

EMPOWERMENT OF DALIT WOMEN AN ANALYSIS OF DALIT MOVEMENTS OF KERALA

VINUKUMAR N V

Abstract: In Kerala, paradoxically, social justice with economic growth or growth with equity has been the basic objective of public policy, with emphasis on reduction of exclusion. Before and since the formation of state dalit women also face the exclusion or marginalization from main stream society. Dalit women in Kerala faces social exclusion, land alienation, marginalization, poverty, lack of education, exploitation etc. In case of dalit women they are marginalized in to two senses; firstly they are dalit and secondly they are women. So there should be the need for empowerment of the dalit women. In Kerala before and after the formation of state various movements organized for the upliftment of the dalit community. Each and every dalit movement contributes to create the dalit identity, but this identity also without the power. So they are also always struggle for existence. This paper analyses and explores empowerment of dalit women and dalit movements in Kerala.

Key words: social justice, social exclusion, empowerment, dalit identity

Historically, the caste system left the lowest castes (dalits) at the bottom of the social, political and economic set up in India. The Indian constitution calls them Scheduled Castes (SCs) and has tried to end their marginalization and discrimination through legal measures. To stop discrimination in particular, the practice of untouchability is banned and successive laws have been passed to stop degrading practices enforced upon dalits. Affirmative action in the form of a reservation policy was adopted, giving SCs provisions for securing government jobs to ensure their economic and social development. At the same time, to bring them into political decision making process, they were also given quotas in representative institutions. A part from these constitutional and legal measures, a number of policy initiatives have been initiated in the last six decades at various governmental levels to improve the socio-economic conditions of dalit community. However, even after six decades of Indian independence, the condition of dalit women has not improved much. They not only remain at the bottom of social hierarchy but also face multiple challenges in accessing their rights. Dalit women are positioned at the bottom of India's caste, class and gender hierarchies. They experience endemic gender and caste discrimination and violence, as an outcome of severely imbalanced social, economic and political power questions.

The scheduled castes (SCs) are known as 'harijans', i.e., 'children of God' a term coined by Mahatma Gandhi in 1933. The harijan nomenclature is considered pejorative by some leaders of the castes. They prefer to be called dalit, i.e., the oppressed (Guru 2001 a). They occupying the lowest rank in the Hindu caste system, they are called avarna, those whose place is outside the chaturvarna system. They are also known as panchama, ati shudra, antyaja in different parts of

the country. Their touch, and sometimes their shadows and even their voice are believed to pollute caste-Hindus. Legally they are no longer untouchables, though in practice many of them still bear that stigma.

The creation of a number of Hindu religious books including the Manusmriti, Atharva Vedas, Vishnu smriti, and many others like these and their strict compliance by the Brahmans (upper priestly hindu caste), led to a society in which equality between men and women was far from existent. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, an architect of the Indian constitution, also makes it very clear in his article titled "The rise and fall of Hindu women" that the root cause of suffering for women in India are these so called Hindu religious. The Books like the Manusmriti divide people into a stratified caste system and promotes inequality between men and women. According to the Manusmriti, women have no right to education, independence, or wealth. It not only justifies the treatment of dalit women as a sex object and promotes child marriage, but also justifies a number of violent atrocities on women as can be seen in the following verses. By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house." Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence (Manusmriti 1920).

'Dalit' is the modern and popular identity term that is self-chosen by the community that has suffered historic discrimination on the basis of caste. Gandhi's attempt to identify these communities as 'Harijan' (children of god) has not gone well with the Dalits; many of them maintain a dislike of Gandhi due to his successful campaign to communalize and subvert the

issue of effective political representation of the Dalits in pre and post-independence national governance.

