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CITIZENSHIP AT THE INTERSECTIONS: CASTE, CLASS AND GENDER IN INDIA

SRUTHI HERBERT

Supervised by:
Dr Subir Sinha

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2017

Department of Development Studies
SOAS, University of London

Declaration for PhD thesis

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Abstract

This research is an empirical investigation into the experience of citizenship at the intersections of social inequalities in India: caste, class and gender. Through the working of the state in one ward of a panchayat in Kerala, South India, I try to understand how social inequalities influence the practice of citizenship, with particular focus on the Marshallian social citizenship. Mixed methodologies, including ethnography, and quantitative data collection were employed. Since Kerala is often seen as an exception in India due to its remarkably high Human Development Index (HDI), and also in development discourses due to its radical communist mobilizations and democratic decentralization, this work has wider relevance to development debates.

The key argument made is that social citizenship rights are not upheld in the local state bodies, whose working often contradicts constitutional provisions for group-differentiated citizenship rights. This is illustrated by several simultaneous outcomes of state working in the field site: a geography of caste evidenced locally, caste-gendered ordering of public spaces, the seamlessness between the personal and the political for the elite, and disempowering discourses facilitated through state bodies. The framework within which the state operates, I argue, is patriarchal, upholding upper caste interests. I also show that academic conceptualization of intersections, in limiting caste to SC/Dalits and focusing on Dalit patriarchy, do not sufficiently address the graded nature of caste inequalities and patriarchal relations embedded within them. I propose that caste-gender roles need to be examined in more detail. This work also argues that caste is not static, and reconfigures itself while upholding endogamy. All of this impact the experience of citizenship.

This work shows that structural inequalities need to be accounted for while empirically examining citizenship gains, and that for newly formed states, social citizenship rights is an ideal worth aspiring for. In offering a new lens to view Kerala's claims of development, this work points to lacunae in the conceptualization of development not just in Kerala, but also in India where the structural nature of caste is not acknowledged.

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Abbreviations

ADS – Area Development Society	NRHM – National Rural Health Mission
ASHA – Accredited Social Health Activist	NSS – Nair Service Society
CDS – Community Development Society	OBC – Other Backward Castes
CPI – Communist Party of India	SC – Scheduled Castes
CRC – Citizens Rights Committee	SHG – Self Help Group
DARG – Developing Areas Research Group	ST – Scheduled Tribes
DFS – Dalit Feminist Standpoint	UDF – United Democratic Front
FC – Forward Caste	WPR – Work Participation Rate
G1 – Men’s Self Help Group - 1	
G2 – Men’s Self Help Group - 2	
GDP – Gross Domestic Product	
GDR – Group Differentiated Rights	
ICDS – Integrated Child Development Scheme	
KSKTU – Kerala State Karshaka Thozhilali Union	
KWA – Kerala Water Authority	
LDF – Left Democratic Front	
MGNREGS – Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme	
MSS – Maranaananthara Sahaaya Samiti	
NABARD – National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development	
NHG – Neighbourhood Groups	

Glossary of Terms

Anganwadi - Anganwadis are the state-run pre-school and crèche for young children, established under the public health program called the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS).

Backward – when used in reference to caste, as ‘backward castes’, refers to the constitutional classification of castes in India, distinct from Scheduled Castes, but nevertheless marginalized.

Cent – Unit of measurement of land, equivalent to 435.6 sq ft.

Dalit-Bahujan – Political word for men and women who are oppressed by the caste system

Forward Caste – Caste communities that are not Scheduled or Backward castes.

Gramapanchayat – Village-level administrative unit.

Gramasabha – Village council meeting

Jagrutha Samiti – local committees for gender justice

Kudumbashree – the state-sponsored women’s microfinance network in Kerala

Lower Castes – Castes at the lower rungs of the hierarchy including untouchable communities, particularly the SC and OBC communities

Maadambi – powerful feudal male figure, usually of the Nair caste

Maranananthara Sahaya Samiti – Funeral Assistance Society

Other Backward Classes – Socially disadvantaged groups that are not scheduled castes.

Pakalveedu – Day-shelter for the elderly

Panchayat – Council. This can be at the village, block, or the district level.

Panikkari Pennungal – Women who work as manual labourers

Pappadam – Fried food eaten with meals

Reservation – Affirmative action granted by the constitution.

Scheduled Caste – Historically disadvantaged caste communities protected under the scheduled list of the constitution.

Scheduled Tribe - Historically disadvantaged indigenous tribal communities protected under the scheduled list of the constitution.

Thozhilurappu – Malayalam word for MGNREGS work

Upper Castes – Castes at the top rungs of the caste hierarchy, particularly Brahmins, and castes that interact with them, those that are not part of SC and OBC communities

Local Castes in Perur, their traditional occupations, and Government Classification

Ashari – Caste of carpenters; OBC

Brahmin – Priestly castes, at the top of the caste hierarchy; FC

Ezhava – Farm hands and manual labourers who, not until long ago, were considered untouchables in Kerala; OBC

Kanakkan – Farm hands in Perur (but Kanakkan community elsewhere in Kerala are engaged in fishing); SC

Karuvan – Blacksmiths; OBC

Kollan – Bronze smiths; OBC

Mannan – Washermen; ex-untouchable; SC

Mulaya – Caste of people who used to build fences using bamboo, ex-untouchable caste; SC

Nair – Dominant castes in Perur and several parts of Kerala. Castes that usually interacted with Brahmins; FC

Nambiar – A variant of Nair, a powerful community in Northern Kerala; FC

Namboodiri – Brahmins native to Kerala; FC

Paraya – Basket weavers and farm hands, ex-untouchable caste; SC

Pisharody – Castes that services temples; SC

Pulaya – Predominantly farm workers, ex-untouchable caste; SC

Thandaan – Toddy tappers; OBC

Thattan – Goldsmiths; OBC

Vilakkathala Nair – Barbers for Namboodiris; OBC

Veluthedathu Nair – Washermen for upper castes; OBC

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Introduction

Citizenship in democratic societies is a guarantee of equality to those who are members of the national political community. It is, as Turner (2014) writes, as essentially modern concept, evolving from debates about human equality in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Today, as equality in the digital as well as genomic age are at the forefront of many debates in ‘advanced’ parts of the world, struggles by many people in other parts of the world concern securing the basic rights that are supposed to be guaranteed to citizens by the state: access to clean water, sufficient food, education, and healthcare. Hence, the development patterns of countries in the Global South, like India, often capture the attention of researchers, activists, and policy makers.

‘Development’ itself is a contentious, much-studied term, criticized as much by some as it has been endorsed by others. Simplistic ideas of economic or infrastructural growth being equated with ‘development’ have been challenged by broader conceptions of ‘development as freedom’ (Sen 1999). In keeping with these conceptions, measurements of development too have moved away from per capita income or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates to the Human Development Index (HDI). India fares poorly on this, with an index of 0.609, which puts it at the 130th position of 188 countries in total.¹ However, Kerala, the southernmost state of India stands out with an HDI of 0.79². The achievements of the state, particularly in education and health leading to this high index have been hailed and the state has been highlighted as an alternative model of development (as against mainstream economic-growth led ideas of development) (Oommen, 1999; Parayil, 1996).

However, growing up in Kerala exposed several contradictions in this development model. Status and gender-based inequalities seemed to continue defining daily life, interactions and choices. Given that India is a deeply stratified society with inequalities along the lines of caste, class and gender, this is not surprising. In Kerala’s unique case, however, several researchers had argued that the class-based communist mobilizations, particularly through organized political parties, and resulting land reforms were key to transcending the highly unequal social order (Franke and Chasin 1994; Mencher 1976; Ramachandran 1997). This necessitates a deeper enquiry into whether class-

¹ Please see Human Development Report 2015 here: <http://www.hdr.undp.org/en/2015-report> (last accessed on 16 February, 2017).

² This is based on the latest computation available in the India Human Development Report 2011 published by the Institute of Applied Manpower Research, Government of India, available at http://www.im4change.org/docs/340IHDR_Summary.pdf (last accessed on 16 February 2017).

based mobilisations have indeed effectively addressed social inequalities. Or, do they still continue to operate?

This then becomes a matter of interest, for both researchers and development practitioners, to examine the experience of individuals in a society that is exemplified as an ‘alternative model’ due to its high achievements in human development as well as other desired democratic ideals such as increased local participation in decentralized governance. One way to do this is through the less-attempted study of interaction of individual citizens with the state machinery. Are guarantees of equal citizenship realized in practice for citizens of a country? Or are there differences in the formal and substantive citizenship? This inevitably involves understanding the experiences of people at different social locations and their interactions with the state. While there have been several studies that focus on the experiences of the marginalized vis-à-vis citizenship, a better perspective can arguably be offered by understanding the experiences of not just those at marginal locations, but through examining the differences, if any, between the experiences of those at varied social locations – in India, of caste, class and gender. This assumes significance particularly because in a deeply unequal society like India, democratic equality is at once a challenge as well as a cherished possibility for millions of people.

Therefore, the central research question of this research will be as follows:

What are the processes through which citizenship is differentially experienced by people at different social locations?

This question will be answered through the following two sub-questions.

1. How do social inequalities inform the functioning of the state?
2. How do people experience the state differently depending on their social location?

This thesis will approach these questions through the interactions between the state and people at various social locations in one ward of a local *gramapanchayat* (village council). In answering the aforementioned research questions through this study, I hope to achieve the following:

- a) Show empirically how deep-rooted structural inequalities impact the practice of citizenship in developing parts of the world like India, thereby also illustrating the resilience of structural inequalities, and how power adapts to change, reconfigures and manifests in varied ways over time.

- b) Contribute towards conceptualising the intersections of multiple inequalities in India, and offer a methodology for studying the intersections, and
- c) In a broader sense, enable a reconsideration of ideas of development that are thought to be ‘alternative’, and if necessary, reformulate them in context-specific ways, with particular reference to the global South.

Towards this end, this thesis will be structured as follows.

In Chapter 1 that immediately follows, I will elaborate on the context in Kerala and introduce the key conceptual understandings that I draw from.

In Chapter 2, I will outline the methodology adopted, and introduce the field work.

In Chapter 3, I will provide the context of Kerala, and background information about the field site.

In Chapter 4, I will discuss how spatial organization and distribution of resources are informed by structural inequalities.

Next, in Chapter 5, through a detailed consideration of public meetings and the discourses legitimized therein, I will elaborate on how the public spaces are ordered.

In chapter 6, I will detail the experiences of a few active panchayat functionaries, and show how caste and gender operate in the experiences and interactions that they have with the state.

In chapter 7, I talk about the experiences of individuals – both women and men - at various social locations and what their experiences mean to the effectiveness of the state’s development programs.

In the last chapter, chapter 8, I conclude by drawing the links between the personal experiences, public spaces, discourses in these spaces, and the nature of both the state and its interventions. I consider whether equal citizenship guaranteed by the constitution is experienced equally, or whether the social location of individuals have any bearing on their experiences.

Chapter 1. Concepts and Theoretical Framework

At the risk of sounding cliched, I need to start out by stating that citizenship is a contested concept. Several political theorists have interpreted it in different ways, and lively debates have ensued. Most conceptual debates have been confined to the domain of theory. What I propose to do is to undertake an empirical investigation into the experience of citizenship. Towards this end, not only clarity about the concept of citizenship, but also about the social realities in the chosen context is necessary.

This chapter is divided into three sections where I will a) briefly outline relevant debates about citizenship in the development discourse, as well as point to the larger theoretical strands of thought about citizenship, b) elaborate on some key theorizations about gender and caste, and their intersections that are helpful to understand the caste-class-gender intersections in India, and c) pin-point the theoretical framework that this work locates itself in.

1.1. Citizenship

There has been a renewed interest in citizenship due to the changing economic, social, and cultural conditions associated with the expansion of globalization. Following the ‘good governance’ agenda of the World Bank, there emerged a significant body of work in the discipline of development studies that critically interrogated the idea of empowerment that citizens were to experience through this good governance agenda, particularly the enhancement of citizenship through participation.³ The rationale for privileging participation in public spaces and decision-making bodies is that it is seen as a signifier of empowerment (Cornwall and Brock 2005; Cornwall and Coelho 2006; Gaventa and Valderrama 1999). These studies understand citizenship through an analysis of local power relations, and explored the idea of the ‘active citizen’ as against the ‘passive citizen’, who is a maker and shaper, not chooser and user of policies (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001).⁴

³ ‘Good governance’ – standing for efficient public services, accountability of public institutions, legal framework for development, and transparency – entered the development lexicon with the World Bank’s 1992 report called Governance and Development.

⁴These writers see citizens as having rights, not being mere state beneficiaries, and view citizenship as a social right, as agency, and as accountability through democratic practices (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001, 9)

In studies centring on the ‘invited’ and the ‘invented’ spaces of participation, ‘power’ has been analysed as a crucial dimension when interpreting participation in public spaces.⁵

Problems with these participatory approaches to citizenship have also been noted. Some of these are: a) ‘participation’ could have a function of ‘officialising’ dominant knowledge (Mosse 1994, 511), b) it could be an officialisation of spaces (McEwan 2005), c) it could be an officialising strategy (Resurreccion and Pantana 2004), and d) the objective of participation being ‘development’ and ‘poverty alleviation’, against the more radical ideals of participation that targets “transformation of the cultural, political, and economic structures which reproduce poverty and marginalization” (Leal 2010, 91). Participation, especially at the local level, as a tool for empowerment has also been criticized for the underlying assumption that power is distributed in such a way that those who wield it are at institutionalized centres and the subjugated people are at the local or regional levels; hence this assumption ignores power that circulates at all levels, and constructs norms, knowledge, and social and cultural practices (Kothari 2001, 140–41). Criticizing the institutional model of inclusion that has become characteristic of participatory approaches, Cleaver (2001, 42) argues that these models assume that ‘many interactions between people take place outside formal organizations’ and that the local institutions and their management may be deeply embedded in social relations. Therefore, understanding the interactions between social structures and individual agency is imperative to understanding ‘participation’, and its relationship to empowerment. Authors from Latin America see the potential of ‘participation’ for redefining citizenship by bringing about ‘radical transformations in the structure of power relations that characterize Latin American societies,’ having a further consequence that citizenship is not confined to the individual-state relationship, but becomes ‘a parameter for all social relations’ (Dagnino 2010, 105).

