upper castes viewed as the descendants of the Aryans. The association of the theory with India had its genesis in the philological relationships noticed between Sanskrit and Greek, Latin and other European Languages." (Thapar 28) Aryans were considered as superior to the non-Aryans. In the eighteenth century, the new middle–class élite in India referred to themselves as Aryans and differentiated themselves from the lower castes who were termed as non-Aryans.

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Why Couldn't Christ be a Dalit?
A Critique of the European Missionary Discourse

Reju George Mathew

The rise of identity movements amongst the various marginalised sections that embraced Christianity willingly, or seemingly so, has, in turn, questioned several European and orthodox notions of Christianity and its iconic figure, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Christ has been, thus, celebrated as a liberator of the oppressed masses and not as a mere White God, with his dominant image having roots in the Western iconography. The counter narratives on Christ and his message have, consequently, depicted Christ as Black, Chinese and of many other ethnicities as well as identities, often with a variety of regional flavours.

Major accounts on the conversions of Dalits in Kerala are available in the European missionary reports as well as in the literary works of the period. Religious conversions of Dalits could have begun with the arrival of the European missionaries in the early half of the nineteenth century. But, a study of these missions would reveal that they were primarily begun not to deal with the lower castes, but as missions to restore the Syrian Christians into 'true Christianity', as a 'Mission of Help'.

Missionary - Manipulator or Liberator?

Many like M. K. Gandhi have argued against the validity of the lower caste conversions into Christianity, accusing the lower castes of having no genuine concern towards the religion into which they are converting. The lower castes are often blamed of converting for the material benefits than out of a spiritual quest.

On the other hand, many of the Dalit and Dalit Christian accounts of the missionary activities, in literary works and otherwise, also talk of them as interventions that are appreciable, though of a patronising nature. These accounts do not identify the missionary actions as mere attempts to gather more 'sheep for the fold' or as the imperial agenda to win over the indigenous, but also as morally and ethically charged actions based on love, equality, justice etc. The moral and ethical bases of the missionary activities could have made Protestant Christianity a more appealing religion to the Dalits. One need not be carried away by the missionary discourses since there are many grey areas and contradictions within them.

Mission of Help, Evangelising and Colonising

While the European missions in Kerala claim to have started as a 'Mission of Help' to the Syrian Christians, to bring them back to their original Christian spirit, one cannot completely isolate them from the British colonial interests. W. S. Hunt, one of the missionaries in Travancore, reveals this inseparability during the early days of Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) and the role the British Residents to Travancore, Colonel Colin Macaulay (1800-10) and Colonel John Munro (1810-19), had to play in it (6). The British Resident, Munro, is said to have taken keen interest in establishing relations with the native Syrian Church.

Notions of equality, justice and individual development that were propagated by the missionaries had a definitive role to play. Sanal Mohan, in his doctoral thesis, "Imagining Equality: Modernity and Social Transformation of Lower Castes in Colonial Kerala", argues that the arrival of the lower caste communities at the threshold of cultural modernity was not as easy as it might seem. The lower castes, at least in the initial years of the mission, attended the night schools to obtain literacy and they did this after their work in the fields of the Hindu and Christian landlords. Also, the objective of providing literacy to the lower castes was limited to enable them to read the scriptures (12). Simultaneously, the notions of progress and development introduced by the missionaries and the colonial administration, both at the individual and societal level, had a larger impact on the Travancore state facilitating the development of Kerala as a 'model state' later.

Mohan refers to the C.M.S. archival documents to argue that the missionaries were keen in implementing the notions of development and progress amongst the lower castes. In the later decades of the mission, they also focused on providing education to the lower castes and not mere industrial training (26). The missionaries also attended to other welfare activities like establishing hospitals, schools and colleges in Travancore (*Proceedings of the C.M.S. Eighteenth Report*, 112).

The missionary discourse, on the other hand, is a part of the annual report presented before a benevolent sponsor public in England. Hence, the claims by the missionaries of receiving appreciations and applause from the native population need not be purely based on facts. While the missionaries claim the slave castes of being in pitiable conditions, both socially and intellectually, the post-conversion slave

behaves in such ways as to appeal to sensibilities of the Anglican Christian public in England. Rev. J. Hawksworth writes

> Some of them speak as if they had at length found a friend- "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." And it is quite affecting to hear them repeat the Lord's Prayer; addressing God for the first time as "Our Father," and proceeding with broken accents till they stop, overpowered by their feelings. (*Proceedings of the C.M.S.*, 1851-52, 145)

Thus, the missionary does not just 'introduce' a new God, he also claims that the slave castes are grateful to them for that. The emotional appeal of these accounts on the Anglican Church in England could have been the source of 'inspiration' for further activities. This could be, thus, seen as a clear example of the 'White Man's burden'[1], as it is called. The missionaries, at a later stage of their work, were also aware of the way in which their activities were conceived by the upper caste Hindus and Christians. Most of the landlords, including the Christian ones, feared that the missionary education will raise the slaves to "an equality with themselves" (*Madras Church Missionary Record*, Vol XVII, No. 3, 64).

In a missionary account from 1850, the missionary explains how Chogans, who are above the slave castes in the hierarchy, got baptised into the church and 'both are united by the same spirit into the true faith', thereby overthrowing the traditional 'ideal' distinctions (*Madras Church Missionary Record*, Vol XVII, No. 10, 238). The missionaries also claim that some of the hill tribes, the Hill Araans, demanded them to destroy their traditional worship places and idols so that they can learn to pray to the Heavenly Father (*Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society,* 1852-53, 130). The missionary accounts also romanticises the pious spiritual life of the 'Slave Christian' through

and after the disciplining process of conversion (*Proceedings of the C.M.S.*, 1851-52, 146).

Contrasting opinions have existed about caste and slavery within the missionary discourse also. For instance, while facing opposition from a Brahmin landlord about teaching his slaves, the missionary assures him that 'if we taught his slaves, we should not allow them to show disobedience to the master (*Madras Church Missionary Record,* Vol. XVII, No. 7, 166). Obedience to the master in this context would require the lower castes to remain slaves and be satisfied with a lower and discriminated status. Thus, the missionary's primary interest, here, becomes to gather more sheep for the herd.

Missionary Organisations, Welfare Measures and Lower Caste Mobility in Kerala

London Missionary Society (L.M.S.), having started its operations in 1806, was the first European protestant missionary organisation in Travancore. C.M.S. began its Travancore mission in 1816 and operated majorly in the central Travancore and Cochin regions transforming many a social practice. And, Basel Mission Society (B.M.S.), a Swiss-German missionary organization, initiated its activities in Calicut and other parts of northern Kerala in 1834. B.M.S. could be termed as the pioneers, who introduced weaving and tile-making units as well as printing press to the region.

L.M.S. records provide a valuable opportunity for the study of Travancore's geography, history as well as cultural and social practices. L.M.S. missionary accounts are not always of sympathy, but also of disgust and aversion. The lower caste situation is being criticised, revealing many prejudices.

The Pulayars, the lowest of the slave castes, reside in miserable huts on mounds in the centre of the rice swamps, or on the raised embankments in their vicinity… These poor people are steeped in the densest ignorance and stupidity. Drunkenness, lying, and evil passions prevail amongst them except where of late years the Gospel has been the means of their reclamation from vice, and of their social elevation. (26-27)

The *Madras Church Missionary Record* (Vol XVII, No. 6) of June 1850 describes who a 'Pariah slave' is, thereby giving us pieces of the Travancore psyche and the missionary discourse.

During the short space of time I was enabled to speak with this man, I endeavoured to correct his views on this and other important subjects, and to impress him with a notion of the exceeding love of God to men in giving up His only beloved Son for their redemption. The state of these poor creatures is in every point of view so wretched, that it cannot fail, if only made known, to draw forth the sympathy of all benevolent and religious people on their behalf. (143)

The missionary's account appears to have been well informed and, by depicting the sad state of the Pariah slave, "the sympathy of all benevolent and religious people" is invoked for the missionary activities in Travancore. The liability and responsibility of the English Christians, commonly referred to as the 'White Man's burden', to redeem and empower the 'wretched of the earth',[2] the slaves of Travancore, is the point the missionary seems to highlight in this account of his day.

C.M.S. mission in Travancore was begun as a 'Mission of Help' for the Syrian Church. The missionaries like Benjamin Bailey[3],

Joseph Fenn and Henry Baker were entrusted with the duty of training youths for priesthood, translating the Bible of the Syrian Church from Syriac to Malayalam and guiding the Churches into a 'purer doctrine' as defined by the C.M.S. In 1837, C.M.S. decided to severe its connections with the Syrian Church as they realised that the Syrian priests and bishops would not change from their age-old ways, most of which appeared heathen and superstitious to the missionaries. At the same time, we get glimpses of the 'greatness' missionaries associated with the upper castes from the manner in which they took pride in upper caste conversions- "Nor must we omit to mention the name of Joseph Peet, who was for many years a very prominent figure in the Travancore Mission, and to whom in particular it pleased God to give some remarkable Brahmin converts (C.M.S. Atlas 1879, 99)." Thus, even while criticising the Brahminical order, the missionaries had also internalised the caste hierarchy as legitimised by the same. This is more evident from the way C.M.S. missionaries in places like Mallapalli and Tiruvalla are quoted to have recorded the various incidents that happened in their mission fields. Rev. J. Hawksworth is quoted to have reported the following incident about a Syrian Christian 'master' and his 'slave' from the 'Tiruwella' station:

A Master and his Slave

In the Tiruwella Mission we have been afflicted by the death of the leading man among the slave converts, and also of the chief man in our congregations. But as the bow brightens the darkest cloud, so we have been greatly comforted by the assurance that both the slave and his master—they stood in this relationship—are before the throne. The slave convert was called away very suddenly: a snake bit him in the jungle. He immediately exclaimed, "The Lord has called me;" and then told how he had received the summons. He never for a moment

lost his confidence in Saviour; and when all around him were in confusion and dismay, he quietly asked to be baptized. In the anxiety to save his life his request was passed over, and he was carried to a celebrated Brahmin doctor, who directed him to swallow some holy water, but the slave refused, and died almost immediately: he died like the penitent thief, a Christian unbaptized… His master was so deeply grieved, that his neighbours, when trying to comfort him, said, "You must not distress yourself thus: you did not mourn so much for your brother as you do for this slave." Since then the master himself has been called away. He was the most influential man in our congregations. For many years he has walked as a consistent Christian, and his firmness, judicial counsel, and good example, have been of the greatest benefit to our congregation at Mallapalli. Of this slave I should add, that after the erection of our first Sunday School he was never once absent from divine service. (*Church Missionary Intelligencer*, Vol. III. 306-07)

This speaks volumes of the ways in which the European missionaries understood and carried out their 'conversion missions'. As the title, "A Master and his Slave", indicates, it is about two individuals at different positions in the caste and feudal hierarchy, not about two fellow believers in Christ. The Christian maxim that all are one and equal in Christ does not seem to have materialised in this context. The missionary refers to the believer from the lower caste community as the 'slave convert' and the 'slave', while referring to his Syrian Christian landlord as the 'master'. The fact that the 'slave' was an active and committed member of the church does not entitle him for a baptism even at his deathbed, nor is he referred to as a 'brother in Christ'. Also, the Syrian is the "most influential man" in their congregation, having stood as a "consistent Christian" for many years,

yet continuing to treat the lower castes as slaves. Thus, when the missionary refers to the Syrian landlord as the master, it becomes evident that at least some of the missionaries had adhered to casteist ideology. The 'slave convert', sturdy in faith, dies as a 'slave convert' and not as a complete 'baptized member' of the congregation. As mentioned earlier, this romanticising of the 'heathen's faith' aims at appreciation from the church in England, who support the mission financially and otherwise.