In India and other countries in South Asia, people have been systematically discriminated against on the basis of their work and descent for centuries. They experience violence, discrimination, and social exclusion on a daily basis. Economic growth in India has been strong over the past decade. However, the caste disparities are increasing. The situation of Dalit women in India needs special attention. They are one of the largest socially segregated groups anywhere in the world. Dalit women are discriminated against three times over; they are poor, they are women, and they are Dalits. Dalit women are discriminated against not only by people of higher castes, but also within their own communities. Men are dominant in Dalit communities. Dalit women also have less power within the Dalit movement itself.

Dalit women include a section of women in Indian society, who come from the lower castes, particularly the untouchable and other lower caste, and who beside gender discrimination, also suffered from the prescribed customary provisions in the institution of caste and untouchability. Excluded women are not 'just like' the rest of the women. They are also disadvantaged by who they are. They suffer from social exclusion which deprives them of choices and opportunities to escape from poverty and denies them a voice to claim their rights. There is a close inter-face between patriarchy and social exclusion which enforce each other. The women from discriminated groups suffer from triple deprivation – gender, poverty and social exclusion. The evidence on the nature and forms of caste based discrimination suffered by Dalit women in access to sources of livelihood and social needs. The Dalit woman's exclusion from the rights normally considered as accruing to every Indian citizen thus needs to be examined more closely, looking both at her conditions of livelihood and employment and the various ways in which she is subjugated in the public and private spheres. Mainstream Indian Feminist Movement addresses some and not all aspect of Dalit women's rights and citizenship. This discourse is universalistic in nature and does not cover the aspect of caste and its interface with gender and as a result Dalit Feminist activism emerged. There is very limited information on the varied experiences of Dalit women as woman, as Dalit and as poor woman and that they constitute a sizeable proportion of women's population.

Aspects of Women Empowerment and Dalit Movement: The Mahar movement of Maharashtra has been projected, more often than not, as an all-India movement. Of course, Dr. Ambedkar, mahar by caste, was an all India-leader. While bargaining with the British and the caste-Hindus he represented all

the dalit of the country (Burra 1986). There is no full-fledged study or even an anthology giving information about various dalit movements in different parts of the country of the colonial and post-colonial period. The scholars like Omvedt and Bharat Patnakar (1979) and Ghanshyam Shah (1980), give valuable information in their text about the dalit liberation and dalit movements in different parts of India. Their books provide the information about the movements like the Satya Shodhak Samaj and the Self-Respect movements in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, the Adi-Dharma and the Adi- Andhra movement in Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, Adi-Hindu movement in Uttar Pradesh, Pulaya movements in Kerala are important anti-untouchability movements which were launched in the last quarter of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century.

Dalit women have been active throughout history, though often this has not been recorded. They were actively involved in the anti-caste and anti-untouchability movements in the 1920s. Today they are the strongholds of the dalit movements in thousands of Indian villages. They continue to play a critical role in the movements for land rights. Since the late 1980s, therefore, dalit women have increasingly felt and articulated the need for separate platform- created, developed and controlled by themselves- through which they could forge their own identity, fight for their rights and find solutions to their particular problems as dalit and as women. Dalit movement, the women's movement vision of social, economic and political equality and justice for all is to be realized. Empowerment of marginalized groups, through the acquisition of varied bases of power is a challenging task. They are denied access to the power resources and their struggle has been against the structures of domination as manifested in the protest struggles of downtrodden castes. Empowerment for them coincides with emancipation from structures of domination. It implies process of redistribution of power within and between families/societies and a process aiming at social equality, which can be achieved only by disempowering some structures, systems and institutions (Sen and Grown 1998). Each movement helps the marginalized sections to attain the reach of the power.

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opportunities to escape from poverty and denies them voice to claim their rights. There is close interface between patriarchy and social exclusion which enforce each other. The women from discriminated groups suffer from triple deprivation- gender, poverty and social exclusion. The challenge is to capture the interface of these three dimensions of caste, class and gender and to analyze the consequences of social exclusion and discrimination on their rights and citizenship. This would help to conceptualize inclusive policies to address the problems of dalit women more effectively. Over time, the dalit movement has gone through several paths and upheavals. It has spread itself across avenues of mass mobilization, affirmative action programmes, religious conversions, land reforms, education, legal resources, use of global human rights instrumentalities, and last but not least social reforms and spirituality.