Therefore, it becomes imperative to look at how the ideas of citizenship evolved and have been influenced by social relations. The following sections will deal with the broad strands within citizenship debates, that is, conceptions of citizenship within the liberal-individualistic tradition, the civic-republican tradition, the social-democratic approach (Shafir 1998), and some critiques

⁵‘Invited’ spaces are defined as the ones occupied by those at the grassroots and their allied non-governmental organizations that are legitimized by donors and government interventions. ‘Invented’ spaces are those, also occupied by the grassroots and claimed by their collective action, but directly confronting the authorities and the status quo. While the former grassroots actions are geared mostly toward providing the poor with coping mechanisms and propositions to support survival of their informal membership, the grassroots activity of the latter challenges the status quo in the hope of larger societal change and resistance to the dominant power relations (Miraftab 2004, 1).

from feminist viewpoints, that of identity-based assertions, and finally post-colonial critiques with focus on South Asia.⁶

1.1.1. Liberal-individualistic Tradition

Jeremy Bentham, John Locke, and John Stuart Mill contributed to this line of Western Political thought which valued individual liberties over government controls, and was guided by a utilitarian philosophy. A brief and comprehensive understanding of liberalism is offered by Dietz (1987, 2–6) where she identifies the following as the most important components of this tradition.

- a) The notion that human beings are atomistic rational agents whose existence and interests are ontologically prior to society.
- b) Society should ensure the freedom of all its members to realize their capabilities.
- c) The centrality of human equality, from which political egalitarianism follows, and
- d) Following this, a negative liberty at the core of which is the ‘conception of the individual as the ‘bearer of formal rights’ designed to protect him from the infringement or interference of others, and to guarantee him the same opportunities or equal access as others.
- e) The free individual as competitor.

More recently, John Rawls elaborated upon public life and citizenship within this tradition. Shafir (1998, 6 - 9) points out that as he did so, he replaced ‘utilitarianism’ with a moral principle of ‘fairness’ which was produced through an overlapping consensus, not just through adherence to the formal aspects of the political and institutional framework.

1.1.2. Civic-republican Tradition

Civic republicans have been strongly critical of liberal discourses of citizenship discussed earlier. Civic-republicanism is a more communitarian line of thought following the Western Democratic ideas of Rousseau, and is opposed to an individualistic pursuit. Oldfield (1990) makes a case against the liberals with the following arguments:

- a) Individuals are not people who only bear rights, but also have duties – sometimes involuntarily acquired by being part of a society.

⁶This is by no means, a rigid classification. Isin and Turner (2002) for instance, classify the approaches to citizenship as Liberal Citizenship, Republican Citizenship, Communitarianism and Citizenship, and Radical Democratic Citizenship. They distinguish this from forms of citizenship, including multicultural citizenship, cosmopolitan citizenship, etc.

- b) If social identities carry duties, there should be a meaningful conception of the community which is consistent with the continued autonomy of individuals.
- c) While rights are afforded as a 'status' in the liberal tradition, citizenship is seen as a 'practice' in the republican tradition. Political identity is a crucial component of that practice.

Mouffe (1995) notes that while Rawlsian liberalism of fairness over utility advances a constitutional equality that allows people to pursue private goods even as it insists on the distribution of goods to favour the least advantaged, republicanism focuses on the public goods. Thus, republicanism opens up opportunities to participate in the political community. The civic-republican tradition of citizenship is wary of individual rights.

1.1.3. Social-Democratic Approach

Expounded by T. H. Marshall, this approach goes beyond understanding citizenship as a relation with the state, and incorporates social changes into the concept. Now widely accepted, his understanding of citizenship was one of 'full membership of a community'. While he drew from the industrialization experience of Britain, his important contribution was in distinguishing between three sets of citizenship rights, and is commonly taken as a starting point in discussing citizenship rights (Lister 1997, 29).

Marshall (1963 in Shafir 1998) calls these

- a) Civil rights – these are “rights necessary for individual freedom – liberty of the person; freedom of speech, thought and faith; the right to own property and conclude valid contracts; and the right to justice.”
- b) Political rights – this includes the “right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such a body”
- c) Social rights – these included the whole range from “the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standard prevailing in the society. The institutions most connected with it are the educational system and the social services.”

He notes the contradictions that can arise between pursuing the civil and the social rights simultaneously. Their operation too, it has been noted by Marshall, is also antithetical: civil rights provide protection from the state; social rights establish claims for benefits guaranteed by the state

(Shafir 1998, 14). The contradiction arises from the fact that the civil rights treats the state as a predator from which private property has to be defended, whereas the social rights see the state as the provider who distributes public goods.

1.1.4. Feminist Critique

A distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’, however, was essential to the conceptualization of citizenship. This was because it was central to distinguish between the realm of morality (private) and the realm of politics (public). Mouffe writes that Such a distinction was necessary for the defence of pluralism, the idea of individual liberty, the separation of church and state, and the development of civil society. However, this also led to the identification of the private with the domestic and played an important role in the subordination of women (Mouffe 1992). Ruth Lister, while critiquing both the Liberal-individualists (by counter-posing an ethic of care against individualistic conception of rights) and the Civic- republicans (as drawing on women’s time, and narrowly conceptualized separation of public and private spheres as well as appeals to universalism) argues for a synthesis of both these approaches. In such an approach “citizenship as participation represents an expression of human agency in the political arena, broadly defined; citizenship as rights enables people to act as agents. Moreover, citizenship rights are not fixed. They remain the object of political struggles to defend, reinterpret and extend them. Who is involved in these struggles, where they are placed in the political hierarchy and the political power and influence they can yield will help to determine the outcomes” (Lister 1997, 35).

The fundamental feminist critique about the private-public divide is that the discourses about citizenship sets up clear distinctions between the individual’s private domain where the state has no authority to intervene, and the public domain where much of state activity is centred. This public-private divide is one that confines much of the matters of the household into the domain of the private while the civil society was the ‘male sphere’ (Dietz 1987, 4; Steenbergen 1994, 100). The elevation of the public sphere in favour of the private, particularly the household where much of women’s activities are centred, directly contributes to denying women full citizenship. Consequently, many authors note that the access to citizenship is a gendered process (Dietz 1987; Mouffe 1992; Prokhovnik 1998). It has been previously noted that the public – private divide contribute to the legitimation of “needs,” associated with the public sphere, as against the de-legitimation of “wants,” associated with the private sphere (Fraser 1987).

By rejecting such dichotomies of public/private, feminist critiques “challenge the conventional formulations of citizenship” and reveal “how the exclusionary conceptualization of political arenas

of citizenship, has effectively ignored the political activities and agency of women in grassroots neighbourhood and community-based groups, those most readily available to them and where they are most effective” (Miraftab 2004). McEwan argues that ‘a feminist conceptualisation of citizenship as ethically-grounded action in all spheres of life, not simply as public participation’ allows us to rethink ‘the public/private distinction that still frames many debates about citizenship and considers the emancipatory potential of gendered subjectivity as it relates to both men and women. This has the potential to bring the voices of people marginalized by relations of power to often abstract debates about citizenship, both in terms of understanding meanings of citizenship and its spatiality’ (McEwan 2005, 987).

1.1.5. Identity-based critiques

These critiques stem from an understanding that citizenship has to be seen as shaped by specific histories, cultures, and struggles (Maitreyee Mukhopadhyay 2007, 3). The BRIDGE Gender and Citizenship Overview Report (Sever and Meer 2004) echoes a similar sentiment when it states that “while rights determine access to resources and authority, in order to claim rights, an individual needs to have access to resources, power and knowledge. Unequal social relations result in some individuals and groups being able to claim rights than others”. One criticism of the idea of universal and inclusive citizenship is that formal equality creates substantive *inequality*, and therefore, universal citizenship may not lead to social justice and equality. Two perspectives on how to address this include a) group representation as argued for by Kymlicka, and b) differentiation of citizenship as argued for by Young. Social movements of the oppressed have asserted pride in their identity and opposed assimilation (under say, national identities). Noting that most of the historically excluded groups have experienced this not because of their socio-economic status, but because of their socio-cultural identities, Kymlicka (1995) feels that differentiated citizenship would be completely realized in self-government rights, and favours poly-ethnic rights as well as representation rights. Young explains why both the liberal and the republican traditions are inadequate to address group differences:

Where liberal individualism regards the state as a necessary instrument to mediate conflict and regulate action so that individuals can have the freedom to pursue their private ends, the republican tradition locates freedom and autonomy in the actual public activities of citizenship. By participating in public discussion and collective decision making, citizens transcend their particular self-interested lives and the pursuit of private interests to adopt a general point of view from which they agree on the common good. Citizenship is an

expression of the universality of human life; it is a realm of rationality and freedom as opposed to the heteronomous realm of particular need, interest, and desire. Nothing in this understanding of citizenship as universal as opposed to particular, common as opposed to differentiated, implies extending full citizenship status to all groups (Young 1989, 253).

She writes that a genuinely universal citizenship is impeded rather than furthered by the commonly held conviction that when persons exercise their citizenship, they should adopt a universal point of view and leave behind the perceptions they derive from their particular experience and social position. The full inclusion and participation of all in law and public life is also sometimes impeded by formulating laws and rules in universal terms that apply to all citizens in the same way” (ibid:274). Therefore, she proposes differentiated citizenship as the best way to realize the inclusion and participation of everyone in full citizenship.⁷ Similarly, taking cognisance of the struggles for social inclusion, Lister (2007) identifies justice, recognition, self-determination, and solidarity and the four values of inclusive citizenship.

1.1.6. Post Colonial Critique and Citizenship in South Asia

Scholarship about citizenship by now recognizes, as Amri and Ramtohul (2014) points out, that colonialism had its own impact on citizenship in colonies. An early study by Ekeh (1975) shows that colonialism produced two kinds of ‘publics’ along with a ‘private’ realm in Africa, instead of a strict public and private divide. These two publics – the primordial public (where traditional and customary relations prevailed) and the ‘civic public’ (that is associated with the colonial administration, and is based in civil structures like the military, civil service, police etc). As a consequence, he writes, that Citizenship acquires meanings depending on whether it is related to the primordial or the civic public.

“The individual sees his duties as *moral* obligations to benefit and sustain a primordial public of which he is a member. While for the most part informal sanctions may exist that compel such obligations from individuals, duties to the primordial public have a moral side to them... But the point is, like most moral spheres, the relationship between the individual

⁷Group-differentiated citizenship implies institutional mechanisms and public resources supporting three activities: (1) self-organization of group members so that they gain a sense of collective empowerment and a reflective understanding of their collective experience and interests in the context of the society; (2) voicing a group's analysis of how social policy proposals affect them, and generating policy proposals themselves, in institutionalized contexts where decision makers are obliged to show that they have taken these perspectives into consideration; (3) having veto power regarding specific policies that affect a group directly (Young 1989: 262).

and his primordial public cannot be exhausted by economic equations. There is more to all moral duties than the material worth of the duties themselves.

The citizenship structure of the civic public is different. Because it is amoral, there is a great deal of emphasis on its economic value. While many Africans bend over backwards to benefit and sustain their primordial publics, they seek to gain from the civic public. Moreover, the individual's relationship with the civic public is measured in material terms—but with a bias. While the individual seeks to gain from the civic public, there is no moral urge on him to give back to the civic public in return for his benefits.” (1975, 106–7).

This, he shows, is in contrast with the Western conceptualisations that saw rights and duties of citizens in the public sphere go hand-in-hand.

In the African continent, the conflict produced by the imposition of the colonial edifice on customary laws and traditional authorities have been noted by several other authors (Mamdani 1997; Amri and Ramtohul 2014; Nyamu-Musembi 2007). Its effect, Mukhopadhyay (2007) writes, has been that “ Identities based on contemporary South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, identities based on ascribed relations operate in the state as political constructs. This particular mode of state-society relations, where ascribed relations become the basis of identity and relationship with the state, has profound implications for women’s citizenship.”