A similar attitude is shown by the missionaries in 1862 as recorded by Hawksworth. A 'wealthy high-caste Nair agriculturist' comes to the missionary and discusses the mission and the slaves as follows

> He was told that our object was to inculcate the fear of God, and effect an entire reformation, so as to make these men humble, obedient, honest and respectable; not proud, disobedient and idle, as the farmers and others had greatly feared, and therefore opposed us for awhile. (*Church Missionary Intelligencer*, Vol. III. 309)

In the above accounts, we can see the missionary and the conversions performing the role of civilising the slaves to make them better workers, both for the local feudal-caste set up as well as for the mission. The missionaries are aware of and take special care not to always disturb the status quo in a radical manner. The *Madras Church Missionary Record* (Vol. XVII, No. 3) of March 1850 brings light to the spirit with which the missionaries started their work amongst the lower castes in many areas as well as how it was received by the local gentry.

> A member of our congregation, who owns several, has engaged to allow us to have his; and we are endeavouring to get others

also. A man has been appointed to teach them. But the owners in general grudge every second of time that the slaves are absent from work, and hence we cannot always insure their regularity. Many also object from the idea that instruction will raise their slaves to an equality with themselves, and that they will not in future be obedient to their commands. We have therefore some difficulties to contend with; but doubt not that they will be duly overcome. (64)

To begin with, we can understand that a member of the missionary congregation 'owns' some of the lower castes as 'slaves'. The missionaries do not object to their own member, though "from the middle of the 18th century, movements had been afoot in England calling for the abolition of slavery, largely in response to a series of slave rebellions taking place in the colonies (Raman 7)." "Slavery was abolished in Malabar in 1843 by the British and through Royal Proclamations in Travancore and Cochin in 1853 and 1854 respectively (Basu, 2008: pp. 57, 62-63) (Manmathan 61)." Thus, one would want to question the anti-slavery tag that historians and social scientists easily assign to the missionaries in Travancore.

The L.M.S. attitude towards Shanar converts in South Travancore would inform us of the scepticism with which many of these converts were received by the missionaries. The missionary appears to be conscious of the various factors other than the spiritual quest, like escaping mandatory labour for the government that would prompt conversions (Mullens 111). On the other hand, the missionaries also fail to identify the converts with a fair sense of respect or dignity. They portray the lower castes, the 'slaves', as they are referred to, as having no agency and sense of future. They are described as indulging in the worldly vices and leading a miserable existence. This description, while projecting the Anglican White Christian as the better

'other', also justifies the missionary's attempt to 'ameliorate' the state of the lower castes. In the postcolonial context, this understanding of the lower caste and Dalit lives and culture could be a major concern, especially when contemporary scholars like Kancha Ilaiah[4] attempt a celebration of the same emphasizing on its unique nature(s) and distinction from the upper caste one(s).

Slave to 'Christian Slave': Disciplining Dalits for the Mission

The missionary's role in the conversion of Dalits is ambiguous for several reasons. Koshy Curien, the anti-hero of Frances Wright Collins' *The Slayer Slain* (1864-66), is the perfect example of Syrian resentment towards the education of Dalit castes (21). The coming of European Protestant missionaries, marked the beginning of a new era in the education and social progress of lower castes in Kerala (Nag 889). In *Saraswativijayam,* there is a reference to how the white people make the lower castes who work for them wear neat dress and have a decent life. Also, it becomes possible for these lower castes to accompany their 'masters' all over India, breaking norms of untouchability and unapproachability (98).

The old Poulusa in the novel is a fine example of how missionary Christianity makes the 'slave' a better one, who does not steal from his master but offers whole hearted services. The 'good slave' also prays for his master even when the latter beats Poulusa's grandchild to death (18). Poulusa, even after his conversion is referred to as 'the slave' or 'the Christian slave' by Madame Collins. The native minister associated with the European mission is projected as the saviour of the slaves, against their cruel casteist Syrian Christian master (29). The native minister threatens the servants of invoking action by government against them to save old Poulusa. Collins also makes sure that the way Christianity and its effects are portrayed

does not antagonise the upper castes. Instead, it appeals to them (27-8). Thus, the missions were a patronising, generous attempt on the part of the white man to spread the gospel to the heathen, to the slaves. The missionary discourse on caste, hence, cannot be considered as a homogeneous progressive one.

> The old lady opened her eyes at this speech, and said she never heard of such a thing as a Brahmin turning Christian.
>
> "Neither have I," returned Mariam, "but if their devotion to Brahma gives them no hope, no comfort, why should not they turn to something which can give both hope and joy here, and everlasting peace hereafter? I think as soon as the Brahmins begin to read and learn more of the truths of science and Christianity, light will begin to spread rapidly; even their very pride will be of use to them, for they will be ashamed to be amongst the lowest in the scale of progress. They will feel compelled to move forward by the very force of circumstances." (57)

Thus, Christianity of the European missionaries is associated with progress and enlightenment, as opposed to the ways of the traditional upper caste Syrian Christianity which is oppressive and feudal.

The Dalit converts faced differential treatment at the hands of the missionaries as well as the upper castes in the church. The converts from the lower castes were referred to as 'Low caste converts', 'Neo-converts', 'Converted Christian', 'Poor Christian', 'Slave converts' etc, thereby assigning them a lower status. These tags have been carried forward by many generations by now.

Can there be a Dalit Christ? Why not?

Dalit theology in India talks of a Dalit God, a Dalit Christ. But, what is the need to constitute a Dalit theology? Why is a people's theology or a theology of the poor not enough? Would it not be enough to employ the Marxist categories to the Indian theological thought? As Liberation theology was indeed a popular choice in the Indian churches for a while, these questions are often posed against the Dalit theologians. But, they respond to it by pointing out the inadequacy of the Marxist thought to deal with the Indian realities in its totality. As Chatterji says, "Even with the best intentions of giving priority to the fact of oppression and exploitation, these formulations fail to reveal the concrete subjectivity of diverse sections of the oppressed, their particular experience, histories, and aspirations" (179). The larger conceptualisations of the Marxian philosophy based on class differences and struggle fail to respond to the diversity and challenges of experiences in the Indian context, which cannot be understood effectively through a mere economic analysis (182).

The attempts of the missionaries to dissociate Dalits from their past through conversion has led to the alienation of the Dalit Christians in the theological circles. While the upper caste converts retained many of their cultural practices and social norms, Dalit converts were often forced into rejecting any association with their own. "There was a time when Dalits in South India, who wished to convert to Christianity, were required to break the drum in public before entering the Church for baptism. This was necessary to demonstrate the Dalits' complete rejection of the non-Christian Divine as experienced in their local context (Clarke 12)." The effects of such acts are reflected in the theologising process as well.

The upper caste converts into Christianity try to essentialise Indian Christian theology in terms of Hindu philosophy, thereby, formulating and projecting a 'Hindu upper caste Christian theology' as Indian Christian theology (Clarke 42). The Westernised and the Indianized Christianities and theologies have become alien to the Dalit Christians, thereby forcing them to formulate a theology and Christianity that will become a source of their liberation, a religion that is relevant to them. This incorporation of Christianity, gospel and biblical stories into the Dalit lives has, thus, led to the emergence of a Dalit theology. As M.E. Prabhakar says, "Dalit Theology is a *new theology* because it is from "below" and uses Dalit peoples' languages and expressions, their stories and songs of suffering and triumphs, popular wisdom including their values, proverbs, folk-lore, myths and so on to interpret their history and culture, and to articulate a faith to live by and to act on (210-11)." Thus, it is a postmodern theology that is relevant to the Dalit Christians and rooted in their lives, histories and cultures.

The Dalit Christian's search for identity, roots and consciousness has led to the formulation of Dalit theology. Thus, it is a theology that deals with the suffering, bondage, slavery, the toil and tears of the Dalits. The aims of Dalit theology are not mere material benefits, but it is a search for dignity for the Dalit Christians. But, on the other hand, what makes Dalit theology and a Dalit Christ unacceptable in the Kerala society? What could be the role played by the European evangelising missions in facilitating this aversion to a Dalit Christ?

T. M. Yesudasan proposes the notion of a 'religious ascension' while dealing with Dalit conversions that had slavery as the larger context.

It is the notion of Dalit religious ascension, which is apt. Religious ascension is used as a notion to denote the ascension into a better state from a disorganized and helpless situation. It was not a shift of loyalty from one organized religion to another organized religion. (3)[5]

Thus, the conversions of the Dalits in Kerala were ascensions into lives beyond slavery. This dismantles several theories of forced conversions and luring by the European missionaries, as propounded by the Hindu right wing, as well as the projections of Christianity as having liberative and patronizing powers. Yesudasan refers to the absence of any mention of the Dalit castes in the C.M.S. records for seventeen years, 1818-35, during which the missionaries can be believed to have been waiting for a favourable response from the Syrian Christians (16-8). Also, the reluctance from the missionaries to facilitate Dalit religious ascension even after the ties with the Syrian churches were severed in 1836 could be seen as a strategy on the part of the missionaries to invite any Syrian who would join the missions. Yesudasan refers to the missionary documents to bring in the example of Kali, a slave girl, who got baptized through her own insistence in Cochin in 1827-8, after she had run away from her European master (49-50). Hence, the religious conversions of the Dalits were ascensions, on par with Ambedkar's conversion into *Navayana* Buddhism[6]. "The slaves had gone in search of the missionaries. The strategies that were used by the slaves to attain freedom, at least in a limited sense; and to develop the freedom that has been attained, are what make Dalit religious ascension active and creative (Yesudasan 51)."[7]

The ways of the missionaries have facilitated the secondary status of the Dalit Christian as well as a forced erasure of the Dalit pasts, with all its cultural, spiritual variations. Contemporary Dalit writers do try to question these attempts by revealing how important the slave past is to understand the struggle and oppression. Today,

the need for a Dalit Christ, who symbolises the Dalit Christian struggle, becomes crucial and the aura of the European missionary has to be broken and the romantic image challenged, without any delay.

Notes

1 "The White Man's Burden" (1899) is a poem by the English poet Rudyard Kipling, which is notorious for its imperial and colonial overtones. Kipling justifies the need for imperialism and the 'burden' on the Europeans to dominate and colonize the world.

2 *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) is the English translation of the French book *Les Damnés de la Terre* (1961) by Frantz Fanon, a Martinique-born French philosopher, revolutionary, and postcolonial theoretician. The book deals with various theories on the psychological processes that are involved in the formation of the colonizer and the colonized.

3 Bailey (1791-1871) was a British missionary in Travancore in the nineteenth century and is known for his contributions towards the development of printing technology and book publishing in Malayalam. He is also remembered for translating the Bible into Malayalam and publishing the first English-Malayalam dictionary in 1846.