Dalit's movement for empowerment started way back during second half of the nineteenth century with reformatory efforts to uplift the backward groups of Indian society, especially dalits. Later on, it turned into seeking state intervention and generating the idea of paying special attention to dalits/untouchables have been described as 'the oppressed of the oppressed and lowest of the low', who have not been benefited from the opening up of modern economic, social, political and cultural opportunities. It is said that at present, millions of people, belonging to dalit community have been the victim of discrimination, violence, exploitation, untouchability, poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, other hate crimes and consequential disabilities for a very long time. They are treated as lesser human beings.

There are various laws and legal institutions to help a victim of violence. However, the key problem is that dalit women not only face challenges while seeking legal and judicial redressal for violence. However, the key problem is that dalit women not only face challenges while seeking legal and judicial redressal for violence, but also while attempting to access and enjoy their fundamental rights and freedoms. Dalit movements create them more consciousness about their rights. Assertion for dalit identity has almost become a central issue of dalit movements. This involves local-level collective action against discrimination and atrocities. Statues of Dr. Ambedkar are found not only in urban dalit localities but also in many villages where their number is fairly large. Dalits, though very poor, enthusiastically contribute to installing Ambedkar statues in their neighborhoods.

Issues of Women Empowerment and Dalit Movement: The expansion of human capabilities is a necessary measure to translate economic growth into human progress. Human capability as defined by

Sen is 'the ability of human beings to lead meaningful lives and also to enhance the substantive choice they have'. It means that a violence-free environment makes women more efficient in delivering economic results, and then it is indeed human progress. In the context of developing world and especially India, various practices of atrocities against women, e.g. rape, sexual harassment and wife beating are common across states. Crimes against women are of various natures. It include crimes involving sexual exploitation for economic gains like prostitution & trafficking, adultery, abduction, rape, wrongful confinement, and murder etc on the one hand and crimes related to women's property like dishonest misappropriation, criminal breach of trust, domestic violence, dowry extortion and outraging the modesty of women etc on the other. These crimes are not only injurious and immoral for the women but for the society as a whole.

Sex determination test and consequent abortion of the female foetus, blaming women for not bearing child or making them responsible for bearing female child, discriminating against women in the intake of food and imparting of education, depriving women from decision making roles, committing heinous crimes against women, such as dowry deaths, torture and rape are only a few examples of such explicit discrimination. In the subtle or discrete forms, such discrimination against women include sex - based division of labour or occupation (men as engineers and pilots and women as secretaries, nurses, school teachers and social workers), glorification of virtues, such as patience and sacrifice in India women and over emphasis on the child bearing, child rearing and home maker functions of women at the cost of denial of their own individuality (Tapan Biswal 2006). Poor families in certain regions of the country sometimes resort to killing baby girls at birth, to avoid an unwanted burden on family resources. Sex selective abortion has also been common in the country. There is a relative neglect of health and well being of girls as well as women. Furthermore, women have been denied the rights to right to be born. The worsening of inverse sex ratio is due to female foeticide, female infanticide death due to violence by burns, poisoning and death due to material morality and communicable diseases.

Domestic violence occurs in many forms ranging from physical violence to mental torture. Generally this violence are classified into four categories: 1. Physical violence, 2. Economic violence, 3. Sexual violence, 4. Emotional violence. Freedom from violence has remained a neglected issue in development studies, and it is necessary to have improved quality of life (McIlwaine 1999, Dreze and Khera 2000). Amartya Sen in his *Development as Freedom* (1999) made an attempt to answer the

enigma of 'missing Women' referred by him in 1992. He believes that the number of these women would be 90 million in China and India. His reason is that female children are neglected in terms of health care, education, hospitalization and even feeding (Mrinal Kumar Dasgupta 2013)