Mohanty and Tandon (2006) offers a conceptualisation of citizenship based on participation. Noting that in India the 'lower' castes, tribes, and women have been historically deprived, they put forward participatory citizenship as a 'set of practices, not a static concept' that looks at citizenship from the 'vantage point of excluded collectives'. Participatory citizenship, according to them, attempts to define the roles of the state and the excluded citizenry by focusing the discourse on public good (Mohanty and Tandon 2006). Informed by the colonial past of institutions in South Asia, Kabeer (2002b) argues that 'the ideas of citizenship which recognizes individuals as bearing rights which are prior to, and independent of, their place in status hierarchies, is not as relevant'. Her view is that in such societies burdened by both caste and gender discrimination, position within kinship is a central factor determining entitlements and obligations, and relationally-defined status precedes status as individuals. Inclusive citizenship is a challenge in deeply stratified societies such as India, and constructing one entails going beyond policy analysis to encompass protests, social movements and prolonged struggles combining the politics of everyday life with the forces of structural transformation. (Kabeer 2002a)

Citizenship in India

In the Constitution of India, citizenship is addressed in Articles 5 – 11, Part II.⁸ Rodrigues (2005, 209–35) contends, drawing from the Constitutional Assembly Debates, that there was a tussle between attempts to define citizenship that privileged Hindu and Sikhs identities (tendencies that can be called ethno-cultural nationalist⁹ idea of citizenship), and attempts to democratize the notions of citizenship. The Constitution of India itself has an inclusive approach of citizenship, of a non-denominational character, and emphasized on people's choices (Roy 2010, 38).¹⁰ This inclusive approach to citizenship is not to be taken for granted, as it followed tremendous discussions and deliberations before the colonial rule ended in 1947. Equal citizenship for “depressed classes,” was hard-won through the negotiations, chiefly by Dr B R Ambedkar, even as this was resisted on various grounds by representatives of the Congress and Mr M K Gandhi. Indeed, the early *Swaraj* constitution for India drafted in 1928 led by Pandit Motilal Nehru made found the demands for representation of the depressed classes in the legislature ‘harmful and unsound’. (Narake et al. 2003, 17:64) It was in the first Round Table Conference in London consisting of representatives from India and the British Government that discussions around the constitution of India was held. Here, demands of various sections of India, including minorities and the depressed classes were put forward. This was when demands for *equal citizenship, free enjoyment of equal rights, and offence of infringement of citizenship* was put forward as one of the conditions that had to be met for the Depressed classes to consent to place themselves under a majority rule in independent India. There were vigorous discussions about the minority question in India, and the Minorities committee that first met in 1931. Dr Ambedkar representing the depressed classes note that Mahatma Gandhi, the representative of the Indian National Congress was ready to give political recognition to Muslims and the Sikhs, he was not prepared to recognize the Anglo-Indians, the Depressed Classes and the Indian Christians. (ibid. 114)

⁸The articles 5 – 11 are titled as follows: 5. Citizenship at the commencement of the Constitution, 6. Rights of citizenship of certain persons who have migrated to India from Pakistan, 7. Rights of citizenship of certain migrants to Pakistan, 8. Rights of citizenship of certain persons of Indian origin residing outside India, 9. Persons voluntarily acquiring citizenship of a foreign State not to be citizens, 10. Continuance of the rights of citizenship, 11. Parliament to regulate the right of citizenship by law. The Citizenship Act was enacted in 1955, and has been amended multiple times since. The Citizenship (Amendment) Ordinance 2005 was promulgated by the President of India and came into force on 28 June 2005

⁹Ethno-nationalism is a variety of nationalism arising from membership of a cultural-historical community (Delanty 1996)

¹⁰Here, Roy is analysing the constitutional provisions in the context of the partition of India. Elsewhere, it has been pointed out that B R Ambedkar who was the head of the Constitution drafting committee has been criticized for making ‘Indian Citizenship’ the cheapest on earth because he refused to insert sections to the constitution that conferred extraordinary powers on the state, and targeted Muslims. (Rodrigues 2005, 225)

Such a fraught history of claims for representation and citizenship, shaped not only by the colonial experience but also by communal and caste-based contestations are key in understanding how citizenship continues to be experienced in India today. Examining the experience of ‘illegal migrants’ in India (particularly the Bangladeshi migrants in Assam) in the context of the Citizenship Amendment of 1986, and juxtaposing it with the subsequent amendments in 2003 and 2005, Roy makes a compelling argument for the ‘principle of *jus sanguinis* or blood ties assuming equivocality over the principle of *jus solis* or birth’ (Roy 2010, 134) in India. However, efforts have been on to carve an exclusionary Indian identity modelled on dominant Hindu culture, symbols, and practices (Roy 2010, 17). The danger of this project is in the on-going process of conflation of national identity with political citizenship. This, she argues, resulted in the ‘culturalization of the idea of citizenship’ which effaced the manner in which citizenship is ‘differentially experienced along axes of class, caste, gender, language, etc.’ (ibid). On the other hand, even though universal citizenship is offered to all Indian citizens, the idea of differentiated citizenship (although that terminology had not yet been coined) finds expression in the Indian constitution (and even in the debates in colonial times) vis-à-vis the rights of the marginalized groups, particularly Dalits and Muslims (Jayal 2012, 199–228).

These arguments are illustrative of the fact that vis-à-vis citizenship, when it comes to those who are not caste-privileged, there has been an on-going tussle between the exclusionary forces and inclusionary claims. Indeed, Aloysius in his book *Nationalism without a Nation in India* notes that the ‘demand for equal citizenship was the foundation of all the civil right movements of the lower caste excluded masses... this was the central concern of the more educated political nationalists’ (1997, 151). In this book, Aloysius sums up the expectations that framed the struggles of the marginalized with the state (colonial and post-colonial):

The political awakening of the lower caste groups of the Indian subcontinent under the colonial rules was premised by an implicit (often also made explicit in the sayings and writings of the prominent leaders) vision of a new nation, of a new form of congruence between culture and power, and a new way of relating the self with the other. This vision itself was deconstructed above, into three component parts, actualization of the concept of citizenship, mass literacy as the basis of new civic life, and social and spatial mobility as a new principle of social life. This three-pronged struggle, the aspirants hoped, would lead to transformed interpersonal relationships suffused with fellow-feeling and

grounded in egalitarianism, a relations engendering a commonality of purpose in public life as the core of the nation (Aloysius 1997, 83).

In fact, similar processes have been noted in the United States of America too. The role of the black struggles in expanding and enriching the idea of citizenship is drawn out in detail by Forbath (1999). He writes that

The language of equal citizenship did not loom large in the Constitution prior to the Civil War and the adoption of the Reconstruction amendments.¹ Since then, however, subordinated groups have laid claim to the status of citizens and rights bearers in language rooted in those amendments. As Hendrik Hartog observes, "[t]he long contest over slavery did more than any other cause to stimulate the development of an alternate, rights conscious, interpretation of the federal constitution.

Such tussles were not un-anticipated in India. On 25 November 1947, one day before the Constitution of India came into effect (on 26 November 1949), the chairman of the drafting committee, Dr B R Ambedkar spoke in the constituent assembly. For a democracy to be truly one, not only in form, but also in fact, he said that mere 'political democracy is not enough, and there is a need to have a social democracy built on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. In a stratified society like India, this had to be struggled for. He says,

Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things. It would require a constable to enforce them. We must begin by acknowledging the fact that there is complete absence of two things in Indian Society. One of these is equality. On the social plane, we have in India a society based on the principle of graded inequality which means elevation for some and degradation for others. On the economic plane, we have a society in which there are some who have immense wealth as against many who live in abject poverty. On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. (Ambedkar 1994, 13:1216)

It is evident that as others have pointed out, the struggle between the formal citizenship rights and the substantial enjoyment of it, that can be brought about only by democracy in social life. These

ideas of citizenship as comprised of social rights (drawing predominantly upon the Marshallian concept) inform the concerns of this thesis too: how was a new social life forged, with formal equality being a citizenship guarantee. How were changes in social life, particularly to caste, and gender-based inequalities brought about by democratic gains in Kerala?

To answer that, one needs to examine how caste, class and gender operates in India.

1.2. Caste

Caste, a system of social stratification in India, has been studied by several scholars. While it is recognized as a characteristic feature of the Indian society, some scholars feel that the British rule exacerbated caste divisions.¹¹ Carroll (1978) notes that “the growth of caste-cluster consciousness was largely an unintended but direct consequence of the fact that the foreigners engaged in a continuous attempt to describe, define, interpret, and categorize the social complexity that India presented to them”. It has also been argued that coloniality offered a modernity that could never be fulfilled, and hence the British could not, in any case, have addressed a deep-rooted inequality such as caste (Dirks 2001). A key treatise that helps understand the structural nature of caste has been advanced much earlier on, by Ambedkar in his paper *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* (1916). He understands caste as ‘enclosed classes,’ the difference being that castes do not have the ‘open-door’ character of class. This particularly unnatural property is maintained through endogamy, or marrying only within classes. It can be understood that to maintain and perpetuate caste, the critical rule is endogamy. Endogamy is enforced through strict social sanctions, and control over women and their sexuality, manifest through customs such as *sati*, enforced widowhood, and early marriage of girls (Ambedkar 1916).

Due to the fact that there was no marriage across classes, class groups morphed into ‘enclosed class’ or caste groups. While it was in the interest of the upper classes to maintain such rigid rules, this practice automatically ensured that lower classes too remained locked into the practice of endogamy. That is, in Ambedkar’s words, “*some closed the door; others found the doors locked against them.*” (ibid.) (However, Ambedkar also shows how rules of exogamy (or marrying outside a group) are imposed within communities within endogamous groups, making the final version of caste, a superimposition of endogamy upon exogamy). There are also exceptions, often of hypergamy where a man of a higher caste group is allowed to take a bride from a lower caste group (but not vice-versa). Ghurye (1990, 18) give examples, among others, of such caste groups in Kerala: upper

¹¹ Srinivas (1957, 530) calls it a ‘jinn freed by the British rule’.

caste Namboodiri men are allowed to take wives from the Nair community. However, these communities cannot marry from other communities and breaking of these laws of hypergamy could also lead to excommunication.

When he distinguishes that “caste is not just a division of labour, but a division of labourers” into graded water-tight compartment without mobility (Ambedkar 1936), he is offering an understanding of how caste is distinct from class where economic mobility allows moving into a different class. As such, the understanding he offers is that caste is a social structure that locks people into their hereditary positions without a possibility of transcending these, even with economic mobility. This also means that there is a significant caste-class overlap. (A. Deshpande 2000; Bhowmik 1992) This caste-class overlap carries on to other areas like access to higher education. (S. Deshpande 2006).

M.N. Srinivas(1968) appeared to differ, and suggested that there was indeed mobility. Before the British rule, this was brought about through processes of sanskritisation (where ‘lower’ castes adopt upper caste customs, particularly vegetarianism) and the ‘open agrarian system’ of India.¹² After the British rule, he argues there was increased mobility due to the opening up of new occupations that not just the elite, but others could also access, and access to legal mechanisms to protest dominant caste violence against them. He writes “the twentieth century has indeed witnessed a great increase in the quantum of mobility in the caste system, and sanskritisation played an important role in this mobility by enabling low castes to pass for high” (1968, 194). In this proposition, Srinivas’ argument is about a caste group at a lower station attaining respectability as a group. It has to be noted that this does not dislodge Ambedkar’s understanding where he talks about the impossibility of escaping one’s own caste group for an individual as long as endogamy is enforced.

Caste is very often at the centre of public deliberations in India over the contentious constitutional provision of affirmative action, also called ‘reservations’. ‘Reservations’ are constitutional safeguards to ensure that the most marginalized are represented in the educational and government establishments and legislative bodies in India.¹³ Opinions have been polarized about these provisions that effectively are Group Differentiated Citizenship Rights ((Jayal 2012). Some feel, as

¹² By ‘open agrarian system’, he means large cultivable land open to the lower caste people to settle in and cultivate – there was spatial mobility that led to social mobility

¹³ Article 15(4) and 15 (5) of the Constitution of India allows for special provisions for socially and economically backward classes including SCs and STs in educational institutions. Articles 16 (4), 16 (4A) and 16 (4B) addresses reservations for backward classes including SC and ST in government jobs. Article 334 provides for reservation of seats for SC and STs in the parliament and the legislative bodies of the state.

Srinivas does, that it has given a 'new lease of life' to caste (Srinivas 1957, 529), and is essentially reinforcing, not ending caste discrimination (P. B. Mehta 2004), particularly through vote bank politics (Bhambhri 2005). Many arguments, particularly by upper-caste individuals, have centred on the erosion of 'merit' that reservation promotes (See for instance, D. Kumar 1992). Supporters argue that it is necessary to bring about social justice (Mitra 1987; Ilaiah 2006; Vivek Kumar 2005). Using data from the National Statistical Survey, Thorat notes that in both ownership of businesses and educational attainment, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) are not represented proportionate to their share in the population (Thorat 2006). He writes, defending reservation policies that "if the lower castes possess few land and business assets and education it is because they do not have access to property rights and education. And if the higher castes are seen to have more of both, it is because access to assets and education was artificially 'reserved' for them at the cost of the lower castes" (ibid: 2006, 2433).

On a related note, there have also been acrimonious debates about reservation for women in legislative bodies, something I will discuss in a following section.

The fact that endogamy is connected to maintenance of the caste order, and the overlap of caste with class makes it imperative to understand the social realities of India through the prism of caste, gender and class. In the following section, I deal with understandings of gender that is useful to understand the social realities in India

1.3. Endogamy: Caste and Gender

At the outset, it has to be noted that discussions about endogamy has a gender component ingrained into it. Ambedkar (1916) saw this as the root-cause of the control of women in the caste society. Only strict adherence to endogamy could ensure continuance of caste – therefore, strategies such as child marriage, sati, and enforced widowhood were in place. Sati ensured that a widow did not become a surplus woman in the case of the death of her husband, and enforced widowhood (which was more humane) removed a surplus woman from active social life and interactions making her a lesser threat of breaking norms of endogamy. Child marriage provided sexual partners to surplus men (whose wives had died), and simultaneously ensured that girls were married before sexual maturity, decreasing chances of attachments across castes.