4 Ilaiah is a political scientist, activist and writer from Telangana, who is famous for his formulations on the Dalit-Bahujan history, culture and politics. His popular books include *Why I am not a Hindu?* (1996) and *Buffalo Nationalism: A Critique of Spiritual Fascism* (2004).

5 (Translated by author)

6 *Navayana* Buddhism was a version of Buddhism, conversion into which, Ambedkar believed would prove useful for the Dalits to liberate themselves from the caste system in Hinduism. Ambedkar, along with a large number of followers, converted into Buddhism on 14 October 1956, at Deekshabhoomi, Nagpur.

7 (Translated by author)

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Head or Tail: Representation of the Subaltern Migrant Worker in the New Generation Malayalam Cinema

Navya.V.K

The subaltern studies group was an offshoot of postcolonial intellectual discourses and the concept of the subaltern theoretically draws upon the neo-Marxist thoughts of Antonio Gramsci. In postcolonial discourse, "subaltern" refers to a social group or class who is politically, economically and socially marginalized from all spheres of life and is located beyond the hegemonic structure of the society (Guha, 1982). Postcolonial theorists often use "subaltern" as a useful category to think through both the implicit and explicit articulations of class/racial/caste/gender stereotypes and their representations. Theoretically, a subaltern exists at the bottom of a hierarchy of power; and in India, people belonging to the lower economic classes or those who occupy a lower position in the traditional caste hierarchy — generally, people from the margin of the society — can be considered subalterns. Popular cultural productions like cinema actively engage with the plight of the subaltern in the society. This paper attempts to engage with the construction of the subaltern in the Malayalam New Generation Cinema in the context of globalization by focusing on the representation of a migrant worker character (Ansari) in the movie *Chappa Kurishu* (2011, Samir Thahir).

The subaltern is not a homogenous category and the condition of marginalization and subalternity changes under the grip of

globalization. In the postcolonial condition, the articulation of subaltern identity and the ways in which it negotiates with the public are not homogenous and are instead more contextual. In an increasingly globalized scenario, as the traditional modes of economic production give way to global capital, new social relations and spaces emerge and the ways in which a subaltern subject is represented in cultural texts like popular cinema is something that demands scholarly attention. This paper attempts to focus on the representation of the subaltern subject (Ansari) in the city space by doing a textual analysis of the film *Chappa Kurishu.* Ansari's marginalization and oppression in the city space is determined by his class position and dislocation in the city space. The study will also problematize the changing nature of relations of power and agency that happens between the central male characters (Arjun and Ansari) through the mediation of global technology (mobile phone).

Ansari is a migrant labourer who works in the urban space and his subaltern identity is constituted by the complex discourses of class, regional dislocation and language. His alienation in the city space is a result of the subaltern position he occupies in the society. Cultural notions of class are articulated in the narrative through name, language, dress, body features, occupation, location, and the social behaviour of the character. Ansari is a Muslim who hails from Thalasseri in the northern part of Kerala, which connotes a culturally inferior geographical location than the more urbanized city space of Kochi where Ansari has migrated to get better employment opportunities. Language also plays a crucial role in the representation of the subaltern subject in the cinematic space and Ansari's language is presented according to the expectations of the social subjectivity of his character. His language is the language of the Muslim community in northern Kerala, and it betrays his regional location in the city. While speaking with him over the phone, Arjun says that the person

who is on the other side must be from north part of Kerala. His slang is visibly distinguished from the language of the other upper class characters like Arjun, Sonia, Ann, etc. The other male protagonist, who is an upper-class businessman, speaks a dialect that is very close to the standard print language and it is very difficult to guess Arjun's regional or religious identity from his language. That is to say, Ansari's language is a code that contributes to his construction as an *other* in the city space and his regional location and community identity are some of the factors that push him away to the periphery of the society; Ansari, as a migrant worker, doesn't belong to the city space.

Chappa Kurishu in Malayalam means "Head or Tail", and the relationship between that of the male protagonists are that of head and tail. The constitution of the subaltern character Ansari is done in contrast with Arjun, whose class position is far superior to that of Ansari. The unequal binaries of powerful/powerless, dominant/ subordinate, upper class/lower class, urban/rural operate in the constitution of the subaltern subject. Arjun represents the typical Malayali film hero figure that is handsome, fair, and aristocratic and he also embodies a dominant masculine image in the movie. Ansari on the other hand has a physiognomy that is smaller, submissive, and soft, and hence physically represents the powerless subaltern. While Arjun hails from a wealthy family and lives in a luxury apartment, Ansari hails from a lower class background; his family is not presented in the movie and he lives in a small room in a slum area. His room is small, he has to stand in queue for his primary needs, he keeps his shirt under the cot for ironing as he can't pay for ironing, and he eats the same cheap food every day. He is mocked by the hotel owner for eating the same food item and for giving the same five-rupee coin as payment and this mockery is shared by most of the other people who are present in the hotel. Here, Ansari's class position, which is

constituted through the complex interaction of his occupation, location, language, body and social behaviour, constructs him as a subaltern subject.

Ansari's character is portrayed as a powerless ordinary man who is continuously degraded and oppressed both in his workplace and in the colony where he lives. Ansari has migrated from the rural space to the city space in search of employment. He works as a salesman in a supermarket for a nominal salary and he lives in a slum. His workplace is not a comfortable space for him as he is continuously harassed and bullied by his supervisor Martin. When his fellow workers have a less miserable existence in the work place, he regularly faces discrimination from his supervisor. He is given punishments like cleaning the toilet and is also publicly insulted for minor faults like coming late to the workplace. He is alienated in his workplace and, except with his love interest Nafisa, he is never shown as sharing any bonds or friendships with his co-workers or fellow beings. In some scenes, the other salesmen in the supermarket are shown as more active and smarter than Ansari: they possess modern gadgets and share friendship with their fellow workers. It can also be seen that it is Ansari, being more submissive than his co-workers, who is sent out for extra duties by the supervisor. The workplace is a globalized one where Ansari's marginality and the discrimination against him can be attributed to his social class and migrant status, which disable him from responding to the discriminations met by him in the work place.

In the colony where Ansari lives, he is shown as very lonely and powerless. In the queues for the toilet, even children surpass him. In his street, nobody notices him and in the hotel where he routinely eats, he is ridiculed for eating cheap *porotta* every day. This

scene in the hotel is repeated thrice in the movie. Here, food become a metaphor of class position and poverty. It is because of his low income that he has to satisfy himself with cheap food and here what is ridiculed by the people around him are his poverty and class position and not just a simple choice of food. Until the last scene in the hotel, the character is shown as silently taking insults from the hotel owner and other characters present there. The character's eating habits and food becomes one of the sites where his class identity is revealed. For Ansari, food is meant for survival and it is never a matter of choice or celebration. On the other side, Arjun's working table and apartment are always shown as filled with many food items and there are other characters like Ann who speak about diet and food control. In Arjun's upper class position, food becomes a sign of celebration and excess.

The subaltern is represented here as a passive, lonely and powerless figure. In the course of the narrative, he never takes up the agency to act against the everyday oppressions he faces in life and similarly, there is no conscious attempt from his part to integrate him to the modes of city life. Ansari's life in the city is divided between his life in the slum and his work in the supermarket. There is neither friendship nor any other activities of leisure that Ansari involves himself in during the course of the narrative, whereas the upper-class character Arjun spends his leisure time in night clubs, drinking and forming relationships including friendship with his fellow people. While Ansari is marginalized and alienated from the mainstream society, Arjun is an active part of the society. Though Arjun is also living alone in the city, he is able to form different relationships in the workplace and in the familial space, and he is not alienated in the city space. The class position articulated through these characters can be seen as one of the major reasons for these differences.

Empowering Gadgets: A Problematic Solution to Marginality

The representation of the subaltern migrant worker in the city space as a powerless, passive and oppressed entity is disrupted in the narrative with the entry of a mobile phone into the dominant/ submissive power binary between Arjun and Ansari. The intervention of this mobile phone gradually disrupts the power equation and the subaltern character is shown as undergoing a transformation in terms of power and agency. In other words, the temporary possession of Arjun's mobile phone by Ansari is shown as an empowering factor and the possession of the gadget without any other changes in the socio-economic position of the subaltern is placed as a solution for the discriminations and marginalization faced by the character in his city life. I would like to propose that such a resolution is a problematic one as it never really disrupts the binary that is constructed by the socio-economic and cultural factors in which the subaltern is embedded.

Globalization is an era of technology and communication and the mobile phone can be seen as an extension of the modern man. In this movie, the mobile phone serves both as a means of communication and as a trope to represent the class position of the character who owns it. The mobile phone that belongs to Arjun reaches the hands of Ansari and the accidental possession of the gadget brings many changes to his character. Even though Ansari did not own the phone, he keeps the phone with him for a very short period and the narrative shows how this incident slowly transforms the character of Ansari. The loss of the mobile is a "tossing" moment where the tail gets an upper hand over the head, and Ansari feels empowered and Arjun is shown as losing many of his cards including his ambitious project, his marriage and goodwill over the course of time. In the film, the mobile phone is presented as a class indicator and once it gets

exchanged, the power associated with technology is shown as getting transferred to Ansari who currently possesses the gadget.

The introduction scene of Arjun and Ansari is connected with the possession of their mobile phones and this gadget serves as an extension of their personality as well as class position to the viewers. Arjun, the corporate capitalist, has two ultramodern mobile sets (Blackberry and Apple) whereas Ansari, the ordinary salesman, possesses an old Nokia model that is tied together by a rubber band. The very first appearance of both of these characters is shown through an advertisement call they receive on their mobile phones, the sources of those calls and their response to the advertisements also mark out their class location. When Arjun wake up in the luxury bed of his apartment to pick up the call, Ansari wake up in his small, unfurnished room, covered only by a thin sheet. The call for Arjun was from a new generation bank and the customer care executive is a woman who canvases Arjun for taking their bank's credit card; as a response, Arjun tries to flirt with the woman and he hang up the call the very moment the woman (Jovita) reveals that she is a married one. On the other hand, the call that wakes Ansari up was from a mobile company and it was a recorded advertisement on setting up a new ringtone that is sent to all customers irrespective of their identity. Ansari, unlike Arjun, is just one among many customers who may or may not set a new ringtone but indeed, he is happy to listen to a star's (Mammooty) hit dialogue from the movie *Big B*, but he visibly can't afford setting up a new ringtone at the cost of 30 rupees per month. So, while Arjun is an upper-class businessman who is personally canvassed for new-age credit cards, Ansari is a lower middle-class worker who can only enjoy a few seconds' worth of advertisement dialogues for free.

While Arjun's phones are busy and people often try to contact him on those phones, Ansari's phone rarely receives any calls. The

single call he dials is to Nafisa and that too is disconnected owing to his low balance. As mentioned earlier, the figure of the subaltern in the globalized city space is an alienated and insecure one. His class background disables him from making connections to people through the phone and probably there is no friend or relative for him in the city or in the village to connect to him. The only communications he makes is with his mother and that is through letters and not through phone calls. That is to say, for him, the phone is not for day-to-day communication but it's more of a luxury. The possession of Arjun's phone is the instance from when Ansari started receiving calls from Arjun and Arjun is the only one who tries to connect with him through the phone.