Violence against women is one of the most brutal consequences of the economic, social, political and cultural inequalities that exist between the sexes. Unabated violence against women and girls accounts for more death and disability worldwide amongst women aged 15 to 44 than war, cancer, malaria and traffic accidents. At least one out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her life time, with the abuser usually someone known to her. Some of the specific and serious issue shared by the dalit women is, (1)The issue of alcoholism and easy access to it due to large number of local liquor shops in and around the villages (2)Wage discrimination (3)While working as bonded labour, they face unpleasant, immoral sexual comments, sexual exploitation and rape from dominant castes (4) Dalit girls who attend school become vulnerable to eve-teasing, harassment (5) Economic and social boycotts are a common tool used by the dominant castes that influences the overall access to dalits to economic and social rights. Such boycotts are used as a form of retaliation by the upper castes against dalits asserting their rights.

Dalit Movements in Kerala: Till the 19th century, social set up of Kerala is not favourable for the development of women as a person or a group. Renaissance movement in the 19th century rewrites the history of women community in Kerala. Social reformers like Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, K.Ayappan, Pampady Johon, Pandit Karuppan, Kuamaranasan etc. worked a creditable service for the emancipation of the dalit women. They questioned the inhuman practices like untouchability, un approachability, discrimination, slavery, blind faiths etc. In this time social practices based on the caste and social distance rigidly following the caste hierarchy. In this time Kerala witnessed a cultural and ideological against the backward elements of traditional culture and against the ideological hegemony of Brahmans. In this time the conditions of women in Kerala was very pathetic. The movements in this time also stressing the rights of women. Social conditions of women were equally depressing, the customs and practices observed at the time of marriage, birth, death, puberty and pregnancy, were absolutely absurd and irrational. The most distressing factor, however, was caste. The caste system then prevailing in Kerala was much more oppressive than that prevailing in other parts of India. The practices of untouchability, unapproachability and unseeability militated against

human dignity. Government offices, school and courts were not open to the lower castes, they were prohibited from entering public roads, temples, palaces, etc. thus the rules and regulations of caste hampered social mobility, fostered social division and sapped individual initiative (Cherian 1999).

Dalit movement in Kerala helps the women for the progressive realization of the democratic principle of equal rights of men in all spheres of social existence. (Sadhana Thakur 2013) .It was an attack upon the subordination of the individual to caste laws and taboos, the exclusion of women from rights enjoyed by men and others. An equal right for women's claim was starting from socio-religious movements. Its reflection can also to be seen in present Kerala scenario. Each social reform movement in Kerala in the 19th and 20th century directly and indirectly high lights the issue of the dalit women. For example the Vaikom, Suchindram, Tiruvarp and Guruvayur sathyagrahas was questioning the caste based social structure in Kerala articulate the issue of civil rights of the depressed classes. These sathyagrahas create a strong public opinion against the practice of untouchability in Kerala. An ultimate result of these sathyagrahas was the great Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936.

Dalit women have been subjected to numerous kind of deprivation viz. social, political, and economic cultural in Kerala since time immemorial. The long history of their deprivation and exploitations led to the emergence of dalit protest movement in the state as in other parts of India. In 19th century the dalit women were not allowed to cover their breasts, and forbidden by force to uncover, if they are uncovered. Unfortunately the royal family of Kerala did not support lower caste (dalit) women covering their breasts. The Chanars or Nadars of south Travancore were a polluted caste and they revolted for the right of their women to dress like upper caste Hindu women. The agitation also known as the 'breast-cloth agitation' as it was waged for the right to cover the bosom of Chanar women. In 1859 a riot took place in Travancore and continued for several days, when the ladies of Channar started to cover the breast. In 1865 king passed a legislation; to cover breasts of all women irrespective of caste or religion. (Robert Hardgrave).