While endogamy was the norm, hypergamy (of men marrying women from castes lower than their own) were also accepted in situations. Examples of hypergamous marriages have been pointed out by several researchers, most notably Dumont (1980). Even as he cites breakdown of endogamy

due to hypergamy at a group's lower limit (1980, 124), it does not challenge the continuance of caste at the higher levels, particularly, patrilineal nature of these caste groups. Also, endogamous rules are not static: Blunt (1931, 8) notes that the same caste may have different rules in different regions, and circumstances, for example, a lack of availability of women from the same caste, may cause bending these rules to create new endogamous groups. In fact, Corwin (1977) concludes from her study of 'love marriages' in a small town in West Bengal (as against 'arranged' endogamous caste-based marriages that are the norm in India) that inter-caste marriages that are consistent with the social ranking system in the town and the rural social hierarchy is well tolerated. Hypergamy in Kerala are well-known, with the Namboodiri men, highest in the caste hierarchy being allowed to marry Nair women (Gough 1959). These hypergamous relations worked within a clearly drawn out system of rules that maintained caste: a first-born Namboodiri man is not allowed to marry a Nair woman, because his child has to inherit property and continue the lineage. A child from a hypergamous union, between Namboodiri men (who are not first-borns) and a Nair woman is treated as a Nair, the mother's caste. The child often has no contact with the biological father, and the mother's brother assumes the father's role. Thus endogamous control of property is maintained. From his analysis, Yalman (1963, 52-53) draws out the following

In order to keep the priesthood small, exclusive, and wealthy, only the eldest son is married. The women are completely secluded. If and when they marry their age may be anything. Pre-puberty marriage of the orthodox Brahmans (Iyer 1912, chap. XII) or the symbolic *tali-kettu kalyanam* of the Nayar and other castes which practise post-puberty marriage is unnecessary. The purpose of these pre-puberty marriages in ensuring the sexual purity of women is much more effectively served (indeed, the problem entirely eliminated) by the vigilant seclusion of all women. Thus, in terms of the caste structure Brahman women are the purest and those most exposed to pollution. In Malabar, the Tamil Brahmans and the Nambudiri Brahmans show the two methods of dealing with the danger: the former hide all women, the latter marry them in their childhood (Iyer 1912, vol. II, chap. XII)

Hypergamy may be accepted in some situations with the children allowed to take on the caste of the father. However, hypogamy, or a woman marrying a man from a caste lower than hers, was unacceptable. These marriages are called 'pratiloma' (or 'against the hair' or grain, as Yalman (1963) translates it). Yalman (1963) also points out the working of hypergamy and hypogamy in the Sinhala society and writes:

the sexuality of men receives a generous carte blanche. But it always matters what the women do: (a) They may have sexual relations with superior and 'pure' men. No harm

comes to them in terms of purity. (b) 'They may have children from 'pure' men; or from men of their own caste. But, if they engage in sexual relations with men lower than themselves, then they get 'internally' polluted. Moreover, they bear 'polluted' children. In such cases the woman is usually 'excommunicated' by the family. In the past, the Sinhalese used to drown both the woman and her children, for this was the most effective method to prevent the entry of 'polluted' blood into the caste or family. (Yalman 1963, 42)

Killing of men or women who cross caste boundaries, particularly with regards to hypogamous marriages are not unheard of, and is often referred to in popular parlance as 'honour killings'. Yilman concludes that "wherever we find the caste phenomenon, we may also expect to find preoccupations with 'dangers' to pure women." (ibid.,54) This is because castes always face a problem as to "how to make certain that only 'legitimate children' (i.e. with acceptable genitors), with 'legitimate' mothers, become members of a caste." (ibid)

However, Abraham (2014) notes in the case of Thiyyas of Kerala, (following what Beteille (1996) does for Tamil Brahmins), that endogamy practices within a community changes over time. The Thiyyas, who in the early colonial times, did not frown upon liaisons of Thiyya women with white men, started looking down on them in the early 20th century. Hence, she posits that "the ways in which endogamy was enforced, or seen as a value to be upheld, varied with a caste's consciousness and its aspirations at a particular historical moment." (Abraham 2014, 58)

Chakravarti (1993), pointing out that feminist scholars have not enquired into the interrelationships between caste hierarchies and gender hierarchies, arrives at a similar conclusion:

The need for effective sexual control over such women to maintain not only patrilineal succession (a requirement of all patriarchal societies) but also caste purity, the institution unique to Hindu society. The purity of women has a centrality in brahmanical patriarchy, as we shall see, because the purity of caste is contingent upon it...The safeguarding of the caste structure is achieved through the highly restricted movement of women or even through female seclusion. Women are regarded as gate-ways-literally points of entrance into the caste system. The lower caste male whose sexuality is a threat to-upper caste purity has to be institutionally prevented from having sexual access to women of the higher castes so women must be carefully guarded. (1993, 579)

Therefore, she identifies the social relations in India as being contingent upon the compliance of women – produced either through coercion or consent, and calls it 'brahminical patriarchy'.

Deniz (1988) understands the patriarchal order present in several parts of the world including India as a case of 'classic patriarchy'. Here, the household is patrilocally extended, and according to her, "The implications of the patrilineal-patrilocal complex for women not only are remarkably uniform but also entail forms of control and subordination that cut across cultural and religious boundaries, such as those of Hinduism, Confucianism, and Islam." (ibid, 278) Some features of classic patriarchy include among others, girls given away in marriage at a very young age, households headed by a senior man with authority over everyone else including younger men, women having no claim on the father's patrimony. Women's (especially young women's) labour is appropriated by the patriarchal household. The only reward, very often, is the eventual power they will wield in their old age over other younger daughters-in-law. She writes that

"The class or caste impact on classic patriarchy creates additional complications. Among the wealthier strata, the withdrawal of women from nondomestic work is frequently a mark of status institutionalized in various seclusion and exclusion practices, such as the purdah system and veiling. The institution of purdah, and other similar status markers, further reinforces women's subordination and their economic dependence on men. However, the observance of restrictive practices is such a crucial element in the reproduction of family status that women will resist breaking the rules, even if observing them produces economic hardship. They forego economically advantageous options, such as the trading activities engaged in by women in parts of Africa, for alternatives that are perceived as in keeping with their respectable and protected domestic roles, and so they become more exploitable." (ibid, 280)

While what Deniz identifies is a broad brushstroke of patriarchy, it can be seen that these hold true only in the case particularly the powerful 'upper' caste communities. Several discussions, including that of the dichotomy between the 'public' and the 'private' in feminist understanding implies a hierarchical, sexualized, binary order, of "private woman" versus the "public man" (Siltanen and Stanworth 1984). That is, it foregrounds the sexual division of labour that locates women's labour primarily within the household and men's in the public spaces. However, these do not adequately explain the different roles of women from 'upper' and 'lower' castes.

These discussions highlight that it is not possible to talk about gender in a caste-ordered society except as a caste-gender intersection. Arguably, all women cannot be the same since the accident of their birth determines their location in the social hierarchy. Therefore, it becomes necessary to speak of people's experiences as being shaped at their caste-gender intersections, and (and additionally complicated by class). In the next sections, I briefly discuss the concept of

‘intersectionality’ as it appears in academic literature, and how insights from this tradition is helpful to understand caste-gender-class intersections in India.

1.4. Intersectionality

Intersectionality as a theoretical framework emerged from Critical Legal Theory in the U.S., and was articulated by women of colour. The focus on intersectionality emerged from a critique of gender-based and race-based research since they did not account fully for lived experiences at the intersections of both. Although Crenshaw coined the term ‘intersectionality’ to encapsulate the multiple expressions and experiences of discrimination, there has been prior work in this complex area, for instance by bell hooks in 1981 in her book ‘Ain’t I a woman?’ Following this, there has been engagement about the intersections from feminists without using the as-yet-un-coined word ‘intersectionality’. For instance, Anthias and Davis write in 1983: “within black feminism the most dominant approach defines black women as suffering from the 'triple oppression' of race, gender and class. This approach is inadequate, however, both theoretically and politically. Race, gender and class cannot be tagged on to each other mechanically for, as concrete social relations, they are enmeshed in each other and the particular intersections involved produce specific effects.” (Floya Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983)

Crenshaw (1991) in her pioneering work has focused on male violence against women, and using examples of battering and rape, showed how the experiences of violence are influenced by intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and how these cannot be understood within the frameworks of feminism or anti-racism alone. She writes that “Where systems of race, gender, and class domination converge, as they do in the experiences of battered women of colour, intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women who because of race and class face different obstacles.” (ibid, 1246). She distinguishes intersectionality from anti-essentialism, where the anti-essentialist critique is that feminism essentialised the category of ‘women’. According to her, to say that identities of race or gender are socially constructed is not the same as saying that they have no relevance in the world. Hence, she contends that “Recognizing that identity politics takes place at the site where categories intersect thus seems more fruitful than challenging the possibility of talking about categories at all” Thus, the intersectional framework stresses on placing the experiences of oppressed women at the centre of analysis. This entails dwelling on the agency of the individual (using a bottom-up approach), and situating it within a structural analysis (using a top-down approach): the interplay between agency and structure, the individual and socio-political realities, predicates social change (Brewer, Conrad, and King 2002).

Grillo (1995) on the other hand, thinks a version of anti-essentialism and intersectionality can be mutually compatible. She understands essentialism as “the notion that there is a single woman's, or Black person's, or any other group's, experience that can be described independently from other aspects of the person-that there is an "essence" to that experience. An essentialist outlook assumes that the experience of being a member of the group under discussion is a stable one, one with a clear meaning, a meaning constant through time, space, and different historical, social, political, and personal contexts.” (1995, 19) While she points out that race and class cannot be subtracted from gender because they are inextricably linked, she sees it useful for anti-essentialism and intersectionality viewpoints to go hand in hand. She cites her own example of being a multi-racial person and not being the quintessential black or white person. She writes, “The confusion that a biracial child feels do not derive from being classified as Black, but from essentialist notions that being Black is one particular experience, and that this experience is not hers or his. Take for example a family, my family in fact, where one child appears so essentially "Black" that he sees no reason to look further for an identification, and the other is so fair, and so blond, that identity issues for her are a constant struggle.” Where at one time, she would have prioritized her experience of race to her gender, she now argues that the anti-essentialist intersectional approach would mean that one should not be asked to choose between one and the other because oppressions cannot be dismantled separately – they reinforce each other. So, for her anti-essentialist intersectionality is something that offers a way to speak about her own experience without compromising the community of black people.

Jordan-Zachery (2007) also points out that intersectionality enables us to stop essentializing differences. While she notes that its lack of methodological clarity is a hurdle in employing the concept, she writes that there needs to be a clarity among those who pursue research on intersectionality as to what they are doing so they can address ‘how to do intersectionality’.

Davis (2008) shows that not only the US Black feminist theory, but the postmodern theoretical perspectives were also influenced by intersectionality theory. She writes that “Critical perspectives inspired by poststructuralist theory – postcolonial theory, diaspora studies and queer theory – were all in search of alternatives to static conceptualizations of identity. Intersectionality fit neatly into the postmodern project of conceptualizing multiple and shifting identities. It coincided with Foucauldian perspectives on power that focused on dynamic processes and the deconstruction of normalizing and homogenizing categories.” (Davis 2008, 71) She outlines the several debates around intersectionality – regarding its methodology, its open-ended ambiguity, lack of clarity and scope, and its utility, and argues that it has become successful despite its weaknesses because of

the possibilities it offers. She writes, “The infinite regress built into the concept – which categories to use and when to stop – makes it vague, yet also allows endless constellations of intersecting lines of difference to be explored. With each new intersection, new connections emerge and previously hidden exclusions come to light. The feminist scholar merely needs to ‘ask (an)other question’ and her research will take on a new and often surprising turn. She can begin to tease out the linkages between additional categories, explore the consequences for relations of power, and, of course, decide when another ‘question’ is needed or when it is time to stop and why.” (ibid, 77)

Finding intersectionality a limiting concept, Anthias has proposed ‘translocational positionality’ (F. Anthias 2013; Anthias 2008) where “location and positionality are more useful concepts for investigating processes and outcomes of collective identification — that is, the claims and attributions that individuals make about their position in the social order of things, their views of where and to what they belong as well as an understanding of the broader social relations that constitute and are constituted in this process” (Anthias 2008, 491).

The several vibrant debates around intersectionality ensured that it caught on, and appeared in research in India too. However, as was the case with Western academia, research pursued before intersectionality became a buzzword did not use this precise term. In the section below, I try to understand how caste and gender has been addressed in research.

1.4.1. Intersections: Caste, Class and Gender in India

In the South Asian context, it is important to acknowledge caste, gender and class as the main axes of oppression. The relationship between caste, class, gender, and religion in India has eluded easy explanation and theorization. Several researchers have examined the intersections, particularly of caste and gender in their approach to understanding gender in India.

The role of women figured as a major concern since the early twentieth century, with the Home Rule Movement (Chaudhuri 1993, 101–36; Sen 2002), The *Charter of Indian Women’s Rights* in 1945 that advocated equality between sexes on the basis of Citizenship in India (Mehta 1981), participation of women in the nationalist movements for independence, and the debates around the Hindu Code Bill (Sinha 2012, 76–132). Early feminist articulations in India, while they recognized caste as a factor contributing to inequality, looked for nuance by categorizing women on the basis of class. For instance, *Status of Women in India* one of the first government documents to outline the feminist position in India states, adopting a class-based categorization:

While Indian society can be categorized by castes, communities, and classes, for our purpose, the most relevant broad categories are only three: (1) women below the subsistence line; (2) women who move continuously between security and subsistence and often descend below the subsistence line with the disappearance of their means of earning a livelihood; and (3) women firmly above the security line (Guba 1974, 5).

In the late 1980s, Feminism and patriarchy was posed in the plural, as feminisms and patriarchies, to account for the “different kinds of relationships of patriarchal practices with class, nationalist reform, social movements and colonization.” (Sangari and Vaid 1990). Even as caste could not be dismissed as a structural unit of analysis, and appeared in several narratives, it was overlooked often for class as the basis for analysis.¹⁴

The dilemmas around addressing caste and gender surfaced critically in the 1990s, in the post-Mandal period.¹⁵ The complexity in addressing caste, gender, and class has been articulated while discussing violence perpetuated against Dalits in India. Perplexed, they point to a dilemma that they face: “The problem of articulation (and indeed understanding) arises when Dalit men, having gained access to power, decide to adopt the methods of the upper castes in exercising this power. It is not uncommon to see Dalit boys molesting or passing derogatory remarks about upper caste girls.” (Kannabiran and Kannabiran 1991, 2123). This anxiety appears to stem from an assumption that there are group-differentiated patriarchies that would be practiced only within communities, and ‘lower’ caste patriarchy was to have no bearing in upper caste women’s worlds. In one of the early considerations about the issue, Chakravarti (1993) recognizes that the structure of caste is safeguarded by strict controls on women – their sexuality and mobility. Patriarchal caste-based social and political arrangements controlled ‘upper caste’ women’s sexuality by placing a premium on the idealisation of chastity and wifely fidelity in women - an ideal of *‘pativrata’* - which was rewarded by social honour. The ensuing system that made women complicit in their subordination was Brahmanical patriarchy (Chakravarti 1993).