The binary of the dominant/subordinate is very prevalent in the initial phone conversation between Arjun and Ansari where Arjun treats Ansari with an air of superiority and speaks English and Ansari hangs up the phone out of tension and fear. The binary slowly gets disrupted through the sequence of conversations that happen between Ansari and Arjun. Arjun was in need of the mobile phone as the phone contains an intimate video clip of him and his secretary and the necessity of keeping it a secret prevents him from approaching the police or other agencies for help. In the age of information technology, finding a lost mobile phone is an easy job but the nature of the data in the mobile phone makes it a difficult task and that's where Arjun has to become submissive in his dealing with Ansari. Gradually, to deal with Ansari, Arjun switches to Malayalam and his commands become requests. Later, Ansari starts enjoying the respect and position that is given to him by Arjun when he temporarily owns the phone. Moreover, the subaltern who has been anonymous in the city space and is reduced as a number in the workplace starts enjoying the same anonymity, as that allows him to make Arjun do things for him. It is important to note that he never demands money or any material goods from Arjun but

the only thing he asks for is retaliation against the insults that he has faced from his supervisor and the upper-class lady customer who falsely accuses Ansari of misbehaving to her. These demands shows that what he has been lacking in the work space of the supermarket was agency, respect and equal treatment — both from the supervisor and from the others who occupy the work space, except for Nafisa.

When Nafisa asks Ansari to return the mobile phone to Arjun, he replies, "I don't feel like giving it (the mobile phone) back. When this is in my hand I don't feel scared anymore". So Ansari's feeling of being insecure in the city temporarily evaporates when he carries the mobile phone with him. The subaltern subject who has migrated from northern Kerala to Kochi is dislocated in the city space and, in addition to this dislocation, his lower class position gives rise to the feeling of alienation and insecurity in the character. The narrative presents the mobile phone as a solution to insecurity and marginalization faced by the subaltern worker in the city space and in his own words that gives him empowerment and security. The subaltern subject is shown as undergoing a process of transformation from a passive, oppressed self to an active agent who intervenes and responds to the actions that are happening around his life. His social behaviour changes and towards the end of the narrative, he becomes a person who could respond to the hotel owner who passes derogatory comments about his poverty and heeven ventures to accept money from him for having a delicious breakfast. The character's body language changes and his movements become more confident towards the end of the narrative. This new attitude developed in this character drives away his fears, insecurities etc., and the configurations of his social behaviour are shown as having changed. The credit for this individual transformation is solely attributed to the possession of a costly modern technology and not to any other social, economic or cultural advancement that has happened in his life. This is a problematic resolution as the

question of change in the complex socio-cultural and economic discourses that marginalize the subaltern subject in the city space are not brought into the transformation of the subaltern subject, and transformation is represented as happening through the possession of modern technology that is not affordable to him from his class position.

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Understanding the Politics of Caste and Religious Conversion in Contemporary India

Jondhale Rahul Hiraman

In the recent years conversion has become the subject of extensive research that has attracted the academic disciplines, such as, Humanities and Social Sciences. According to Rowina Robinson (Robinson, 2003: 5-6), religious conversion in India has emerged from internal processes and from without. India has seen conversions backed by political regimes or worked as forms of resistance to particular social and political regimes. We could think of sixteenth century Catholicism in Goa or modern Buddhism as instances of different modes of conversion. India has seen both mass and individual conversions as well as conversions bolstered by varying degrees and those caught in moments of dialogue and religious interchange.

When one talks about the rise of religious conversion in India, conversions to Islam is said to be spread through trade links, through the influence of the 'Sufis' or through other processes that have little to do with political oppression. Mass conversions of Dalits, low castes and certain tribal communities during the British colonial rule, may be in part read as one effort among many others to come to terms with the multiple dislocations being experienced by different groups as a result of the radical social and economic shift occasioned by colonialism. The British did not force conversions and such movements were certainly efforts by different groups to gain social mobility, self-respect and dignity. While in Goa, mass conversions across all castes

took place under the shadow of colonial regime that saw itself both as a political and religious entity.

Religious conversion is also viewed often as an expression of resistance, dissent and rebellion. Whether, it is conversion to Sikhism or Christianity in the nineteenth century or to Buddhism in the post-independence period, the category of the convert also carried the implication of dissent. One could perhaps think of conversion in India as falling into three major chronological periods: pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence. The pre-colonial period is extremely unwieldy as it spans many centuries. It includes indigenous conversion movements, such as, Jainism and Buddhism. The conversions to Islam took place and got mediated through trade associations, Sufism and political linkages over many centuries. Conversions to Christianity in Kerala (Syrian Christians) are an earlier instance of conversion. This was followed by conversion to Catholicism in Goa and Protestantism in parts of South India. The post-Independence period saw various conversion movements that had their linkages with political movements and aspirations for political independence and autonomy as well as for social mobility and economic betterment. For example, conversion to Islam in Tamil Nadu and other regions, conversion to Christianity among tribal groups and Buddhist conversion of Dalits under Ambedkar in particular are such conversions.

Religious conversion movements in India have such a long and detailed history, starting right from the pre-British era till present. These movements actually represent the desire for self improvement and socio-cultural upliftment by the lower caste groups. Nevertheless, conversion movements in the sub-continent are informed by the range of social and political issues. As far as Dalit conversion movements are concerned, one can look at the conversion movements in the context of Indian democracy and as a path towards modernity. The

conversion movements were not just religious conversions of Dalits' into modern/new religions but they were conversions into full citizenship, into modernity. Hence there is a necessity to understand the politics of caste and aspirations for democracy involved in the religious conversions in India, as it can inform us about the gaps and fissures in the contemporary Indian democracy and about the creation of a more egalitarian society.

Politics of Dalit Conversions in India

According to Gauri Vishwanathan, the political debate over religious conversion in India can be traced back to the initiation of colonial rule in India. This debate had produced an uncanny alliance between the Hindu nationalists and M. K. Gandhi and together they judged conversion as the instrument of British colonialism and therefore a threat to Hinduism (2001: ii-iii). Throughout the history of the national independence struggle, religion has occupied a central space in the mainstream discourses on nationalism, citizenship and social justice. Today, in India, the issue of religious conversion has been debated between the zealous promoters of Hindutva and a feeble Christian minority. However, in last one decade this debate has taken a violent form. Much has been written about this in popular forums and there have been scholarly studies of major reforms and nationalist views on the question of conversion. Few studies on conversion issue have placed conversion in the framework of faith, religious freedom or authenticity. Conversions have also been understood as political practice of disintegration. As a result, conversion is defaced as religious inauthenticity and conspiracy both at the personal and political level. The mainstream media has also played the role of a source that looked at conversion as inauthentic and corrupt.

Having said this, there are several scholars who have started writing about conversion issues and are engaging critically with the same, specifically after 1990s. To get the clear picture of these discussions/debates, one has to look at the various standpoints about same issues. The issues involved are: 1. The Hindu right wing politics against conversion that has generated a heated debate among the scholars. 2. Hinduisation or the re-conversion strategies adopted by these forces and 3. The formation of Anti-Conversion laws in the orthodox, upper-caste dominated states. These debates that I will discuss in this paper are actually informed by three articles, namely, 'Conversions and the Politics of the Hindu Right Wing' by Sumit Sarkar, 'Conversion, Re-Conversion and the State: Recent events in the Dangs by Ghanshyam Shah and 'Anti-Conversion laws: Challenges to Secularism and Fundamental rights' published by South Asian Documentation Centre. For me, the issues discussed in these articles are of prime importance as they form a major academic contribution to the existing knowledge produced in the field and as they are very recent discussions in relation to the question of conversion.

Recently, in Orissa the Christians were violently attacked, murdered, churches were vandalised and nuns were raped. The incidents of riots and attacks were further extended to Karnataka and Maharashtra. The state governments remain mute spectators to the violent attacks perpetrated by the members of Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and in most of the cases state has openly colluded with the attackers. The violent attacks against Christian minority by the Hindutva forces, especially in the Kandamal District of Orissa, have been analysed from many angles. Issues were raised using the aegis of secularism versus communalism divide. What is most disturbing is the ideological interventions and critical engagements from Dalit political parties and intellectuals on such a critical issue. Those who were attacked by the Hindutva brigade in

Orissa are primarily Dalits or tribals. These socially deprived sections often converted to Christianity or other religions in a desperate hope for a better life, access to modern education and dignified social status (Sharma: 2002). In Orissa and other parts of India, like Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh the attempts to convert on the part of the Dalits and tribals have been communalized systematically in order to retain the perpetual hegemony of the upper caste elites in the social and economic spheres.

Having said that, let's move onto an in-depth critical analysis of the three articles those which look at conversion as a burning issue and at the politics of Dalit conversions. For Sumit Sarkar, to understand the increased attacks on Dalit converts, it becomes necessary to look at the question of conversion, its changing meaning and forms across time, trying to investigate when, under what conditions and how it became a contentious issue. According to him, there are two factors that have generated conversion debates, one, developed community consciousness, and two, communalism. Developed community consciousness has to do with religious identity of that particular community and communalism with the issues and ideas of the community. Basic reason for the recent outrages against Christians is a semantic ploy that assumes Hinduism as unique among religious traditions, in being non-proselytizing and says conversions to other faiths is unfair.

It doesn't stop here, one has to also recognize that across centuries Brahminical Hindu rituals, beliefs and caste disciplines have spread across the sub-continent and sought to create a monolithic Hindu identity which erases the history and presence of very different practices and faiths existed among different caste groups. One can call it as *sanskritisation* or forced cultural integration. From the 19th century onwards they have adopted a new policy as expansion towards

the marginal groups and tribals. These strategies involve reclamation, shuddhi, reconversion or paravartan. For the Hinduthva forces the ways of transformations which they call shuddi/reconversion are fair enough and it doesn't involve any conspiracy they justify these transformations as a form of cultural processes called as *Sanskritization* .

Moving from here, let's look at why religious conversions are becoming controversial. According to Sumit Sarkar, three major changes in the 19th century onwards became relevant for conversion controversy.

1. Tightening of community boundaries: colonial law and the census operations in the early period developed a broader framework of politico-administrative, economic and communal integration. The boundaries between the religious communities were also centralized and textualized and that made sharper and enhanced influence over the rest of the society of high castes and Muslim elites.

2. In the 19th and early 20th century many community identities such as religious, caste, linguistic, regional, anti-colonial, national and class emerged in an interactive yet conflictual relationships with each other. But later on the colonial law broadened its defined community norms into personal laws and gave freedom to the individuals in market places, land owning and in commercial transactions. What happened was the upper-caste were the ones who could benefit out of this and advance to economically and socially stronger sections of the society together with sticking to their politics of exploiting others.

3. In the later years to come, the heightened late and post-colonial tensions around conversions have to be related to community borders. Conversions happened among upper-caste communities

to other religions gave chance and time to reflect upon the process of conversion. Individual conversions were happening within the upper-caste communities that were felt to be a threat to the family order by the orthodox Hindus and they made immediate arrangements to stop it. But at individual level, conversions continued to happen.

4. The last quarter of the 19th century was marked by a surge in the number of Christian conversions and they were described in mission histories as the era of mass conversion movements. Whole families, villages, or sub-castes came over en masse in a manner that possibly reduced the aspects of conflict at local level. This became a torture for upper-castes and the mainstream.