In Kerala Sree Narayan Guru brought about a new awakening among the depressed class. Guru campaigned against the rigid caste system when the rules of untouchability and un approachability were brutally imposed on the oppressed castes. He was fought against the Brahmans hegemony to the masses through his consecration of a 'Sivalinga at Aruvippuram' in 1888. To high caste criticism that as Ezavas as 'avarana', had no right to worship-let alone to consecrate- a Siva, Narayana Guru famously

reputed to have replied that he had consecrated on Ezava Siva and made no presumption to have consecrated a Brahmin Siva (Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella 2000). This was the challenging action of the Brahmins supremacy who are the supreme authority decide the social customs in society. The practice of worship was the monopoly of the Brahmins. Guru's revolutionary action was the way to build up dalit consciousness and dalit identity in Kerala. Guru's ideas of temperance were also concerned which the social and economic improvement of the Ezava and other backward communities. Guru's one of the dictum was "liquor is poison; It should not be manufactured, served, or drunk". In 1903 Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) founded under the leadership Guru for the emancipation of the backward community. In Kerala, SNDP had done creditable service in the life of the dalit women, especially Ezava women. At present SNDP organizes the women's units on the micro level and promote the formation of the Self Help Groups (SHGs) at local level.

Kumaranasan one the greatest poet in Kerala, his most of poems discussed the social problems of his time. He identifies the caste as the root cause of the human freedom. Duravastha (1923) and Chandala bhikshuki (1922) was inimitable works of the Kumaranasan. Duravastha depicts the matters like inter caste marriage, un ethical superstitions and rigid caste practices of Kerala in the 19th century. Chandala bhikshuki narrates understanding meaningless of the caste system. Asan forced Ananda bhikshu, hero of Chandala bhikshuki to request for drinking water to Mathangi, Chandala women; "the thrust of the poem is upon the nobility that Mathangi gets after accepting 'Buddhasrama', and the work criticizes heavily the caste system. Of course his works always give attention to the dignity of the women and the rights of backward community (Sanitha 2015).

Pampady John Joseph played vital role in the empowerment of dalit community in Kerala. He stand for the upliftment of the dalit converts and Pulaya community. Like Ayyankali he fought against the unveil practice of untouchability in Kerala. As a converted dalit Christian, he was also victim of severe discrimination. The un ethical caste laws are also rule dalit Christian community. His attempt was to create awareness about the civil rights, liberty, identity among the community (Chentharassery 1989). For to retain dalit Christian identity under the leadership he started a socio religious movement named, 'Cheramar Mahajan Sabha' on 1921. Pandit Karuppan was founding the 'Abala saaranam model school'. Jathikkummi was his famous work published in the year 1912. This work was severely criticized the rigid caste hierarchy of Kerala society in the 19th century. It

played important role in mobility caste consciousness among the Pulayas and other lower caste people of Kerala. He belongs from the Dheerava community and encouraged the education of Dheerava women.

Kumara Guru, popularly known as Poikayil Yohanna was stands for the upliftment of the downtrodden and marginalized society. He was the dreamer of the egalitarian society. He preached a new sermon, the 'Adi Dravida'. He emphasized the resource based power struggle. He preaches the community role of the ownership of land in human life. He believes the development in the human life only through the attainment of land right (Santhosh 2011). PRDS founded by Poykayil Yohannan, an intriguing figure who declared himself divine and whose socio-religious movement grew immensely popular, aided by song and oration. Another trend within the Ezava social reform movement was reflected in the ideas and activities of k. Aiyappan (1889-1698). He developed a secular ideology "no caste, no religion, no god, no class" which combined aspects of Buddhism the achievements of science and socialism. Ayappan followed the dictum of Guru, 'ask not, say not and think not caste', and he promotes inter-dining and inter-caste marriage.