Drawing out the history of feminist movements in India, Kumar (1993) details how feminists were countered by Hindu women who ‘appropriated their language of “rights,” as Hindus and as women, to commit, worship and propagate Sati.’ She states that debates invoking the binaries of rural-urban, tradition-modernity, complementarity-sameness, spiritualism-materialism and so on

¹⁴For instance, see Subaltern studies, volume IX, or *Recasting Women* (Sangari and Vaid 1990)

¹⁵ In 1989, the V P Singh-led Government of India decided to implement the recommendation of the Mandal committee (1980) to allocate 27% of the seats in public universities and government employment to OBCs. This led to several agitations by led by upper caste students and leaders.

were launched where feminists were pictured as urban modern materialists who were supporters of capitalist ideology (Kumar 1993: 173-175). Usha Menon's work on the upper-caste Hindu women in Orissa, an eastern Indian state, explores the intersections of caste-mediated privilege and the gendered private sphere¹⁶. She explains the experience at the intersection of caste and gender in positive terms for upper caste women and observes that these women celebrate their marital status by wearing symbols of being married, by accepting and enjoying the joint-family system of living arrangement, by valuing their lack of mobility, and highly regard their transplantation from their natal to the conjugal household (Menon 2000). She suggests that the only successful mass movement in India has been the struggle for independence and that feminism has had little success in mobilizing Hindu women. It would appear that such an identity-based crisis has always presented itself often in the women's movements in India. Differentiating between women's 'liberation' movements and women's 'equality' movements in India, Omvedt argues from a specific case-study of Maharashtra (and drawing from larger leftist mobilization in India, particularly Kerala) that class-based mobilizations were women's equality movements that, whilst they worked for economic equality and could mobilize a large number of the rural poor women, did not adequately discuss women's subjugation (Omvedt 1978). Such an argument where women's equality is instrumental to revolutionary mobilizations, and as being different from empowerment (brought about by addressing patriarchy itself) has been noted earlier.¹⁷

Indeed, considerations of caste within gender have not been invisible, having figured as a talking point in the debates about quotas for women in the Indian parliament. Women's groups arguing for quotas in representative institutions have been met with demands for quotas for 'lower' caste women within quotas, because of caste differences between women themselves (Rai 1999). Emphasising the role of the anti-Mandal agitations in revealing the fissures in the feminist articulations up until then, these, Tharu and Niranjana (1996) argue, reinforced the identification of upper caste women as 'women'. Lower castes were 'men'. (Writing almost a decade later, about the turmoil in the post-Mandal phase, Anupama Rao (Rao 2003, 5) also draws attention to the presence of autonomous Dalit and lower-caste women's movements that challenges a "unified and

¹⁶Here the author is not claiming to use the Intersectionality approach; rather, this work looks at identities that are formed at a particular intersection of caste-class-gender location. Hence, I am using it to throw light on intersectionality.

¹⁷There is a large body of literature that points out the instrumentality of women's development in the larger (neo-liberal) development agenda where gender equality could be achieved by larger work participation of women, as against addressing the social, political, and historical conditions that shape the subordination of women. In a study of the Cuban revolution and the promises it held for women, Harris points out that many similar measures like promoting work participation of women, and participation in the socialist revolution itself became valued (Harris 1995). These however did not substantially address the question of women's empowerment or liberation.

monolithic account of patriarchy-in-action” and necessitates revisiting issues of labour and surplus from the perspective of caste). This led to the search for ‘difference’ of Dalit women, articulated by Guru (1995) where he notes the presence of ‘Dalit patriarchy’ which subsumed women’s voices within the Dalit movement. On the other hand, Dalit women could not identify with the demands of the feminist movements too. Following this, Rege (1998) analysed two important movements: the Dalit Panthers, and the Women’s movement in India. She writes that the feminist acknowledgment of differences among women started seriously only in 1994– and argued that feminism in India was *savarnized* and Dalithood was masculinised.¹⁸

With the rise of the intersectionality framework in the West, ‘Dalit’ as an analytic category gained prominence and intersectionality in India came to mean discourses around Dalit patriarchy. For instance, in an edition of the Economic and Political Weekly devoted to intersectionality, the editorial advisory group writes that “in analysing the caste and gender matrix in Indian society, merely pluralizing the term patriarchy is not enough. The task is to map the ways in which the category “woman” is being differently reconstituted within regionally diverse patriarchal relations cross-hatched by graded caste inequalities” (Rege et al. 2013). The edition focused on the ‘Dalit’ women’s situation as part of an intersectional framework.¹⁹ Indeed, intersectionality in India has focused on the Dalit identity viewing it as a homogenous ‘identity’ group, ignoring that Dalit people themselves include men and women from several castes who are in hierarchical relationships, an argument advanced by Anandhi (2011) too.

Attention was drawn to the tensions between feminist and identity-based articulations by (N. Menon 2009) who writes that there can be fruitless debates on what the ‘primary contradiction’ is (is it caste, or is it gender?). Her view is that in different contexts the salience of caste and gender will vary even as each is prepared to ‘destabilize’ the other. Thus, she seems to imply a combative relationship between caste and gender identities in debates in India where one has to choose between one or the other, thus precluding a position where both caste and gender is seen as simultaneously constituting identities. This seems to have set off scholarship on the apparent contradictions between Dalit women’s assertions as against mainstream feminists (see Vasudevan 2015). Not too long afterwards, Menon (2015) writes that intersectionality does not capture the

¹⁸She explains that while the Dalit Panthers saw Dalit women as ‘mothers’ and ‘victimized sexual beings’, the Left party-based women’s organizations politicized ‘violence against women’. She further writes “while for the former ‘caste’ was contained in class, for the latter, the notion of sisterhood was pivotal. All women came to be conceived as ‘victims’ and therefore ‘Dalit’ so that what results is a classical exclusion. All Dalits are assumed to be male, and all women Savarna” (Rege 1998, WS42).

¹⁹ See articles published in EPW edition (of May 4, 2013) by Smita Patil, S Anandhi, Rekha Raj, Varsha Ayyar etc.

complexities in the Indian context, and rejects the concept. She draws attention to the role of universalizing western notions, as well as international funding in the spread of ideas of intersectionality, even as Indian feminism, she argues, has been accommodative of identities, and was not built on a single axis of 'gender'.

As the previous sections show, the interplay of gender, caste and class in India requires complicating our understanding of the experience of gender identities. Scholarly writings about gender within the development studies literature helps to understand how it has been dealt within the discipline.

1.5. Gender in Development Studies

In this section I will draw upon some of the key contributions in relevant to understanding gender as well as women's situation in the Global South for this research. The dichotomy between the 'public' and the 'private' in feminist understanding implies a hierarchical, sexualized, binary order, of "private woman" versus the "public man" (Siltanen and Stanworth 1984). That is, it foregrounds the sexual division of labour that locates women's labour primarily within the household and men's in the public spaces. Moser (1989) questions this male breadwinner- female home maker model and argues that there are more roles that women do. Calling it the triple role framework – where women do productive, reproductive, and community roles – Moser (1989) clarifies that "The spatial division between the public world of men, and the private world of women (where the neighbourhood is an extension of the domestic arena) means that men and women undertake different community work.

Within this framework, she talks about planning to advance women's interests and more specifically, gender interests which include both strategic and practical gender needs. Strategic gender interests are those that have strategic objectives such as the abolition alleviation of the burden of domestic labour and childcare, the removal of institutionalized forms of discrimination, the attainment of political equality, the establishment of freedom of choice over childbearing, and the adoption of adequate measures against male violence and control over women (Molyneux 1985, 233). Ability to pursue these, and to choose them are important to understanding empowerment according to Kabeer (2005). According to her, "Strategic life choices include where to live, whether and whom to marry, whether to have children, how many children to have, who has custody over children, freedom of movement and association, and so on. These help to frame other choices that may be important for the quality of one's day-to-day life, but do not constitute its defining parameters" (2005, 14).

1.6. Theoretical Framework

Discussions above show that theorising the interaction of caste, class and gender vis-à-vis citizenship in India, requires special attention to the idea of social citizenship. This makes a focus on power relations in a community that gives rise to differential access and experience of citizenship necessary. The discrepancy between political equality and social inequality that Ambedkar highlighted at the time of founding the new constitution was not a new debate in citizenship. Jayal (2013, 5) writes that such a discrepancy, once flagged by a young Marx, was addressed by Marshall.²⁰ It was Marshall's view that political equality and social inequality were compatible despite the exercise of citizens' rights, that "basic equality, when enriched in substance and embodied in the formal rights of citizenship, is consistent with the inequalities of social class." (Marshall [1950] 1992, 7) Jayal (2013 pointing out that democracy and citizenship need not necessarily entail each other, raises this question that is pertinent regardless: "under what conditions can democracy be an instrument for the realization of citizenship?" (ibid, 6).

In India, rights granted so that marginalized groups for representation in education, employment and political bodies is understood as group differentiated rights. Theoretically, this conflicts with the universalist notions of citizenship. Jayal (2013) points out that whereas the rights of universal citizenship attach itself equally to all citizens of the political community, 'cultural difference' is the basis of claims for differentiated rights. This reading reduces differences to 'cultural,' as against the idea of differential citizenship proposed by Young (1989) who sees differentiated citizenship as a mechanism to provide representation and recognition for the oppressed and the disadvantaged. For young, the forms of oppression can take exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and vulnerability to violence motivated by hatred and fear. This conceptualisation provides more leeway to talk about the structural nature of inequalities in India. It also helps understand the constitutional provisions for advancing the situation of some marginalized caste, ethnic and religious communities in India. However, Jayal (2013, 203) views this as leading to a philosophical anxiety: if universal citizenship views the individual as the 'exclusive basic unit of the political universe whose membership of the state may be unmediated by community,' differentiated citizenship allows for a 'centrality of community' that leads to 'questions about how

²⁰ Jayal (2013, 286-287) writes, drawing from Marx (1963, 12): "In his work *On the Jewish Question*, Marx argued that while the state abolishes the distinctions of birth, social rank, education and occupation by declaring that these are non-political distinctions and that 'every member of society is an equal partner in popular sovereignty,' it nevertheless 'allows private property, education, occupation, to act after their own fashion.... And to manifest their particular nature'"

best political institutions can be tailored to represent its interests, especially where the identity of a community is also linked to claims of disadvantage.’

The social origins of citizenship from the European city-state and its later development by the nation-state has been traced by Turner (2000). Citizenship that emerged in the modern period, developed by the nation-state, by implication, excludes and subordinates various social groups that falls outside its framework. This has been the experience of various aboriginal groups in white-settler societies, especially in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. Turner views Marshall’s concern with citizenship as one that specifically addresses “how to reconcile formal equality with social class divisions... The Marshallian answer to the problem of capitalism versus democracy was the welfare state.” (ibid, 6)

The idea of social citizenship rights, formulated in a positive way, implied an active and interventionist state, writes Steenbergen (1994, 3). “These social rights are meant to give the formal status of citizenship, a material foundation. A certain level of material well-being is guaranteed, which enabled the citizen to exercise his or her rights to full participation in the community.” (ibid.) This is the aspect of citizenship that is mostly ignored, one that is never used in assertions in the USA, writes Fraser and Gordon (1994).

People who enjoy ‘social citizenship’ get ‘social rights’, not ‘handouts’. This means not only that they enjoy guarantees of help in forms that maintain their status as full members of society entitled to ‘equal respect’. It also means that they share a common set of institutions and services deigned for all citizens, the use of which constitutes the practice of social citizenship: for example, public schools, public parks, universal social insurance, public health services. (ibid, 90).

Hence, they point out that the absence of social citizenship in a society where civil citizenship is an emphatic presence is conspicuous. That is, civil citizenship rights are seen as a contract, whereas social citizenship rights provided by a welfare state are seen as charity. Therefore, Marshall’s vision that “universal education and health services would eventually help dissolve divergent class cultures into a ‘unified civilization’ by progressively decoupling real income from money income” and that “the minimum standard established by public provision would in time, be raised so high as to approach the maximum so that the extras the rich could buy would be mere frills” (Fraser and Gordon 1994, 93) remained merely wishful thinking.

Marshall's evolutionary form of citizenship drawing from the British experience where it developed from civil rights into political rights and then expanded to embrace social rights has been criticized for making it appear that civil and political rights precede social rights. There are several forms of citizenship that have emerged in 'different circumstances of political and social modernization in contemporary societies.' (Turner 2000, 11) So, he suggests that a unitary theory of citizenship is inappropriate, and that 'if citizenship can develop in a context with differences, differentiation and pluralism are tolerated, then citizenship need not assume a repressive character as a political instrument of the state.'

More recently, Isin and Nielsen (2008) have attempted to bring a new direction to the study of citizenship, focusing on what they call 'acts of citizenship'. This, they write is to move away from citizenship understood merely as status or practice, and to focus on the deed, rather than the doer. Hence, what they propose is a shift from "the institution of citizenship and the citizen as individual agent to acts of citizenship – that is, collective or individual deeds that rupture social-historical patterns" (*ibid*: 2). These acts "disrupt habitus, create new possibilities, claim rights... and are the actual moments that shift established practices, status and order. Acts of citizenship should be understood in themselves as unique and distinct from citizenship practices in the sense they are also actively answerable events, whereas the latter are institutionally accumulated processes."

Not many studies examine citizenship in the Indian context. Corbridge et al (2005), in their book 'Seeing the state' examine the spaces of citizenship that are created by the government in India. They acknowledge the state institutions, the individuals who make up these institutions, and interactions between the state and its citizens. Their focus is on how the state becomes visible to people, either through participatory provisions or the mechanisms of decentralised governance. They portray a state that is examined against the constituency that it is most accountable to in India: the poor people. However, the caste, class, and gendered nature of working of the state, and how that informs the working of the state and the interactions of people are not elaborated in detail.

The departure of this work then, from previous studies, is in examining how these structural aspects inform the working of the state and shape experiences of its citizens.