5. Throughout the 19th century there were numerous encounters between missionaries, Hindu and Muslim spokes-men, in public debates as well as through press on the issue of conversion. To stop these conversions, three processes started coming from upper caste intelligentsia. The processes such as Sanskritization in the very beginning even before colonial rule, the Shuddhi movement by the Arya Samajists; were purifying the converted marginal groups and the social upliftment efforts, which in logic directed towards all subjugated lower castes and untouchables.

Let's move onto the next article that focuses on the recent re-conversion events in the Dangs district of Gujrat. The article titled, "Conversion, Re-conversion and the State: Recent events in the Dangs," by Ghanshyam Shah argues that the dominant section of the majority mainstream upper caste community, the regional media, many non-governmental organizations and the state have either joined hands or preferred to remain silent against the minorities and the oppressed, as if the civil and state society have blended together. This article

forms a new framework to look at how the so called mainstream upper caste, orthodox Hindus have adopted new strategies to defame religious conversions. Shuddhi or reconversion of the innocent tribals with force and added to that the increased attack on the lower caste communities and the tribals who were .converted into Christianity were the strategies adopted by caste Hinduthva forces

Ghanshyam also looks at the complications involved in identifying caste and religion in the rural Indian context and the how the difficulty in naming is politically used as a strategy by the state and the Hinduthva forces. For example, the census of India and methods of enumeration of religious identity has been rightly contested. Most of the Dangis who are illiterate specify their religion as tribal religion and enumerators have characterized them as Hindus. One has to think the politics of this act; on the one hand they say that Adivasis are not part of Hindu religion and on the other hand they are forcibly categorising them as Hindus.

Countering this, the mainstream view of tribals as Hindus, most of the sections of Adivasis believe they are not Hindus and they were the original natives of the land. Linking this, in the past around 1930s they launched religious movement called Sati Pati Panth that opposed Hinduism and as well as Christianity. But due to humane and personal touch of missionaries' tribals found that somewhere Christianity is close to their feelings and emotions. Seeing the danger of missionary activities to Hinduism, politics of Gandhian reform in the past and Sangh Parivar in the present realized and started different methods of social reforms and religious activities. These activities amount to such incidents where HJM (Hindu Jagran Manch) in June 1998 in Dang collectively purified some Christian Adivasis and were taken back into Hindu fold. Besides this, HJM, VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad), RSS (Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh) and other

organizations of the Sangh Parivar organized anti-Christian rallies, killing of Christian converts, attacking churches and priests etc which showcased the anti-secular values of the orthodox Hindus.

The third article in the series titled, 'Anti-Conversion Laws: Challenges to Secularism and Fundamental Rights' presents a scrutiny of the Anti-Conversion laws that have been recently passed in the states of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Arunachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat. These laws have been passed in the respective legislative assemblies of each state under the special acts rights given to the states by the Indian constitution. These anti-conversion laws have a specific meaning which seems to be ambiguous, against the basic right of freedom of religion guaranteed by the Indian constitution and makes a wrong interpretation of conversion by defining it in the more orthodox form of Hindu ideology.

Before going onto discuss the politics of the Hindu dominated states behind implementing these laws in the states, let's see why these laws have come up. The first and foremost reason for getting these laws into action is the increased community consciousness among the exploited masses to renounce Hindu faith and embrace some other modern religions (most of the conversions have happened amoung Hindus, due its exploitative and discriminatory caste structure). On the other hand, respective governments have claimed that the anti-conversion laws are intended to prevent religious conversions carried out by the use of force, inducement or by fraudulent means. The above claim lacks proper understanding of the conversion issue and the very claim made by the government officials, favouring anti-conversion laws, poses a threat against the right to freedom of religion guaranteed by the constitution. If we carefully look at the constitutional right to freedom of religion it allows propagating ones religious faith but not conversions by force, fraud or inducement. On

these lines, then, the anti-conversion laws doesn't hold any ground and seem to be anti-secular, against fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution and against the International Human Rights.

Another interesting part of these Anti-Conversion laws is that they oppose the conversion by force or proselytization activities of the missionaries. But, beginning from the 19th century onwards, these Hindu forces are actually proselytizing converted communities back into Hindu fold by the way of Sanskritization, Shuddhi movement (Gandhian form) and the paravartan (Sangh Parivar) or the reconversion in the recent times. No official action appears to be taken under the anti-conversion legislations against the Hindu conversion efforts, despite allegations from several quarters of forced conversion to Hinduism.

Conclusion

Mass conversions among Dalits are not necessarily a matter of force or fraud; they are often socio-cultural protest movements against oppression. The real issues leading to conversion are the desire of the Dalit Communities for civil liberties, religious freedom, fundamental democratic rights, and equal citizenship .As far as Dalit politics of conversion is concerned, there are certain discourses that have to be taken into account. At the first level, the psychological discourse has to be considered. For Dalits it is a matter of personal identity and individual freedom. At the socio-cultural level, it is one of community identity and collective rights. At the economic and political level, the focus is on economic interest and political fair play. Finally, the socio-religious discourse is concerned with a faith understanding and the conviction and the commitments, the belief and practices that go with it. In each of these discourses the perspectives of the converter and converted is considered, opening up issues of civil rights

that must not be compromised. For example, Ambedkar's conversion is a challenge to any honest attempt to contextualize the present issues more historically. The counter point to this is Gandhi who cannot quite comprehend conversions within the understanding of his Varnashramdharma.

The three articles discussed above opens up a serious discussion on the issue of religious conversion. They present the socio-cultural and political problems of banning conversions. India being a religious nation cannot subtract religious identities from the public discourse based on reason and rationality. The right wing forces in India are gaining momentum and mass support because of the institutionality of religious identity as the prime force to mobilize people especially among the lower caste segments. On the other hand, the Dalit social movement is not radically determined to counter this hegemonic usurpation by espousing the legacy of Ambedkar's model of social emancipation. For a dignified social order, it is important to end plural caste identities and its antagonistic immoral political nature. The moral responsibility of the Dalit social movement and other secular and progressive forces is to convert the traditional war amongst the castes and tribes into a conclusive battle between the scientific, modern, secular, civilized traditions against the orthodox, communal and discriminatory religious order. The syncretic and autonomous cultural values of the tribals must be protected from the violent and conservative attempts of Hindutva forces. Building a solid Dalit Tribal unity is essential in this context. The Dalit perspective and the Dalit politics is yet to realise that a revolutionary shift of subaltern and deprived masses to the progressive non-Hindu socio-cultural tradition has the potential to radicalise the whole democratic order towards a meaningful human world.

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Life Writing and Historiography: The Generic Question in Bama's *Karukku*

Sruthi B Guptha

When it comes to the question of "genre", its intact existence and treatment in literature has been altered by the coming of counter narratives. The projected representative texts and writers in the area of Women's writing are also not rid of its hegemonic tendencies. Hence the models of life writing and historiography offered by mainstream narratives need to be looked at from an alternative perspective. In this context, Bama's *Karukku* offers a different dimension to the question of genre. Instead of limiting the framework of writing within generic models and labels, it is interesting to look at how Bama's *Karukku* has transgressed the boundaries of traditional generic conventions of life writing. In contemporary discourses in literature, history is no longer an undisputed terrain. In breaking the conventions of mainstream autobiographies, *Karukku* can be seen as a site of contestation which asserts a politics and history of subalternity in terms of caste, gender, religion. In *Karukku*, the boundaries of autobiography and historiography are blurred in the making of alternative historiography and an unconventional autobiography which runs parallel to the mainstream history writing and life writing. It offers a distinct mode of autobiographical writing in terms of thematic style, content, specificities etc. It also offers a history of the struggles, happiness and survival of the parayya community in Tamilnadu

particularly that of dalit Christians. In the same manner, the sense of aesthetics that is expected from an autobiography is also subverted by Bama in *Karukku*.)

Bama Faustina Soosairaj, pen named as Bama, is a celebrated dalit writer especially known for her autobiography *Karukku* which was translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom and published in 2000. *Karukku* records the life of dalit Christians of Parayya community in Tamilnadu. Having said so, it is pertinent to address the question of the genre under which *Karukku* comes. It is majorly seen as an autobiography, first of the kind written by a dalit Christian woman writer from Tamilnadu. In tracing the rather unnoticed projects which *Karukku* undertakes, it can be well seen as a history as well.

Bama's craft of subjective writing has been innovative in amalgamating the genre of Autobiography which is a genre very much personal, related to an individual's experiences, and History, which is a record of a group of people. In *Karukku*, the 'I' factor which dominates the autobiographies usually is replaced with collective identity of her community. It involves a departure from the traditional individual centric autobiographies. The usually unidentified group of people seen in mainstream history is given an alternative through the political subjective assertion of caste and gender identity. As M S S Pandian in his 'On a Dalit Woman's Testimonio' notes that "The absence of "I" gets its further affirmation in the polyphony of other voices from the Dalit community which saturates *Karukku*" (57).

Today it is widely accepted that history is no longer an undisputed, uncontested terrain. Looking at any history would make us understand that every history can be narrated from various perspectives given the historian's perspective is undoubtedly impacted by gender, age, class, caste, race, milieu, national and ideological

affiliations in its construction. In case of India, In the process of canonizing history the process of inclusion and exclusion of certain people or community is widely seen for historiography's affiliation with the dominant ideology. This tendency is being questioned in various ways which sets off the problematization of certain aspects of history. Dalit writing in India explores the counter perspectives to the established mainstream histories which excluded their traumatic existence. In postcolonial scenario, it is termed as alternative historiography which goes parallel to mainstream history with subaltern perspective. History being a part of literature is not seen as a directly accessible unitary part in postmodernist view which argues against the conventional concept of history and also conventional methods as well as forms of historiography. In *Karukku* the contestation of caste, religion and gender which happened historically still which is not written about can be read. It is the history of the community recollected from memory which has come into lime light.

Memory has an eminent role in autobiography too. Usually, autobiographies have a tradition of very formal, conventional technique in narrating events. When it comes to *Karukku*, Bama departs from the convention style/ methodology of autobiographies and employs a very innovative narrative technique. Instead of continuing the narrative in a linear fashion, Bama makes a full circle when she ends the autobiography and abandons the concept of linear narrative altogether. It is not only the matter of form but the matter of remembrance which is very selective. Compared to the chronological order of events in the conventional mainstream autobiographies, there is practical limitation as there are many events and experiences which fade away as a part of selective forgetting in the autobiography. *Karukku* represents a style of writing in which the writer follows her unconscious train of thoughts and not conscious efforts to make it chronologically ordered

and rather organized on very insightful thematic principles using it as a tool of self assertion.

The community and its people who have been historically silenced are given a voice through *Karukku* positioning subalterns as an active historical agent. Bama through *Karukku* breaks away from the stereotypical notions about dalits by mainstream historiographers. The mainstream technique of marginalization either by removing dalits from history or by portraying them as submissive, fatalistic, inactive and irresolute people is also challenged in alternate historiographies. In Karukku, Bama shares her personal experiences as well as the events which she has come across. When Bama was forbidden to go home for a festival when others were given permission. She responded 'How is it that you are allowing these others to go; why it that you only refuse me?' (22). We can see the instances of small children getting corporeal punishments from nuns etc. In one occasion, when a small kid got blows from a nun for no relevant reason, his mother questioned the nun for this and walked out of the church. Bama raising n number of questions in different occasions throughout the book voices the revolt of her self and the community.