Missionaries belonging to the London Missionary Society and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) engaged closely with "slave castes" of the 19th century in Kerala such as the Cherumas, Pulayas, Kuravas, Parayas and Thanda Pulayas and left behind a wealth of material which the author has thoroughly explored to reconstruct a montage of forgotten faces, voices and stories. The Christian missionaries did the spade work in the field of education they were the pioneers in English and female education in Kerala. Women were organized in Mahila Samajams which began to be formed in 1937. The Mahila Samajams were active in Kozhikode, Kottayam, Chirakkal and Kasargode taluks. In Chirakkal and Kasargode, the Mahila Samajams were organized under the auspices of the Karshaka Samajams and were composed of peasants and lower middle class women. The Samajams made women politically conscious.

However by the beginning of the 20th century, and with the advent of Ayyankali some changes did take place among Pulayas. Ayyankali as their spokesman, articulated the Pulayas sufferings and disabilities, and turned a passionate fighter for their elementary human rights. The Pulayas organized themselves in Tiruvitamkur and Kochi under Sadhuparipalana Sabha (1907) and Cochin Pulaya Maha Saba (1913) respectively. One significant movement of Pulayas under Ayyankali in 1905 was the famous "kallumala agitation" for removing the chain of beads worn by their ladies as a symbol of slavery and inferior caste status. Ayyankali advocated free and compulsory education. He also demanded educational facilities

for peasants and workers. A conference of Sadhujana Paripalana Sabha, an association of the Pulayas at Thiruvananthapuram in March 1930 attracted the following comment from a newspaper, "These presences of many well-clad and respectable women being a conspicuous feature of the function and a batch of Pulaya girls sang a song about the present condition of Pulayas".

In 1891 in Tiruvitamkur, the literacy of Ezavas and pulayas were 1.5% and 0.09% respectively. At the same time the literacy of Brahmins, Ambalavasis and Nayars were respectively 27.13%, 16.35% and 11.12 %. Similarly in Kochi of the English knowing mares, 29% were Brahmins, 21% Nayars and 28% were Christians. So the reformers who represented the backward communities such as Sree Narayana Guru, Kumaranasan, Ayyankali, Vakkom Abdul Khaddar Moulavi and many of their followers opposed the practice of limiting knowledge only to the upper strata of the society, the privileged few of the middle class who were the main beneficiaries of modern education. According to them the backwardness of Indian society including religious superstition and social obscurantism, was due to general ignorance of the people. So the dissemination of knowledge became a vital point in their programme of reform. Among the backward communities only Ezavas had some improvement in English education. However the achievements of Pulayas, Parayas and Muslims were not worth mentioning.

Almost all caste association sought to effect social changes aimed at the eradication of senseless, meaningless and expensive social customs and practices like thalickettu kalyanam, thirandukuli, pulikudi. etc. their attitude towards all these social customs and practices was trenchant. They knew that all these customs did not have any social, moral or religious significance. Even then they celebrated all these customs for four days with elaborate preparation involving huge expenditure. The status and prestige of the families were measured on the basis of the grandeur of the functions. The oppressive caste practices made swami Vivekananda describe Kerala as a "paradise of fools where everyone was happy in his ignorance, in his superstition and his age long social bondage".

The emergence of political consciousness among women in Kerala from the late 19th century upto the 1940s is inextricably linked with the processes of social reform, nationalism and class struggles. The rise and growth of political consciousness among women did not follow a linear pattern, for the impact of colonialism on the existing hierarchical social order (like caste), with varying roles for different sections (Nambutiries, Nayars, Ilavas, Pulayas, etc) gave different forms to the social reform movements that arose from among them. Changes in land

relations, commercialization and the rise of an educated middle class from different sections of the people were bound to create tensions within the traditional caste and social structures. Changes in land relations were reflected in the growing demand for changes in property rights, form of marriage and family organization. The struggle between matrilineal property rights and patrilineal property rights and individual rights was intense as can be seen from the legislative council debates, news paper reports, memorandums presented to the colonial authorities and the literature of the late 19th century and later ideas of individual freedom and equality also gained momentum.