Analysis in the later parts of the thesis, after empirical examination, will try to understand the experience of citizenship. Literature review already gives material to rouse curiosity about the actual experience of citizenship. If exclusion is experienced, what is the status of Marshallian social rights: how have we in India, move past the narrower idea of citizenship as a legal and political

status, to an idea of citizenship as a social right? India already has group-differentiated rights. How do they enable attaining the universal experience of citizenship? If ideas of differentiated citizenship rights indeed inform our understanding, does the experience of citizen enable:

- 1) self-organization of group members so that they gain a sense of collective empowerment and a reflective understanding of their collective experience and interests in the context of the society;
- 2) voicing a group's analysis of how social policy proposals affect them, and generating policy proposals themselves, in institutionalized contexts where decision makers are obliged to show that they have taken these perspectives into consideration;
- 3) having veto power regarding specific policies that affect a group directly (ibid, 262)

Examination of empirical material will be done through a few key ideas: social citizenship, differentiated citizenship, intersections of caste, class, and gender, and endogamy as a key principle that upholds caste and its several manifestations. It is helpful to keep in mind, what Aloysius (1997) set out about the nature of the Indian society:

The society and history of pre-modern India cannot be reduced to the dialectics of castes; several other contradictions such as gender, class, ethnic-region etc., were operational throughout its long history. However, the overarching form of contradiction, providing a scaffold for all others, suffusing both base and superstructure of society was caste. Within this framework the different contradictions aligned and jostled for primacy. Gender oppression appeared as a function of caste patriarchy; class relation expressed themselves as Jajmani relations and patterns of land ownership and cultivation rights; and relations between regional and ethnic communities at both micro and macro levels were expressed in caste terms. Conversely, attempts to rescue these different contradictions – gender, class, and ethnic-region – were invariably part and parcel of most anti-caste movements. (Aloysius [1997] 1998, 32),

In fact, he concludes that Indian nationalism succeeded in securing independence, but a nation based on the notions of social citizenship, rid of the ascriptive inequalities of the old caste order failed to emerge. Even as the masses clamoured for sharing power, the elites refused to step into modernity and insisted on the traditional socio-political order – thus a new political community was not forged. (ibid, 243-244)

Thus, it can be seen that the idea of social citizenship appears to be one that is still being debated and deliberated and in India, is yet to take off in a full sense.

Following these discussions, it is helpful to briefly recapitulate the theoretical understandings of caste, class and gender that inform this study:

- a) The Marshallian idea of ‘social citizenship’ is key to understanding the experience of citizenship in India, Insights from the feminist criticisms of conceptualization of citizenship are important to understand the experience of citizenship in public and private spaces. Arguments regarding group-differentiated citizenship rights are also relevant to understand citizenship in India, given there are group differentiated provisions for access to education and employment. Criticisms of ‘participation’ advanced by the good governance agenda are also helpful in understanding citizenship in practice.
- b) Caste is seen as the key determinant of social structure in India. The inter-relations of caste and gender will draw from Ambedkar, where endogamy is identified as the key feature of caste, critical to maintain caste order is enforced through controls over women and sexuality. There is also a caste-class overlap. Caste has percolated even religions like Christianity that did not originate in the subcontinent.
- c) Intersectionality is a useful tool to envision the intersections of caste, class, gender, and religion. In the absence of contextualisation of intersectionality in India, this study will not directly borrow directly from the ‘intersectionality’ approach in the West. This is primarily because it does not assume that ‘race’ can be substituted with ‘caste’, or ‘black’ woman can be substituted with ‘Dalit’ woman, as most studies on intersectionality in India have done. While some researchers and activists compare race and caste, and some disagree with this (see for instance, Beteille 1990; Das 2014; Panini 2001; Gupta 2001; Visvanathan 2001), this research does not enter that debate. This work adopts the position that that caste and race are systems of stratification that originated independently (even though there are similarities in the manifestations of oppression), and these need to be understood differently.

Chapter 2. Methodology and Fieldwork

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. The first is to discuss the methodology adopted for this work through a brief discussion of previous studies of citizenship. The second is to elaborate on the field and field work, including outlining the ontological and epistemological position. Finally, I reflect in this chapter on the way these methodological choices enabled me as well as posed challenges, and in doing so, I try to shed light on certain dilemmas that require more attention, as well as the ethical considerations of this study.

2.1. Methodology of Relevant Studies of Citizenship experience and the State

In the last two decades, there have been increasing efforts to link the idea of citizenship as a status to its practice. Almost all of these studies rely on qualitative methodologies to account for the various aspects of people's identities that influence their practice or experience of being a citizen. For instance, a study conducted in the backdrop of the 2001 riots in Britain (which had undercurrents of racial tensions) among British Pakistani Muslims discusses the role of identity, religion and ethnicity to understand how they contextualized citizenship. The authors note that "Ensuring that all the respondents were Pakistani and Muslim was important, as those involved in the riots were predominantly from a Pakistani background. Religion was important because it provides a sense of cultural identity when considered in conjunction with a person's 'ethnic' background. This is an important mediator of a person's experience and understanding of the events in Bradford in 2001..." (Hussain and Bagguley, 2005). This study used interviews and focus group discussion with thirty-four first and second generation British Pakistani Muslims – both men and women. Another research on citizenship experience uses accounts of twenty-eight British Muslims – nineteen men, and nine women. Their experiences in public spaces and its implications on their citizenship are studied using qualitative semi-structured interviews (Hopkins and Blackwood 2011). This research too recognizes the centrality of identity in individual experiences, including those of universal citizenship, even as they caution against the reification of these categories.

Attempts to theorize a particular experience as structural often comes from a feminist viewpoint, in recognition of the structural nature of patriarchy. For example, Miraftab and Wills (2005) studied an anti-eviction campaign in South Africa outside formal invited spaces for participation as citizens. This study drew on a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with members and leaders of the anti-eviction and anti-privatization movements. They paid attention not just to particular actions of the movements against evictions but also to the race and gender composition

of those who participate and create these spaces. A study in Tapalpa, Mexico has explored citizenship through ethnographic fieldwork by looking at how citizens 'know' their history – by not just examining whose voices are accorded importance on town matters, but also who are perceived as the knowers of history. This work lays bare a disjuncture in the experiences by arguing that there are different practices of citizenship in relation to the state of Mexico, and to the town of Tapalpa (Stack 2003).

Another study by Louis Ackers approaches the study of citizenship qualitatively, focusing on the experience of woman migrants into the European Union. He argues that there is “a hierarchy of entitlement based on gendered assumptions about employment, family relations, and migration behaviour. At the top of the hierarchy, EU nationals in paid employment (and their children) have full independent entitlement to equal treatment in the social advantages of the host member state. A second tier provides derived entitlement for the legally married spouses of EU migrant workers for as long as their marriage and their spouse's status as a "worker" persist (i.e., the "worker" is not voluntarily unemployed or deported for any reason). Finally, a third category of citizenship exists that gives rise to very minimal social entitlement, requiring those who claim a right to free movement to demonstrate financial autonomy (Ackers 1996: 329). Indeed, Miraftab (2004) writes that examination of the relatively unstudied spaces of citizenship practice – of informal politics – would make an important contribution towards an inclusive reformulation of informal politics. Sassen underscores the lacunae in research on citizenship: “the theoretical and empirical distance that has to be bridged between the recognized world of politics and the as yet unmapped experience of citizenship of the housewife—not of women as such, but of women as housewives—is a distance we encounter in many types of inquiry. Bridging this distance requires specific forms of empirical research and theorization” (Sassen 2002, 15).

The challenge in such an undertaking is that it has to deal with “the ideological structures of the state and its practices of rule, which are imbricated in the translational structures of economic and political governance, and the ways in which the ‘struggles over the state’ and hegemonic articulations of nation-hood constitute citizenship through differential inclusions and erasures.” (Roy 2010: 16). A few studies in India have accounted for the functioning of the state in citizenship practice, again through qualitative means. To expand the study of citizenship to its practice, Philippa Williams attempts to examine “actually existing citizenship” in India and how it operates as a ‘lived experience’ (Williams 2015). In her work in slums with a Muslim community in Varanasi, she extensively documents life in the locality. Through interviews, she tries to bring out how within the restricted terms of secularism in India, individuals and groups ‘realize and recast their claims

to citizenship within society and the state' (Williams 2012: 991). Yet another study by Shani also focuses on the exclusion faced by Muslims along religious lines in India, and how the notion of citizenship in India has come to acquire multiple meanings for diverse communities in the nation (Shani 2010). However, this paper draws on historical documents and published reports, and is an analysis of a process, not the practice of citizenship itself.

Studies that explore the structural aspect of caste and the experience it creates are similarly rare. Among studies relating to citizenship in India, there have been very few attempts at locating citizenship experience within the caste-ordered social structure. A study among nurses from Kerala who migrated to Delhi addresses the regional identity differences that surface despite being in the same country. This study, carried out among 150 nurses employs questionnaires and in-depth interviews to show how gender identity continues to exclude participants from public spaces even as citizenship rights offered them several possibilities in an anonymous new space (Nair 2007) Another study by van Teeffelen and Baud in a city in South India studies the e-governance mechanism to illustrate how different classes – lower and middle classes – exercised their citizenship rights differently. They use a combination of several qualitative methods – including transect walks, conversations, snow-balling interviews etc. in the locality for their study. They find that the working-class, low-income population did not find these new mechanisms to their advantage whereas the middle-classes found themselves empowered through these strategies. (van Teeffelen and Baud 2011)

One of the most useful descriptions of the deprivation and exclusion faced by Dalit women comes from Dhaka, Bangladesh. (Islam and Nasir Uddin 2009) Even though the focus of the study was the political participation of Dalit women, the authors of this paper argue that it is not possible to delineate one aspect of exclusion from another due to the intertwined nature of caste, class, and gender in shaping the condition of Dalit women in society. This study used a well-rounded methodology – combining focus group discussions, interviews, life histories, attending several meetings and secondary sources. This is similar to the methodology adopted by Kabeer and Kabir (2009) in their study in Bangladesh, where they explore the position of individuals in an unequal social order – determined through ascribed relationships of family, kinship, caste, etc. – that influences the state-society relationship, and hence the realization of citizenship rights. This is examined through semi-structured in-depth discussions with the working poor who were participants in civil society organizations that work with these social groups, so as to test the hypothesis that 'belonging to alternative associations whose membership is not given by position in the social order holds out the greatest promise for democratizing the social order' (ibid:3).

To summarize, as evidenced by the aforementioned studies, qualitative methodology seems best suited, indeed indispensable, to understand both how social inequalities inform the state, as well as how people's experiences shape their interaction with the state. Very often, interviews are used in combination with other methods like focus groups, questionnaires, ethnographic methods etc. to arrive at a better understanding of the social conditions that shape these experiences. It has to be noted that most of these studies have focused on one particular group identity – be it gender (women), class (for example, low-income or middle-class), religion (for example, Muslim), migrants (to the UK, for instance) or even caste (for example, Dalit women) – what has been called intra-categorical complexity (McCall 2005).

Methodology of intersectionality research

McCall (2005), in trying to address the question of methodology of intersectionality research, arrived at some distinctions. Drawing from several studies, she describes three approaches that satisfy the demands of complexity: 1) anti-categorical complexity, 2) inter-categorical complexity, and 3) intra-categorical complexity.²¹ As an attempt to capture the differential experience of citizenship, particularly interactions of members of several communities with the state, this research takes the second approach, that of inter-categorical complexity; that is, one which requires that “scholars provisionally adopt existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions.” (McCall 2005:1773).

It can be seen that engagement with this aspect in India has focused largely on intra-categorical complexity of intersectionality, which means that ‘identity’ of particular groups have surfaced without reference to ‘identity’ of groups at various intersections. This research, on the other hand, will adopt government classifications as provisional categories. A study relevant in this context is by Corbridge et al (2005). In their book ‘Seeing the State’, they look at people’s encounters with the state at the local level, through what they call ‘sightings of the state’ and ‘sightings of others’. They adopt two ways to accomplish this. The first is to look at the ‘human technologies of government – the census, the national sample survey, and discourses about shame and backwardness’ (ibid:10). The second is through information from two development/research

²¹The first approach is called anti-categorical complexity because it is based on a methodology that deconstructs analytical categories. Social life is considered too irreducibly complex—overflowing with multiple and fluid determinations of both subjects and structures—to make fixed categories nothing more than simplifying social fictions that produce inequalities in the process of producing differences. The third approach is called *intra-categorical complexity* because authors working in this vein tend to focus on particular social groups at neglected points of intersections. (McCall 2005: 1773-4)

projects in three Indian states – where income support, empowerment and protective functions of the state were studied through questionnaires as well as conversations with key informants at various levels of the state – the block, district and state levels.

Similarly, Madhok (2013) in her book ‘Rethinking Agency’ undertakes an ethnography of Women’s Development Programs. She trails *Saathins*, female development workers, shadowing, observing, and interviewing them. She also examined ‘policy papers, state documents and feminist commentaries’ to understand the ‘conceptual framework that informed the evaluative judgments of the feminist groups and state actors’. Visweswaran’s account of feminist ethnography that foregrounds the question of social inequality is instructive. In exploring how caste, class, and gender operate, intersect and interact with the state to shape citizenship experiences, she writes that ‘feminist ethnography can be defined as ethnography that foregrounds the question of social inequality vis-a-vis the lives of men, women and children. She feels that ‘gender cannot be understood *a priori*, apart from particular systems of representation’. To mistake the category for the reality is to reduce it to a male/female dichotomy mistakenly constituted in advance of its operation in any system of social representation” (Visweswaran 1997).²² Several studies have used an ethnographic approach to understand citizenship, and interactions with the state. Gupta and Sharma (2006) have employed an anthropological approach for a similar purpose, to understanding the state – through investigation of two development programs of the Indian state. This involves ethnographic observation and interaction with the state and people at many levels, and these authors argues that this allows for a 'nuanced appreciation of continuity across historic transformations' by 'considering the interplay between political economy, social structure, institutional design and everyday practices and representations' (Gupta and Sharma 2006: 278).

2.2. Research Paradigm

Following the earlier discussion, In the Indian context, I adopt an approach that looks at inter-categorical (not intra-categorical) complexity. Before explaining the fieldwork methodology, I briefly explain the research paradigm and ontological and epistemological positions adopted here.

2.2.1 Paradigm, Ontology, and Epistemology

This research is based on the ontological²³ categories of caste, class, and gender. There is some greyness involved in using clear categorizations of problematic notions of caste, class, and gender.

²²While Visweswaran is particularly dealing with feminist ethnography, this insight seems useful to apply to caste relations too.

²³Ontology, according to Greene (2006: 93) are assumptions about the nature of the social world.