Here it is pertinent to quote Arundhati Roy who said that there is really no such thing as the voiceless, there are only the deliberately silenced or preferably unheard. As Bama notes, she and her community were silenced through systems including the system of historiography and representations in literature. When women were silenced through the system of patriarchal setup, the whole parayya community was silenced by the caste system, the children were silenced by the kind of politics behind the system of education, the dalit nuns were silenced by the system of codes in the order (such as submissiveness), Bama's urge to emancipate through the education was hindered by her own

parents in the name of social system, the education of small kids was hindered because of all these systems which is the root cause of staying dependent on upper castes for survival.

In the afterword of *Karukku*, Bama writes, "It has been a great joy to dalits aiming to live with self respect, proclaiming aloud 'dalit endru sollada, talai nimirndu nillada': say you are a dalit; lift up your head and stand tall" (105). She through her own way of historicizing the community challenges the approximation of dalits rather than expressing their experiences. Karukku also showcases the history of resistance. The name of the autobiography '*Karukku*' itself is a symbolic resistance. *Karukku*, the leaves of Palmyra tree which have sole like edges, fine sharp cutting which can hurt. Education is seen as a weapon for resistance preferred over either conversion or sanskritization.

In *Karukku*, the more Bama pays attention to the cultural transactions within the community people, the more she emphasis on this micro level events i.e. the day to day happenings in their lives which constitute the history of parayya community, it makes us observe an evolution at the individual and community level in the course of time which traces their reasons back to these events. In the words of G N Devy, a literary history in India, if it has to be a properly ordered illumination of the literary past, will have to be a history "Of many Beings" .When it comes to the literary tradition of historiography, *Karukku* marks the alternative for canonization in accordance to the dominant ideologies. *Karukku* is more of inner history i.e. Personal histories of common lives that give an entry into the aesthetic, moral and spiritual perceptions of the world. The genre of autobiography has proved right to be a medium which can serve such a purpose and stand for such a cause.

In a way *Karukku* revises the question, "what is the essence of the subject of history?" To put it in more appealing terms in the words of Spivak, it offers a 'theory of change'. It is related to the functional changes in systems of social signs within the broader text of history. History need not be written and read as a series of momentous events centered on prominent figures ('heroes') as in 'grand narratives' but may alternatively be conceived as a continuous chain of 'small' changes in the lives of ordinary men and women in ordinary circumstances. The events then unravel materialistic truths which are unbearable throughout history.

There are certain aesthetic expectations from the genres autobiography, history etc which compel the writers to conform to those expectations and in turn over a long period moulds the sense of aesthetics of the readers. Aesthetics based on real experiences of life is most expressive in dalit autobiographies as the experiences portrayed are peculiar only to the communities in which they are born into. *Karukku* has a particular purpose and audience which has an important role in literary and aesthetic decisions and can't be assessed by the criteria made by others. Bama's consciousness of being dalit is evident throughout *Karukku* which is formulated by the complex wave of social, religious, political and economical relationships which also paves the way for an alternative strategy for aesthetics. The very concept of aestheticism is defined differently. What is considered crucial is the social sensibility and representation of people belonging to underprivileged sections. The questions of human dignity and identity have come to the centre. *Karukku* is richer in content than aestheticism as it is traditionally perceived.

Dalit aestheticism needs to be appreciated from the point of view that Dalit literature is essentially associated with a movement to bring about change in the existing social construct. Sharankumar Limbale has been justified when he reacted sharply against the

conventional connotations of aestheticism: Are human beings only beauty mad? Do they only want pleasure? The answer to both questions is no, because hundreds of thousands of people appear to be passionate about these basic elements such as freedom, love, justice and equality. They are many times more important than pleasure and beauty. When it comes to aesthetic experiences/ appreciation, the dalit aesthetics doesn't fit into/ admit the traditional aesthetic theories like 'rasa theory'. The aesthetic experience will not be only to feel pleasure but it would be of pain and anguish. However it has come to a point that dalit writings are being stereotyped as documents of only pain and suffering. Bama has tried to include a very vast description of her village, food style, stories, experiences, labor, education, conversion to Christianity, discrimination within church, her life as a nun, systems, untouchability, games, festivals and celebrations, emancipation, beliefs, talent, solitude, predicament of her community power social and religious politics of many subjects around her which evoked self realization in her or the markers of transformation in her.

In his article 'One Step Outside Modernity', M S S Pandian writes "We have here two competing sets of languages dealing with the issue of caste. One talks of caste by other means; and the other talks of caste on its 'own terms" (1). On the one hand, the long history of identity politics which talks of caste on its own terms was erased by the historiographers. On the other hand, the mainstream autobiographies dealt with the question of caste by other means. Texts like *Karukku* subvert such literary and historic conventions. In history, while dealing with issues such as caste, most of the times, the theories and literature are in a way failures in enabling voices/ knowledge of / for dalits. In case of caste, if we distance past from present the whole purpose posed behind the subject is at stake. In *Karukku,* Bama reduces the pastness of caste even if the narrator is looking back to decades in the process of penning down the events which constitutes

their history. Caste is being recovered as a question of immediacy. Time is allowed to be secular for theorization as it stays as a material reality even now.

In discussing caste, the category of dalit Christians has to be paid distinct attention as sometimes it faces exclusion from the discourses of both Hindu and Christian religion. In this aspect, Bama's Karukku remains a document which has the essence to inspire people. Instead of choosing sanskritization/ re conversion, Bama makes it clear that no philosophy and religion can help dalits from discrimination as it is majorly perceived that "Once a dalit, always a dalit". It urges the subalterns to come out of the constructs and educate themselves for empowerment. The multiple levels of discrimination that the women face in terms of caste and gender are also noteworthy.

This autobiography in historicizing a community is written on the basis of experience and not speculation. In *Karukku,* the language as well as images and expressions come from the experiences instead of their observation of life. The empiricism as evident in *Karukku* is fused of experience and the narrator's political position. It gives a radical alternative to the mainstream literature which distances itself from authenticity in such terms. The discourse of causality is being challenged through the discourse of participation in *Karukku.* It represents the ideas seen from a woman's social and cultural position in representing the misrepresented ones and also in challenges the systems which paved way for the same. This text answers Spivak's Question 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. Yes, the Subaltern speaks, realizing and unraveling and resisting the chains of the systems which silenced them.

Bama as a woman who has undergone the process of subalternization for her gender and caste identity through Karukku

raises the language of resistance. Contextualizing *Karukku i*n the process of making of alternative historiography, Bama doesn't break down the constructions but breaks through them in defining her own and the community's subaltern position a concept, condition and category and to demarginalise them. Bama has tried to subvert the form of mainstream autobiography and also provides a space for the interface of history and life writing.

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Cultural Trauma and Dalit Identity: An Analysis of Malayalam and Gujarati Dalit Poems

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Dalits, a group that consists of all the oppressed "lower castes", have been deprived of personal and political identity since long. The caste system in India has often rendered them as invisible objects or abjects as Julia Kristeva mentioned it. The Dalit identity is haunted by both physical and cultural trauma as their history was extolled by the experience of anguish and despair. In terms of Derrida it might be said that their ontology is marked by a sense of hauntology. As such, they have a kind of cultural trauma. According to Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways"(Alexander 1). But for Dalits, this is not a single event but a series of events dating back to primeval times.

Dalit literature is marked by the element of cultural trauma. The general introduction to *The Oxford India Anthology of Malayalam Dalit Writing* says: "The beginning of Dalit poetry, like poetry everywhere else, was powerful: an unleashing of experimental pangs; an opening-up of concealed traumas and angsts; reclamation of negated self; an assertion of identity." M.B.Manoj, in his poem *Survey of India,* asserts us that a dead cow weighs five times a live outcast.

Poikayil Appachan in *Songs by Poikayil Appachan* shares his grief that there was no one in the ancient world to write the story of his race. Hence, all these poems reflect the intricacies of the Dalit cultural trauma.

This paper is an analysis of the poems *Identity Card* by S.Joseph and *A Journey by Bus Down the Countryside* by a Gujarati writer, Shanker Painter to address the problems faced by Dalits on revealing their true sense of identity. It discusses the problems confronting Dalits in their attempts to recuperate from the pains of culture trauma. The paper also highlights the fact that the plight of Dalits across cultures is more or less the same.

Anupama Rao, in her essay *Who is the Dalit? The Emergence of a New Political Subject,* says, "Becoming "Dalit" is the process through which the caste subaltern enters into circuits of political commensuration and into the value regime of "the human" (26). The age old hierarchical set up of the Hindu society has marginalized the Dalits and has rendered them invisible. They occupy the lower strata of the society and are said to be the 'other' of the upper class Hindus. They become impure to maintain the purity of the upper caste. Dalits are thus the caste subalterns who are silenced by the upper castes. Sarankumar Limbale defines Dalits:

> Harijans and neo-Buddhists are not the only Dalits. The term describes all the untouchable communities living outside the boundary of the village, as well as Adivasis, landless farm labourers, workers, the suffering masses, and nomadic and criminal tribes. In explaining the word, it will not do to refer only to the untouchable castes. People who are lagging behind economically will also need to be included. (11)

Dalit Literature unravels the pains and agonies in the lives of the oppressed castes. It involves a Dalit consciousness. It is a realistic account of the sufferings and travails of people who are considered as 'untouchables'. It echoes their voice of resistance against class oppression, marginalization, and perverted justice. Their literary anthologies portray the life of dalits who are subjected and subjugated since time immemorial. Dalit literature has undeniably offered fresh avenues, diverse experiences and a new insight to Indian literature. Rejecting the age old established tradition, they write about the traumas and wretchedness of their lives to attain a sense of identity of their own.

S.Joseph, a versatile Dalit writer has always stood for the oppressed class and has worked for improving the conditions of the suffering humanity. His poems portray people from real life. He depicts ordinary contexts and uses mockery to bring out the injustices prevailing in the society. His poems address the issues of untouchability and class hierarchy. He questions the strangle hold of caste system that leaves the Dalits as 'broken' people.

Identity Card is a poem by S.Joseph which clearly denounces the secular modernity by raising the issues of Dalit identity. The poem starts with the poet's college life – a girl's inviting smile, closeness of sharing food and the pleasure of touch. It has certainly a secular atmosphere when the speaker says that they became a Hindu-Christian family. In the second stanza, the tone of the poem changes as he misplaces his identity card. The girl in the poem returns his identity card pointing at the account of his stipend entered in red. She leaves him on finding out his Dalit identity. The speaker is left all alone. The girl is in action- she returns the identity card, remarks at the stipend in red, and leaves. The speaker is dumb and passive. Her

actions are legitimized. But he is stigmatized by the state stipend and reservations.