Undoubtedly, the land struggles by adivasis and dalits represent the most significant development in post-millennium Kerala. On the one hand, it signals the weakness of the claim that Kerala's experiment in democratic decentralization of the mid-1990s was sufficient to resolve inequalities – persistent and emergent. On the other hand, it indicated that "public action" was perhaps being taken up by new radical agencies, identified "outliers" of the Kerala model. The huge gain in public visibility is perhaps an undisputable fact of every day of life in contemporary Kerala. On the one hand, political decentralization in the mid-1990s and the formation of statewide self-help group network of below poverty line (BPL) women under state aegis for poverty alleviation towards end of the decade marked the beginning of the present phase in which relatively larger numbers of women step out of the confines of their domestic spaces and enter the labour market and public. On the other hand, resistance to intensifying predatory capitalism-most visible in struggles over land and water resources and environment in general-has also brought a very large number of women into public politics especially in the last decade. Secondly, since the 1990s, a good number of young women migrated to academic metropolis in India and abroad seeking higher education and work, which now means that Malayalee femininity, or indeed, feminism, is no longer confined to the geographical limits of Kerala. At the same time, "ideal femininity" with all its upper-caste Hindu connotations is being constantly refurbished here, often through publically – celebrated rituals and festivals. Saleena Prakanam represents a new generation of women political leaders from the dalit and adivasi communities who have entered politics through oppositional civil social activism largely outside the formal politics of Kerala.

Since the 1990s, Kerala has seen wave after wave of struggles for access to productive assets, especially cultivable land, and not just public welfare, by dalits and adivasis-people identified as the "outliers" of the Kerala model-who did not share in huge gains in social development achieved by the state in general

over the 20th century. She entered public life as the leader of a local self-help group (SHG), a part of the Kudumbasree, the state wide network of women's SHGs created by the State Poverty Eradication Mission. In 2007, a major land struggle by the Sadhujana Vimochana Samyukta Vedi (SVSV), an organization led by dalit leader Laha Gopalan, focused on the Harrisons Malayalam Plantation at Pathanamthitta, broke out, and thousands of dalit, tribal and Other Backward Class (OBC) families entered the plantation and occupied the land, marking the beginning of what became a long-drawn-out struggle (devika 2014).

In Kerala, many collectives in both rural and urban context have mobilised around the circulation of waste where women from marginalized classes, caste and tribal communities have been at the forefront of these struggles. For instance, the Anti-Coca-Cola struggle committee in plachimada had Mayilamma, a member of the Eravalar tribe, as one of its leaders. The movement received national and international attention for mobilizing adivasi, working class and middle class consumers in their campaign against the Hindustan Coca Cola Company (HCCC) for dumping toxic waste and depleting the ground water in their community (Parvathy Binoy 2014).

Gender and sexuality were crucial concern of most reform movements initiated in Kerala in the early half of the 20th century, motivated by mainly by colonial education and nationalist fervor. The community-based movements of this period were mostly oriented towards disciplining the diverse conjugal practices in the region, and the consolidation of normative citizenships that could moral fold of nation. The state-sponsored family planning programme of the 1960s was to accomplish mission of birth control. It is now well known that this programme was "most successfully implemented" in Kerala, and that it led to production of a series public documents, including films, which could not really evade talking about sexuality. The sex workers movement of the late 1990s caused considerable disturbance to the normative imaginations and moral frameworks in Kerala. A striking linguistic innovation of this period is the introduction of the expression "sex worker" in the place of the earlier "prostitute". Nalini Jameela one of the leader of movement. (Muraleedharan Tharayil 2014).