It can well be argued that caste, class, and gender are social constructs. However, the categories defined by caste, religion, gender, and class operate and are experienced in social life. For instance, in one of the early studies on caste relations in India²⁴, M.N. Srinivas wrote: "As I have described earlier, the older villagers cast me in the role of a Brahmin and a landowner. By so doing, they were able to make me behave towards them in certain predictable ways, and they in turn were able to regulate their behaviour to me. I may have spent many years in Bombay and abroad but that did not alter my caste or my belonging to a landowning family. I had, like everyone else, to be categorized, and without categorization, regular relations were impossible" (Srinivas 1980:164 - 165). To study the society by ignoring these categories which regulate social relations is tantamount to starting from a position of a naive outsider, which I am not. Hence, for me doing a study in my hometown, I believe an ontological position that recognizes the categories of caste, class, religion and gender is the most meaningful one.

Here, I am adopting a structural understanding of caste, class, and gender and using these as the basis of my categories for research purposes - people tend more likely than not, to experience and live their lives as belonging to these categories. Following the explanation offered by Trouillot (1995), individuals are seen simultaneously as 'agents', as 'actors' and as 'subjects'.²⁵ Also, in this research, I am taking a position that a) social structures have causal powers, and that b) not all social phenomena and the relationships between them are directly observable, but positing their existence gives the best explanation. This means that the work doesn't qualify as strictly positivist or interpretivist, and falls into the paradigmatic position that is understood as a realist. (Marsh and Furlong in In: Marsh, David and Stoker 2002: 17 – 41, Grix 2004: 77 - 99). Bates and Jenkins clarifies that 'realism *is* an ontological position', and 'depth realism *is* relativist at an epistemological level' (emphasis theirs). They argue that central to critical realism is its claim to combine and reconcile ontological realism, epistemological relativism, and judgmental rationality (Bhaskar 1998 in Bates and Jenkins 2007: 59).

²⁴In his book 'A remembered village' where he devotes three chapters (5, 6, and 7) to gender, caste, and class each. These are titled 'The sexes and the household', 'Relations between Castes', and 'Classes and Factions). These serve to illustrate the importance of these categories in India.

²⁵Although mentioned in the context of interpreting History, Trouillot understands a social process as one where people are involved in three distinct capacities: 1) as agents, or occupants of structural positions, 2) as actors in constant interface with a contest, and 3) as subjects, that is, as voices aware of their vocality. Examples of agents are the "strata and sets to which people belong, such as class and status, or the roles associated with these". By actors, he means "the bundle of capacities that are specific in time and space in ways that both their existence and their understanding rest fundamentally on historical particulars." As subjects, he means that people as who define the very terms under which some situations can be described... as powerful subjects who are aware of their own voices." (Trouillot 1995: 23-34)

While Marsh and Furlong argue that ontology and epistemology is related in that ontology affects epistemology, Bates and Jenkins feel that this is at best a contested perspective. More specifically, in dealing with the ontological and epistemological concerns of categories, Dixon and Jones argues that epistemology precedes ontology. Their position is that "the ontological divisions between physical and social phenomena, or between individual agency and socio-spatial structure are the result of an epistemology that segments reality and experience in order to comprehend them both." Asking how such categories that draw boundaries of the individual emerges, they feel that 'variables structured upon categories and their derivatives are not "natural" in any "real" sense, but are the socio-historical outcomes of representational processes - analysis therefore must first begin at the epistemological level' (Dixon and Jones 1998: 250)²⁶.

In consonance with the requirement to understand the individual in a way that incorporates all the complexity of his/her location, standpoint epistemology is compelling to use for this research. Standpoint epistemology developed from feminist criticisms regarding women's absence from, or marginalized position in, social science (Maynard 2004). This is both a theory of knowledge building and a method of doing research – an approach to knowledge construction and a call to political action, writes Brooks (2006). In locating the oppressed woman at the centre, it demands that 1) the world be understood through the experiences of oppressed women, and 2) the vision and knowledge of oppressed women be applied to social activism and social change (Brooks 2007:56). This approach seems the best equipped to understand how the intersections of caste, class, and gender operate by locating the experience of marginalized women at the centre. In India, Rege, recognizing that there are 'multiple/plural feminist standpoints,' (1998, WS-39) suggests a Dalit feminist standpoint: this is a shift from acknowledging 'difference' to locating the social relations that convert differences into oppression. Along these lines, indigenous-standpoint epistemology has been proposed by Kjosavik (2011) based on her study amongst indigenous peoples in Kerala.²⁷ Although an important epistemological contribution, these are deemed

²⁶This argument has been forwarded from a post-structuralist perspective, but I am not convinced at this moment that my work is post-structuralist. I look forward to suggestions from the committee for suggestions on refining my understanding of ontology and epistemology.

²⁷ Kjosavik concludes her argument for indigenous standpoint epistemology thus: "Such a conceptualisation of indigeneity has the potential for the development of a revolutionary consciousness, which would facilitate the forging of class alliances and other working class movements ... the key question then emerges: is political mobilisation based on identity politics capable of addressing this situation? I would argue that alliance based on class politics are all the more relevant at this juncture. A materialist conception of indigeneity would facilitate an alliance of working class movements and indigenous people's movements in their struggles". This formulation is deemed insufficient because a) even though it takes into account indigeneity and class, in failing to incorporate 'gender' as an analytic category constituting intersectionality, it takes away the theoretical value of intersectionality, and b) much more importantly, by privileging class-

insufficient because a) even though it takes into account indigeneity and class, in failing to incorporate 'gender' as an analytic category constituting intersectionality, it takes away the theoretical value of intersectionality, and b) much more importantly, by privileging class-based struggles, and attaching more value to the positioning of ethnicity-based struggles inside the class struggle,²⁸ it takes away the political rationality of intersectionality (being that oppressions cannot be prioritized and have to be seen acting in confluence with each other).

At this point, it is pertinent to point out that although this research allowed the centering of marginalized identities, as intersectionality approach does, there was no assumption that as a researcher, I will fully transcend my own caste-class-gender position in India, that of a middle-class lower-caste Christian woman, and identify for the purposes of this research as a poor Dalit woman. In fact, as the following sections will show, it not only be impossible but also undesirable. I will show in the subsequent sections in this chapter, the Indian version of standpoint epistemology is insufficient and problematic. I will clarify my own position towards the end of this paper, and elaborate on my own location and role in the research. In some ways, this work is an attempt to move towards an epistemology that embraces the variety of marginalized social locations that intersectionality throws open in the Indian context.

2.2.2 Methodology

This work is conceived as an interdisciplinary research. Harriss (2002) has discussed the need to surmount disciplinary rigidities to understand development processes. He underscores the need for cross-disciplinary work, and suggests that one of the ways to overcome disciplinary barriers is "through more rigorous interdisciplinary exercises that attempt to integrate the theoretical and methodological frameworks of different disciplines" (2002: 488). The interdisciplinary nature of this work derives from

based struggles, and attaching more value to the positioning of ethnicity-based struggles inside the class struggle,²⁷ it takes away the political rationality of intersectionality (being that oppressions cannot be prioritized and have to be seen acting in confluence with each other).

²⁸She concludes her argument for indigenous epistemology thus: "Such a conceptualisation of indigeneity has the potential for the development of a revolutionary consciousness, which would facilitate the forging of class alliances and other working class movements ... the key question then emerges: is political mobilisation based on identity politics capable of addressing this situation? I would argue that alliance based on class politics are all the more relevant at this juncture. A materialist conception of indigeneity would facilitate an alliance of working class movements and indigenous people's movements in their struggles" (Kjosavik 2011: 131).

- a) its exploration of the concept of citizenship that is broadly discussed within the discipline of political theory, but of late is being discussed in different academic disciplines making citizenship studies interdisciplinary (Isin and Turner 2002:4),
- b) this work being informed by the approach of ‘intersectionality’ that originated from critical legal studies (see Crenshaw 1988, 1989, 1991),
- c) a sociological engagement with caste and gender,
- d) a nature of enquiry that contributes to political-economy understandings, located as it is in Kerala’s political and development experience, and
- e) its borrowing from the methodology of ethnography that owes much to the discipline of anthropology.

The methodology of intersectionality, that is, how to study it has posed a challenge to its study. Mc Call (2005) states that feminists have tended to focus on the complicated ones like ethnography, deconstruction etc. to study intersectionality and its demands of complexity. She describes three approaches that satisfy the demands of complexity: 1) anti-categorical complexity, 2) inter-categorical complexity, and 3) intra-categorical complexity²⁹. As this is an attempt to capture the complex processes of shaping citizenship, I am not focusing on a single marginalized group at the intersections, but on the many possible intersectional combinations. Having made a matrix of intersectionality with 36 categories (see Table 2.1), I am aware of the challenges this poses, mainly in terms of complicating the fieldwork and post-fieldwork analysis.

As the matrix below shows, there are 36 combinations possible at the intersections of caste, class, gender, and religion in the locality (Table 2.1). Arbitrary government classifications – Scheduled Castes (SC), Other backward castes (OBC) and Forward Castes (FC) are, for purposes of this research proxies for the graded hierarchal caste order. Caste within both Christianity and Hinduism is recognized in this provisional matrix.

²⁹The first approach is called anticategorical complexity because it is based on a methodology that deconstructs analytical categories. Social life is considered too irreducibly complex—overflowing with multiple and fluid determinations of both subjects and structures—to make fixed categories anything but simplifying social fictions that produce inequalities in the process of producing differences. The third approach is called *intracategorical complexity* because authors working in this vein tend to focus on particular social groups at neglected points of intersections. (McCall 2005: 1773-4)

Table 2.1: The intersectionality matrix

Caste- Religion	Gender	Upper class	Middle Class	Poor
SC Hindu	Woman			
	Man			
SC Christian	Woman			
	Man			
OBC Hindu	Woman			
	Man			
OBC Christian	Woman			
	Man			
FC Hindu	Woman			
	Man			
FC Christian	Woman			
	Man			

2.3 Fieldwork Methods

In line with the methodology, mixed methods – both quantitative and qualitative - were adopted for this study. Many researchers have reflected upon the possibilities of using both methods. For instance, Yin writes that “Using mixed methods within the confines of a single study can simultaneously broaden and strengthen the study. However, a continuing challenge is to maintain the integrity of the single study” (Yin 2006:41). Mixed methods research is defined as one where “the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study.” (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004: 17)³⁰. These researchers distinguish between two types of mixed research methods: the mixed-model (mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches within or across the stages of the research process) and the mixed method (the inclusion of a quantitative phase and a qualitative phase in an overall research study). For the purposes of my study, I am adopting a mixed-method research. This

³⁰These authors settle on Pragmatism as a way to resolve the contradictions arising out of taking puritanical positions about using qualitative or quantitative methods”. The pragmatic position that they outline is one where “practical consequences and empirical findings to help in understanding the import of philosophical positions and, importantly, to help in deciding which action to take next as one attempts to better understand real-world phenomena”

means that I am using both qualitative and quantitative methods separately for my study in different phases. Of the methods elaborated by them, I will be utilising bottom-left method of ‘QUAL+quan’ where both methods are employed separately, and qualitative methods have a dominant status, without a sense of progression from one method to the other.

Figure 1: Mixed methods matrix

		Time Order Decision	
		Concurrent	Sequential
Paradigm Emphasis Decision	Equal Status	QUAL + QUAN	QUAL → QUAN QUAN → QUAL
	Dominant Status	QUAL + quan QUAN + qual	QUAL → quan qual → QUAN QUAN → qual quan → QUAL

Note. “qual” stands for qualitative, “quan” stands for quantitative, “+” stands for concurrent, “→” stands for sequential, capital letters denote high priority or weight, and lower case letters denote lower priority or weight.¹¹

Source: Johnson and Ommuegbuzie (2004: 22)

The rationale for employing this particular mixed method of ‘QUAL+quan’ is what has been identified as ‘complementarity’³¹. This implies a common purpose for combining qualitative and quantitative methods, which is, “to use the results from one method to elaborate, enhance, or illustrate the results from the other” (Greene et al 1989:266). These authors also feel that when complementarity is the purpose of mixed methods, both quantitative and qualitative methods should be used of examine “overlapping phenomena or different facets of a single phenomenon”. To take account of the inter-categorical complexity within an overall approach that is qualitative, some quantitative tools are necessary. This was to arrive at some broad summaries about the profile of the respondents, and to guide a structured sample selection. Therefore, mixed methods – using both quantitative and qualitative – predominantly ethnographic, were adopted to answer

³¹The rationale for mixed method research has been identified to be five-fold: a) Triangulation, Complementarity, Development, Initiation, and Expansion. For a full discussion on the rationale for all methods, see Greene et al 1989.

the central research question: *What are the processes through which citizenship is differentially experienced by people at different social locations?* Several researchers have reflected upon the possibilities of using mixed methods.³² Mixed methods research is defined as one where “the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study.” (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004) These researchers distinguish between two types of mixed research methods: the mixed-model (mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches within or across the stages of the research process) and the mixed method (the inclusion of a quantitative phase and a qualitative phase in an overall research study). For this study, I adopted a mixed-model research where I used both qualitative and quantitative methods across various phases. At this stage, it is important to clarify that while I adopted questionnaires as my tool for collecting primary quantitative data, this was not extensively used as a method of analysis. Questionnaires were tremendously useful as an entry-point into conversations, the questions working as guides for semi-structured interviews that focused on experiences and interactions with the state.

2.3.1 Qualitative methods

Ethnographic data gathering techniques were the most important of the qualitative methods used during fieldwork³³. Tilly (2006) writes that as a method, it “engages the analyst in looking at social processes as they unfold rather than reasoning chiefly from either the conditions under which they occur or the outcomes that correlate with them”. The following methods were used for fieldwork.

- 1) Participant observation – This was one of the most important data collecting techniques that I used. Participant observation implies that the researcher studies people in their own space and time, thereby gaining a close and intimate familiarity with them and their practices³⁴(Bray 2008). I observed people and their interactions in: a) public spaces - like the *gramasabha* (local council meeting), public meetings, work sites, etc. and b) in their own surroundings – at home, and in interactions with family, neighbours and friends.