The issues of Dalit identity have been a recurring theme in literatures across cultures. The stereotyping of Dalits is one of the major themes in Gujarati poetry. *A Journey by Bus Down the Countryside* is written by a Gujarati Writer, Shanker Painter. He has realistically portrayed the social stigma associated with the Dalit identity. The poem highlights the fact that dalits cannot be amalgamated into the mainstream society because of their denunciation by the upper class. In the opening lines of the poem, the villagers call the speaker 'saheb' and try to start a conversation with him. They ask a lot of questions intended to know his identity. They were curious of thousand things- his name, his village, his destination, his mohalla, and his job in the city. Their intention was to ferret out his caste from its molehill. But when he confessed that he was visiting a family of shit-shifters, the villagers put the lid on all questions.

On analyzing the two poems, it is evident that caste hierarchy has changed nowhere in India. The trauma and oppression that the Dalits face are similar in Kerala and Gujarat. Dalits get isolated and stigmatized at the very moment their identity is revealed. They are haunted by the realization that they can never become a part of mainstream society. The two incidents are not at all isolated events. The speakers in the poems are representative of the entire Dalit community. The pain and agony they face are the real sufferings of an oppressed community. Hence, collective trauma of a class or community is linked with the singular bodies of the speakers in the poems.

Dalit literature is formed out of the real material and psychological agony of the Dalits. Dalits experience the trauma that "applies to any society, ethnic group, social category or class which has been exposed to extreme circumstances of traumatization, such as natural disasters, technological catastrophes and social, political, cultural, gender, ethnic or religious persecutions that leave them with lifelong problems" (Krystal 24). Both the poems are a clear portrayal of the cultural trauma of the Dalit community. Because of the caste hierarchy and power relations that they entail, the subalterns lack sense of belongingness, and they find themselves stuck in a rut.

Dr.B.R.Ambedkar rightly said: "caste has made public opinion impossible. Virtue has become caste-ridden, and morality has become caste-bound" (Rodrigous 2004). Dalits, blacks and women were sidelined by the upper class people. They had to constantly conceal their identity to mark their presence. And, in that futile attempt, they often ended up becoming victims of cultural trauma. It is not easy for the Dalits to escape from the clutches of cultural trauma. The Indian caste system stigmatizes the "lower caste" and renders them invisible. The poems clearly portray how the wounds of the two speakers represent the injury of the entire Dalit community. Thus, the stranglehold of casteism is too strong that their status is never felt and respected. This is true across cultures.

The lines from *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* still echo: "A great wave of humiliation and shame swept over me. Shame that I belonged to a race that could be so dealt with; and shame for my country, that it, the great example of democracy to the world, should be the only civilized, if not the only state on earth, where a human being would be burned alive" (Johnson 137).

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Art and Resistance: The Artistic Fervour in *Untouchable Spring*

Nasma K

G Kalyana Rao's *Untouchable Spring* is better to be called a memory-text in which history, fiction and a family saga are rolled into one. Written in the tradition of oral storytelling, this text opens up insights into the socio-cultural as well as the artistic life of the untouchables- the Malas and the Madigas. For a community who are deprived of the acquisition of the symbolic capital and whose history was limited to passing references made by others, their history and past find expression in the oral literature and folk art forms. Rao, in this work, portrays how these artistic expressions could be also used as modes of revolt. In his words agitation, turmoil and revolt constitute the untouchable's art.

In his *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Terry Eagleton has propounded that aesthetics like art becomes an ideological and historically conditioned set of ideas and that the notions of subjectivity, autonomy and universality make art and aesthetics inseparable from the construction of the dominant ideological forms of the modern class society. This idea can be read in connection with the concept of 'taste' by Pierre Bourdieu. He maintains the idea that taste is an expression and reinforcement of social status and the acquired cultural capital of the dominant class grants it access to the 'legitimate' culture. If these ideas are borrowed to understand the artistic life of the untouchables,

it becomes evident that for a community who were treated as having no 'capital' of any kind, the access to 'legitimate' art and standard aesthetics would be more or less impossible.

Oral story telling is against the textualised version of Brahmanical tradition. Memory forms the basis of oral tradition. Rao has used Ruth's reminiscences to document this family/community saga and he hopes that Mary Suvarta's silence will once be shaken and her memories will lead to another *Untouchable Spring*. This is the continuity that the oral tradition offers. The upper castes bequeathed acres of land to their sons whereas the untouchables inherited stories, songs and dance as legacy. As the title indicates, the people who had no spring in their lives rejuvenated their otherwise subdued creativity and vitality through art. Rao's work attempts to show how art added colour to the lives of the untouchables, especially through the lives of Yellanna and Naganna. Yellanna was first introduced to the world of art by his aunt Boodevi with the help of songs. These songs were not in the standard metre but used refrains extensively which helped one to memorise them. But, later Yellanna's entry into a dance troupe was ushered by the curse of untouchability itself. The untouchables were supposed to watch the performances sitting on the allotted mounds and of course, unseen by the Kapus and Karanams of the *ooru*. The young Yellanna was beaten by the upper castes for approaching near the tents as his physical proximity induced pollutedness. Later when Yellanna and Naganna began their performances, these deprived people sat close to the stage for now the performance had become theirs. Thus folk art becomes truly an art of the masses.

The plays performed by Yellanna and Naganna had no written script, no rules and anybody could take any role in them. Even the dialogues were changed as the audience demanded. The stories were

made different from the 'accepted' ones. 'Veedhi Bagotam' was one such form of drama of turning gods and goddesses into village folk who talked about daily lives. So Rao says that there is naturalness, frankness and integrity in folk art. Rao makes sharp criticism against the art critics who are blind and deaf to the untouchable's art. They only see mere 'jumping' in their dance and 'crooked shapes' on their faces. The critics charge these artists for distorting history and for lacking aesthetic quality. These Pundits call their songs 'wind-swept' songs. They failed to understand that these songs were born out of the back-breaking labour, hunger and pain.

> To forget hunger, to forget the child crying out for milk, to forget the pain of the bent back, the pallavi was heard from the silent voice. Distributed charanams through toil. Hundreds repeated that pallavi….They hid life in those songs. They said that the folk song was immortal. (42)

And there was revolt in their art. It was this trace of revolt in their performance that enraged the upper castes and even led to the death of Naganna. The artists dared to avoid the upper caste Karanams and showed respect to the 'mala' and 'madiga' elders instead of them. The upper castes were restless also because these performances provided an opportunity for various untouchable divisions to come together. Naganna died when he was to lose his self-respect as the upper castes tried to control their art.

The drum has strong links with folk art. When it comes to untouchable art its significance doubles. The drum has been associated with the pollutedness of Dalits, mainly for two reasons: it was usually made of cowhide and it was primarily used to announce deaths. Both refer to the menial jobs Dalits were subjected to do. By using the same drum in their performances they change the noise

into voice. The very symbol of their pollutedness thus gets transformed into an instrument of expression.

Rao also mentions how art was confined to the temples and became untouchable to the untouchable castes. There goes a story in Natyashastram when the asuras created troubles during the first performance of 'natyam' as the story was about their defeat. Rao remarks that from then onwards art was performed inside the temple premises alone to avoid asuras. This can be read in connection with the recent arguments such as asuras were actually the non-aryans and the image of the asuras was invented by the Aryans to create their 'other'.

Many folk art forms are believed to have an anti-caste framework. For instance, Mahars and the Mangs form the backbone of Tamasha of Maharashtra as the upper castes despise it due to its erotic elements. Bhavai of Gujarat is said to be started by Asaita Thakar, a Brahmin who was ostracized due to some caste issues. Dalit art is against the textual version of the Brahmanical tradition. It rejects the tradition, aesthetics, rules and concerns of the so-called classical literature and art. These untouchables have been denied dignity and self-identity for ages. Their physique was considered to be a carrier of pollution and they lacked 'voice' and 'presence'. Folk art is an opportunity to assert their physical presence through dancing and thus they resort to attain a long-denied corporeal dignity.

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Individuation in *Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C.K. Janu*

Anita Ann Thomas

Individuation is an ongoing process that is an essential and indispensible necessity of any person's life. Individuation is a process and not a state. It is a continuing process that involves wholeness. It is not a stagnant state but a continuing factor. It is right to say that there are many individuating persons. However, there are no individuated persons. Individuation cannot move on to reach a final destination and claim that the process is completed. C.K. Janu's autobiography also is an unfinished story. It cannot have a finishing line as individuation in her doesn't have a finishing line.

At every point in life and in every new situation, human psychology tends to attain new individuation in search of wholeness. The study of individuation in Janu's autobiography maps and traces the individual in Janu. Adolpho Garcia De La Sienra states that in the traditional sense, to individuate is to make something to be individual, in his article, "Wiggins' Hidden principle of Individuation." Individuation is thus a process that leads one to an individual. Chekkote Kariyan Janu was born in Trissileri Chekot colony in a tribal village in Wayanad to poor tribal parents who were indentured labourers. They belonged to the Ravula community called 'Adiya'. 'Adiya' means slave and the word originated from the Malayalam word 'adiyaan' which a slave uses to address himself before the master. Janu did not have her schooling

or her basic formal education. However she learnt to read and write at a literary campaign. Her growth from a poor tribal girl who began her career as a domestic servant and a daily wage labourer to an important and reputed tribal leader cannot be just left unseen. She worked as a domestic servant in a teacher's house in Mananthavady. Later she took to the job of a labourer of daily wages for two Indian rupees per day. All the bondage that she ever had in her life was with the forest.

Janu has been undertaking a social movement called "Aadivaasi Gothra Mahasabha" since 2001 for redistribution of land to the landless tribal people in Kerala. "Kudil Ketti Samaram," Muthanga incident that helped ten thousand tribals to redeem their lands was one of the prominent protests. *Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C. K. Janu* is a small book of 56 pages that describes her life which was first published in Malayalam as 'Janu: The Life Story of C.K. Janu.' This book was later translated into English by N. Ravi Shankar. Her growth from a tribal woman to a leader shows the steady graph of self development and individuation. An ever growing awareness of herself and her community is evident as we turn the pages of her autobiography.

Rosemary Gordon states that individuation is a continuing process in which the individual moves towards wholeness. "Individuation involves the development of ever growing awareness of one's personal identity with its good and desirable qualities and ego ideals as well as its bad, reprehensible and shadow qualities." (267). This process also involves an expanding capacity for comprehension. Thus the individual begins articulating his/ her thoughts and ideas. According to Rosemary Gordon, "Individuation encompasses processes that drive people to search for the meanings of their own lives, of life in general and of death and of the universe." (267) Janu

realizes not only the meaning of her own life but also that of her community and the indigenous identity of her mother forest. Education and literacy strived to mould her and the community to a different realm. It was easy for the outside world to think that they were right in transforming them into new people meant for the society. The individuation in Janu did not show a green flag to leave and forsake her mother forest for the sake of a different life. She knew the pulse of her nature. Nature was her mother, and the nature's lap was their home unlike the educated lot. As Ammini, a friend of Janu puts it, "our people knew how to transplant till and harvest without seeing these pictures. May be the teachers with knowledge from these books were ignorant of all this."(23) She says that such lessons were meant for those ignorant but educated, teachers. Apart from the literacy people, the solidarity people also crept in, campaigning about the need for learning. Needless to say, their intervention distorted the rhythm of both the mother forest and her children. The individuation process dragged Janu much closer to nature, in spite of the serious intervention of the outside world. Her sorrow for losing the future generations can be seen in these words, "Our children studied up to fourth or fifth and began to hate the forests and the earth" (32).