The debate on Indian inequality can be categorized into two types based on whether it focused on "vertical inequalities", that is, inequality across the class based on income or consumption expenditure, or on "horizontal inequalities", which is nothing but inequality between groups such as those between groups based on caste, religion, gender etc. Within horizontal inequalities, the focus has been predominantly on inequality (economic or social)

between caste groups that is, between scheduled groups (SCs/STs) and non-scheduled groups (non-SCs/STs). It is a known fact that the members of the SCs/STs have suffered from severe discrimination-social exclusion in the case of SCs, and physical exclusion in the case of STs, since historical times (Deshpande 2011)

The dalit confronted with multiple deprivations of high level poverty, illiteracy, landlessness, and lack of access to education, healthcare and denial of human rights and freedom in wide spread situation of caste violence. On the other hand, dalits are caste-based excluded, and unfavorably excluded economically. In civic and cultural life they are discriminated and excluded in using public goods and services. In economic life, they are excluded and discriminated from education, housing, health, competitive jobs and also they are denied of goods, of leasing lands, sale or purchase of inputs and from purchasing consumer goods.

Chegara had become the symbol of a silent war for land. The agitation at Chegara in Pathanamthitta district had commenced on August 4, 2007, when 300 families from various parts of the state converged on the rubber estate owned by Harison Malayalam Plantation Ltd and pitched up thatched sheds and started living there. Their number swelled by day and at one time, there were as many as 5000 families, majority of them dalits. Their demand was five acres of land for cultivation and Rs. 50,000 as financial assistance per family. After 790 days, the struggle has been settled. Lack of access and entitlement to resources leads to the denial of the rights of depressed, such as right to livelihoods and civil rights affecting dalit women's ability to protect and assert themselves. The lack of right distributive justice in spite of protection by the law, in the context of burdens dalit women face, reinforces the caste hierarchies and the unequal power relation in society. Hence addressing dalit women's resource rights remains key to building an egalitarian society.

Kudumbashree in association with the local self-government of Kerala is charting out new meaning and possibilities for local economic development and citizen centric governance. Empowerment of women and their participation in the development process has been considered essential feature of development. A micro financial enterprise covers both an individual and collective transformation it helps to strengthen their innate ability through acquiring knowledge, power and experience. Kudumbasree as Kerala government's landmark programme which would help to large number of dalit women to mobilize and assuring their participation in all development issues of the grassroots level as well as state. So the Kudumbasree as a movement for the increasing the capability of

women, strengthening their participation in the decision making process and to re-build their identity.

The rights and status of Dalit women in India both historically and socially could not be recognised any time. They are struggling for their own identity, shouting for diffusion of their voices and fighting for their own esteem. Every day, they cross among the fears and fraught for individuality. Despite the constitutional guarantee of equality of sexes, rampant discrimination and exploitation of women in India continues. Awareness in the women as well as society should be created and their equal rights should be effectively implemented. Empowerment of women has become important concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Each and every government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal; society must take responsibility to the protection of the women's. Women have full opportunities of Self decision making and participating in the Social, Political and Economic life of the Country with a sense of equality.

Women empowerment would be able to develop self-esteem, confidence, realize their potential and enhance their collective bargaining power. As women are oppressed in all spheres of life, they need

to be empowered in all walks of life. Government may offer welfare schemes for women. They may float anti-poverty programmes. They may enact legislation to safeguard women's rights. The government policies can only facilitate the process, reduce the hurdles and create an atmosphere conducive to empower themselves. Unless they themselves become conscious of their oppression, show initiative and seize the opportunities, it would not be possible to change their status. Dalit movements in Kerala was the way to open the empowering the marginalized community especially women. Each movement contributes the development of the civil society to highlight the issue of voiceless people. It creates the awareness among the women, civil society and the government to the need for to conduct the empowerment programme. It is presumed that real development is possible only if the women and men work in equal gender equality and empowerment women is recognized globally as a key element to achieve progress in all areas. Jawaharlal Nehru commented "in order to awaken the people, it is the women who has to be awakened first. Once she is on the move, the house hold moves, the village moves the country moves and this we build the India tomorrow".

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Vinukumar N V/ Assistant Professor on Contract/ Local Development Studies/ Malayalam Tirur/ Malappuram/