Intervention of men from various political parties and literacy campaigns could sow their seeds of vested interests among the Adivasi communities. However, Janu was aware of their corrupted motives and realized how they exploited the poor men and women of the Adivasi community in the name of education and literacy. The *janmis* or land owners also exploited them; giving them low wages and making them work for the whole day. They had been starving the whole day unable to find a decent three time meal. Their wages weren't even enough to sustain them. In spite of all these odds, Janu strives ahead with a sole intention of being with her mother forest. Individuation reveals

the essential person in her and realizes her potential for wholeness. Her story is still unfinished as the process of individuation continues to take her to as much wholeness as possible.

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Manual Scavenging: India's Shame

Dr. P. Priyadarsini

Shameful, degrading, dehumanising, disgusting, obnoxious, abhorrent- a blot on humanity -these are some of the words used to describe manual scavenging   (Annie Zaidi- "India's Shame"*, Frontline,* Sept 2006)

A major criticism levelled against the discipline of History, which as a subject is losing its charm in the academic circles, is its stereotyped approach to what had happened in the past. It remained for thousands of years 'his story', relegating to the margins the role of women and also the millions of ordinary people who had toiled day and night in the making of great empires and civilizations. The question, has this subject shown justice to those groups who played a pivotal role in the building of many a civilization, without questioning their destiny, perhaps would lead one to Dalit writing that is attempting to provide another dimension of social history which is yet to gain significance in common discussions and studies.

Dalit literary writing lost two of its stalwarts with the demise of Namadeo Dhasal and Om Prakash Valmiki who had mirrored through their poems, centuries of suffering that the Dalits had to undergo due to caste discrimination in India. There have also been a number of good films produced in the last few years that claimed wide critical acclaim which include *Fandry, Papilio Buddha, Perariyathavar* and some more also of the same genre. However, as far as historical

writing is concerned, the contributions made by the marginalized communities have not been able to hog the limelight. A person outside the purview of historical objectivity still sees it as a subject that deals with kings, his wars, his conquests and all the dates connected with it. It is high time that we changed such an attitude to history. It thus becomes a responsibility and liability of the academia to make a paradigm shift in changing this preconceived notion about the subject.

One such area that deserves special focus in historical study is about the role of those people in our country who were forced to engage in the filthy task of manual scavenging. They were the most exploited people of the society of India, who believed that it was their duty to carry human excreta on their heads and shoulders. Treated as outcasts by the rich and affluent of the society, they lived their lives in sheer pain and agony. Their services were very essential to a society that had been engulfed in caste system of the worst manner, a society that played its cards well as far as the triple evils of untouchability, unapproachability and unseeability were concerned. The manual scavengers who belonged to the Dalit community were thoroughly uneducated, unorganized and ignorant. How this inhuman slavery is being carried out in the post-independent India is truly a blot on humanity.

When India emerged independent in 1947, there was hope for fortunes and better lives in the minds of the midnight's children, (Salman Rushdie's evocative phrase). There was a sense of newness as also arousal; it was, to quote Dilip Menon, as if like a sleeping beauty at the kiss of the prince, the nation too had awoken to a sense of itself (9). Against all the dreams and aspirations, millions of men and women of the disadvantaged and subaltern groups continued to live traumatized lives in the world's largest democracy. Even after six decades of independence, manual scavenging continues in various parts of India and the country still struggles in the clutches of a caste system which derogates the very existence of human life and dignity.

It was the Italian Marxist scholar, Antonio Gramsci who first used the term 'subaltern' to refer to the lower classes and the social groups who are at the margins of a society- a subaltern is a person rendered without human agency, by his or her social status. This is explicit in Antonio Gramsci's theory of 'subalternity' in his cultural hegemony work. In describing 'history from below', Gramsci has identified subaltern classes as social groups who are excluded from a society's established structure of political representation, the means by which people have a voice in their society. Gramsci possibly used it as a synonym for the proletariat. However social scientists apply it to other contexts as well. In the words of cultural theorist Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, 'subaltern' is "not just a classy word for the oppressed, for (the) other who's not getting a piece of the pie…In post-colonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern. They are within the hegemonic discourse, wanting a piece of the pie and not being allowed" (29).

In the Indian context, the subaltern classes are often identified with the people of the lower castes. The ancient Hindu scriptures like the Rigveda and the Bhagavad Gita do not advocate caste system and untouchability. The Rigveda reads, *Samaani va a kuthi, samaana hrudyaniva, samaana vastu va mano, yatha va sahsuhasti i.e.* Oh Humans! Let your pledges be one, let your hearts be one, let your thought be one, so that you are always united. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna asserts that an individual's caste is determined by his duty and not his birth. However in the *Manusmriti,* a text that was written much later, there are verses that support caste discrimination. Manu, the Hindu law giver uses the term *chandela* to refer to people belonging to lower classes. Fa Xian, the fourth century Chinese traveller refers to a class called panchamas or the fifth group beyond the four fold division of the Indian people. They were not allowed to let their shadows

fall upon a high caste member. The word 'Dalit', which is not there in any ancient Indian text or sacred scriptures of history, is, however, based on the Sanskrit word which means 'ground', 'crushed ' or' 'broken into pieces'. Jyotibha Phule was the first person to use the term Dalits for a community that really had to struggle due to the whims and fancies of the caste Hindus. Literally, it refers to any person or group of inferior rank and status, whether because of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion. The term expresses their weakness, poverty and humiliation at the hands of upper classes In the Indian society. The reason is that they handle occupations that are considered ritually impure such as involving leather work or removal of rubbish, animal carcasses and waste and also as cleaners of latrines, streets and drainages. India has approximately 16.2% people who belong to the Dalit category, as per the Census of 2011.

Manual scavenging is a caste based and hereditary occupation for Dalits that is predominantly linked with forced labour and slavery. It refers to the removal of animal or human waste/excreta (night soil) using brooms, and plates and baskets from dry latrines and carried on heads and shoulders to disposal grounds some distance away. They believed that it was their right to do this most inhumane task, a practice which went on unhindered for almost three decades after independence.

It was only in1970, that Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak introduced his 'sulabh' toilets which marked the beginning of wet toilets in India. The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act was passed in the year 1993.This law punishes the employment of scavengers or the construction of dry latrines with imprisonment of one year and a fine of Rs.2000. This law with several loopholes was toothless, feeble and reluctantly applied. Safai Karmachari Andolan was organised by a group of activists in the year

1995 to represent the needs of sewage workers, pit workers and sweepers who fall within the ambit of Safai Karmacharis. This organization was highly instrumental in the eradication of manual scavenging from 139 districts in India. There have been many deadlines for eradicating this practice, and one such deadline was 31 March 2010. Deadlines have come and gone, but manual scavengers continue their work, anaesthetizing themselves with drinks and drugs from the assaults on their dignity. In spite of all the laws and efforts, manual scavenging continues in many parts of India. The Census of India, 2011 reports the existence of 7,94,390 dry latrines in India. Another bill on Manual scavenging was introduced in 2012, explicitly prohibiting the construction of dry latrines and employment of scavengers as also the hazardous cleaning of a sewer or a septic tank, but cleaning railway tracks has not been included.

In Kerala, there are people belonging to the dalit community whose occupation was manual scavenging and are sarcastically referred by the upper classes as 'thottis.' In the 1940's, when Kozhikode was under the grip of contagious diseases like cholera, the death toll of residents increased in large numbers. The dead bodies had to be removed and cremated. This requirement made the authorities recruit people of Ramanathapuram and Madurai of Tamilnadu to do this job in Kozhikode. These economically impoverished workers were transported like cattle and recruited. Many died due to cholera and the rest were given the work of cleaning dry toilets that were as many as 40,000 in number in Calicut Corporation then. The unhygienic conditions in which they lived led to their early deaths. They were affected with contagious diseases and the authorities gave no ears to their health problems. They had to start their work every day as early as 4 a.m. and were not provided with gloves or any other protective equipment. To do these stinking jobs and, moreover, to suffer the humiliation of doing this, they sought refuge in drugs and

alcohol. Not only men but also women were forced to take up this profession in order to make a living. Their children also grew up in circumstances devoid of proper parental care. Nobody was there to cook food for them and these children became the symbols of malnourishment. When they went to schools and other social places they were humiliated by others as sons and daughters of `thottis'. Even today, teachers and parents of other students don't want their children to mingle or dine with scavengers' children. This social exclusion forced many to become school drop outs though they were interested in learning. Article 17 of the Indian constitution states: `Untouchability is abolished.' But such incidents where a child is forced to sit in the back bench due to ostrasication happens in this day and age. These children before reaching adolescence resort to drug abuse and delinquencies and become the ant-social elements of the society. High class people threaten them when they take water from the same wells and taps, as they do. Even today the practice of two tumbler system, forcefully making them clean the toilets and calling them derogatory names 'thottis' have taken them deeper to the web of exclusion. Even when he tries to take other professions he finds it difficult to do so. As B.R. Ambedkar has rightly put it, in India a man is not a scavenger because of his work, he is a scavenger because of his birth, irrespective of the question whether he does scavenging or not. They don't have any permanent homes and as they are ignorant and unorgansied. Their wages are also far below the minimum. When townships expand they are pushed to the suburbs where there is severe water shortage and other related problems. The onslaught of urbanization with its increased complexities of systems dismisses them. They are the people who supply everything the town needs and demands, but they remain uncivilized and ignorant by the development phase of their sub-cultures.

Bezwada Wilson, the founder of 'Safai Karmachari Andolan' writes, "An estimate of 13,00,000 people from Dalit communities continue to be employed as manual scavengers across the length and breadth of India - in private homes, in community dry latrines managed by the municipality, in the public sector such as the railways and the army (Menon 7). No acts and laws have come to the rescue of these workers. It is high time that this disgusting task is put to an end in India, the mother of all democracies. People trapped by their birth in this vocation are shunned and despised. The anonymity of cities otherwise may free people of the disadvantaged destinies brought by their caste identity, because their caste is not written on their foreheads, but manual scavengers are branded irrefutably due to the loathed work which they perform. The average quality of life of Dalits in India much lower than of the people belonging to lower strata in many developing countries.

Sensitisation should continue against caste discrimination as castes are anti-national. Technologies that are globally available should be adopted by the governments, especially to clean the railway tracks which should elevate their self-esteem and help them lead lives of dignity. But our real problem is that we coupled social and economic inequality with the notion of pollution and the work that we do and have segregated a section of our people into being treated as unable ever to change their place in society. It thus becomes a tough task indeed to wipe out the notions of pollution from the cobwebbed caste based thoughts.

Neither identity politics nor a host of political discourses have been able to bring any revolutionary changes in the pattern of social and economic hierarchy that have been glued to the Indian thought process. The discipline of History, in such contexts, should integrate the contributions of the marginalized classes into the context of the

larger society and attempt to effect a historical reconstruction that would only enhance the glory of the subject. The history of any social group cannot be a stand-alone history as this would be unnatural. The historians can certainly construct a new national identity on the assumption that all citizens are equal before the law, with the same rights and obligations. As the distinguished historian Romila Thappar rightly says, the theoretical basis for this exists in our constitution , but it has to be put into effect. History as a discipline should definitely take a giant leap in this transition.

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