³² For instance, Yin writes that “Using mixed methods within the confines of a single study can simultaneously broaden and strengthen the study. However, a continuing challenge is to maintain the integrity of the single study.” (Yin 2006: 41)

³³I borrow from Willis and Trondman (2000, 5) who write: “What is ethnography for us? Most importantly, it is a family of methods involving direct and sustained social contact with agents and of richly writing up the encounter, respecting, recording, representing at least partly in its own terms the irreducibility of human experience.”

³⁴It has been noted that a variant of participant observation called ‘observant participation’ is often used to describe fieldwork in contexts in which the researcher is personally involved outside the immediate context of her academic work.

- 2) Open-ended in-depth interviews – this is another tool which enabled me to have a more in-depth conversation with people in the field. Often questionnaires were the entry points into in-depth interviews, and the responses of individuals to the questions often led to in-depth interviews, without plans to do so.
- 3) Conversation – Often people whom I engaged with in conversation ended up sharing interesting experiences and observations. Quite frequently, these were discussions on pressing issues of the day, with a mutual give-and-take of information.

2.3.2 Quantitative tools

The primary quantitative tool used for data collection was the questionnaire. The data collected is used to present some basic information about the caste, class and gender composition of respondents. While the idea was to undertake a deeper quantitative analysis of information collected using the questionnaires, the complexity and detail of fieldwork necessitated that I abandon quantification. However, as mentioned earlier, questionnaires were very helpful in the process of fieldwork – they provided convenient entry points for conversations with people with whom, otherwise, the possibility of a deep conversation would not have existed. I particularly have in mind people who lived in remote locations within the ward, or households whose members did not attend public activities or meetings. The questions were prepared keeping in mind the fact that this was to be an indicator, and entry point into a possible detailed interview. Hence, there were both closed as well as open-ended questions. The questionnaire is included in Appendix 1. I have also used quantitative information from secondary sources – like census reports, data collected by the ward functionaries and through the gramapanchayat handbook. These will be compiled in the next chapter to draw a picture of the population and living conditions of people.

To sum up, to address the first sub-question, *‘How do social inequalities inform the functioning of the state?’* I will simultaneously analyse the discourses legitimized by the state – in this case, of the local gramapanchayat, as well as human technologies of government – the panchayat-level census data and panchayat handbook. I will look at discourses in state-sponsored public meetings, inauguration programs, publicity material and information on government websites.

To address the second question *‘How do people experience the state differently depending on their social location?’* I draw from in-depth interviews, conversations and discussions with people in the ward as well as the ward functionaries, and particularly focus on the experience of ward functionaries – both men and women from various social locations – to afford a well-rounded view of the way

social inequalities shape their interaction with the state. The table 2.2 below shows how the central research questions are broken down into sub-questions.

Table 2.2. Research Questions, Sub-questions and Fieldwork Methods

Research Question	Operational questions	Fieldwork Method
<p>How do social inequalities inform the functioning of the state?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do social divisions have any bearing on the geography of the ward and its welfare programs? 2. How do local elected representatives address ward members in meetings - as citizens or beneficiaries? Do they reinforce stereotypes about communities and categories – lower caste communities, women etc? 3. Are they challenged or held accountable for any wrong or discriminatory statements that they make? 4. What are the discourses legitimised by the state in the field site? 5. Do structural social inequalities find reflection and validation in the discourses of the state? 	<p>Participant Observation, Conversation, Discourse analysis</p>
<p>How do people experience the state differently depending on their social location?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do individuals from different social locations have different experiences with the state? 2. Have educational and health benefits/achievements of the state led to dissolution of caste barriers and enabled social mobility for marginalized groups? 3. Have the achievements in the state of Kerala led to breakdown of endogamous caste rules and movement towards a casteless society? 	<p>Questionnaires, Conversation, in-depth interview</p>

2.4. The Field and Fieldwork

To consider the research questions within the development experience of Kerala necessitates selecting for fieldwork a locality that has a good experience of the Kerala model of development – that is, has had communist mobilizations, has a vibrant political culture, good implementation of panchayat schemes, and has active decentralized governance mechanisms. Oridam gramapanchayat is one such locality in Central Kerala. This panchayat has a very active network of the state-sponsored women’s groups called the Kudumbashree. It also performed well in the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). When compared against the state average, the average days of employment provided by the panchayat to the workers were far higher, particularly in the years immediately preceding fieldwork.

Table 2.3 Average Work Days Through MGNREGS in Oridam gramapanchayat

Progress	FY 2016-2017	FY 2015-2016	FY 2014-2015	FY 2013-2014	FY 2012-2013
Average days of employment provided per household (State average for Kerala in parenthesis)	Not Available	41.49 (49) (post-fieldwork year)	55.7 (43)	74.17 (57)	69.55 (55)

(source: *nrega.nic.in*)

There are constituencies in Kerala that have elected the same candidate or party for several consecutive terms. A change of leadership is seen as a more vibrant exercise of democracy. Oridam is an appropriate location since both of the two main political parties³⁵ have been elected to power in the panchayat council for significant alternate periods.³⁶ thus providing for vibrant politics. Oridam also has a rich history of communist mobilizations and political activism in the 1960’s making it an integral part of the Kerala story of development, and therefore, making it

³⁵The Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) are the two main coalition fronts comprised of left-leaning parties, and other oppositional parties respectively. Power alternates between these coalitions every year in the state elections, as well as in the chosen field. At the time of fieldwork, the UDF was in power both at the state-level, and in Oridam. Currently, the LDF is in power at the state-level.

³⁶ 1979-1984 – LDF, 1984-1988 – Administrative rule, 1988-1995 – LDF, 1995-2005 – UDF, 2005-2010 – LDF, and 2010-2015 - UDF

meaningful to critically interrogate it within the Kerala development story.³⁷ Additionally, being in the same region of Kerala that I grew up in, I was able to follow the local dialect of Malayalam that was spoken in these parts, thus enabling me to capture nuances of communication. Finally, I had some familiarity with the location during an earlier field work stint, and field work here was meaningful in terms of a long-term engagement with the locality. For fieldwork, one ward council was chosen. This choice, of Perur ward, was made during the field work period after interactions with panchayat officials and elected representatives, based on their recommendation. In the next chapter, I will present a more well-rounded picture of Oridam panchayat, as well as Perur, the ward in Oridam where fieldwork was eventually carried out.

2.4.1 Fieldwork

In this section, I will outline the process of field work and towards the end, reflect on my role as a researcher in the locality.

Field work was carried out in broadly three stages. The first stage involved re-establishing old contacts and making new ones at the field site and narrowing down a location within Oridam for fieldwork. The second was to be a participant observer of the working of local bodies, by attending various public events in the field site – I attended *gramasabha* meetings, inaugural functions and other programs in the panchayat, meetings of men’s self-help groups and met women workers at MGNREGS work sites. At this stage, the questionnaire was also prepared. The last stage of fieldwork was devoted to in-depth interviews. At this stage, from a list of all households in the ward, purposive random sampling – purposive to include people from all class and caste backgrounds – was used to select 101 households using the full list of households prepared by ward functionaries. The sampling was done with the help of a local ward functionary to ensure proportionate representation of all categories of participants. Women comprised 65% of the respondents. This is not only because women were more often present in households, but also because women chose to answer questionnaires more often as the questions were asked by women. Even though couples or entire family members have talked to me, the woman in the household whom I first talked to has been recorded as the main respondent.

³⁷These were mobilizations, sometimes militant, of the agricultural labourers spearheaded by the Kerala State Karshaka Thozhilali Union (KSKTU), the agricultural workers union of the Communist Party. The basic demands included improved working conditions and better pay.

During the initial days of fieldwork, the plan had been to identify individuals belonging to the 36 different social locations (as in table 2.2). Soon after fieldwork started, it became clear that while it was possible to identify individuals from SC, OBC and FC backgrounds from Hindu religious background, it was not possible to do the same for those from Christian community. There were no Christians in the area who fit into the government classification of SC or OBC. All Christians were classified as FC. This was not because all of them were from upper caste backgrounds, but due to the fact that caste among Christianity, even as it had been recognized in academic literature was yet to reflect in government classifications. And government classification was the basis for these provisional categories. In the absence of such an arbitrary grouping, it was not possible to use the intersectionality matrix without some modifications, as I will show in chapter 7. This was one important change that had to be accounted for – as such, it required me to stick to government classifications, and while I remained sensitive to some stark differences in the backgrounds and social capital across the Christian community in Perur, a deeper elaboration into the experience of caste within Christianity was not possible in that particular field site. (This does not mean that a study in another site in Kerala where Christians classified as SC and OBC exist will have the same limitation.)

Hence, during fieldwork, I used purposive sampling to select individuals to approach for my study based on the following criteria: government caste category (SC, OBC, FC), religion (Hindu, Christian), and Class status (Upper, middle, lower). The class-status was not based on any pre-existing data about family or individual income. Indeed, such a data source would be non-existent/difficult to find. What was available was the list of Below Poverty Line (BPL) beneficiaries, all of whom were considered to be poor, and from whom, I chose a few individuals to represent various other social location. Selecting upper and middle class individuals was based on the subjective assessment of the class situation of individuals by the Kudumbashree functionaries – they often knew each and every individual mentioned in the list. Their assessment often matched up with my own assessment when I met the respondents. In the end, the final matrix that I worked with looked like this:

Table 2.3: The intersectionality matrix, revised after field work

Caste- Religion	Gender	Upper class	Middle Class	Poor
		Christian	Woman	
	Man			
SC Hindu	Woman			
	Man			
OBC Hindu	Woman			
	Man			
FC Hindu	Woman			
	Man			

This matrix has 24 subject positions. However, not all of them are equally represented. For instance, I did not come across an individual in the SC category who was ‘upper class’ in the same way that a FC Hindu man was. The most well-off SC individual I found was a retired government employee, but even his financial position could at best have been ‘middle class’. Similarly, it was difficult to find more than a couple of FC individuals who were ‘poor’. At best, many of them, who described themselves as being in financial difficulties, were still better off in comparison to the financial position of several poor SC or OBC household. This means it is will neither be proportionate, nor even possible to find an equal number of individuals belonging to each category.

That is, while these 24 subject positions were theoretically feasible, and could have had same probability of occurring across caste locations, in practice, the caste-class overlap was acutely sensed. Therefore, as fieldwork ended, I found it more useful to keep caste and gender as the key analytic categories, and class as being secondary, and to a good measure contingent upon caste. I will revisit these points in Chapter 7 where I look at individuals in various subject position.

In addition to individuals in various subject positions of this matrix, I also spoke to the lone Muslim family that does not belong to any of the positions above – however, I have not analysed the data because of absence of comparisons with other members of the Muslim community.

The plan, during the initial days, had also been to dwell more directly on questions concerning citizenship. This was included in the questionnaire (see questions 11, 12 and 13 in Appendix 1). I based the feasibility of these questions on the fact that '*pourathvam*' (citizenship) was a much-used word in Malayalam, invoked in popular and public discourses. Hence, I expected that such questions could be reasonably answered by the respondents. However, as fieldwork proceeded, it became clear that neither was my field assistant able to ask this question without stumbling, nor were the respondents able to fully grasp the question. On the other hand, open-ended questions about education, health and living spaces prompted rich and detailed answers. These questions set off sharing of life histories, and old forgotten stories of people, places and incidents. Therefore, I use answers to these questions the most for answering the second central research question.

Likewise, while Kudumashree and MGNREGA was of interest to me in the initial stages of research, I decided while in the field to limit my analysis to how the Kudumbashree functionaries involved themselves in the activities of the local government. I also decided to not analyse the MGNREGA scheme in detail, focusing instead on the discourses in the panchayat. This was because of two concerns: first, a previous research I had undertaken in the area had investigated some of these aspects, and I wanted to avoid overlaps of the findings. Second, during fieldwork, more nuanced processes including the relatively little noticed Men's Self Help Groups as well as other contestations over resources like water (see chapter 4) came to light. Pursuing these were exciting from a researcher's point of view. Hence, substantial changes occurred during fieldwork from what was initially planned.

Before I move onto the analytical chapters, it is relevant to explain some of my experiences during fieldwork that often posed challenges to me as a woman who quite identifiably belonged to the same socio-cultural background. Both reflexivity and positionality were important throughout this research: not just during fieldwork, but also in the earlier planning, and the later writing-up stage.

2.4.2. House-hunting or Experiencing Gender/Religion/Caste

The plan, when I started fieldwork, was to find a house to stay at the field. After I renewed some of my contacts in the field, I started house-hunting. I requested the ward councillor, some women ward functionaries and also the ward coordinator to help me find a place to stay. One of the things I realized during this process was that the field site was a locality where there were

more or less permanent residents, and people did not move in or out very frequently. The nearest town was fifteen kilometres away, because of which this was not a preferred location for people to move into. As a result, houses for rent were hard to find. Some of the early options suggested had to be ruled out as they were unsafe for me to stay at alone as a woman. After some days, I had been offered four options, none of which worked out.

The first option came up while I was at a ward council meeting where the ward councillor announced that I was a researcher looking for a place to stay at. He also separately mentioned this to someone present at the meeting, and this man said that he had a house for rent. He enquired after all my personal details and seemingly convinced that there was nothing suspicious about me, offered to arrange a viewing right away. Saying he would be back in five minutes with the keys to the house, he went out. He returned rather quickly, said he could not find the keys, and that anyway, he was sure the house would not suit me. Although I figured that something had happened in those five minutes, I was unable to guess what that it was.

The second option came up at yet another meeting where I met the ward councillor and reminded him that I was looking for a place to stay. He suggested that there was an unused house in a safe residential location, the owner being away at Delhi, and could be made available for me for the duration of my fieldwork. He called up the care-taker of the house and discussed with him about letting it out to me. The care-taker pulled him aside and discussed something in hushed tones. Finally, he came up to me and said that the house belongs to a 'pisharody'³⁸ and asked me if I ate meat. When I said 'yes', he said that in that case, he could not let the place out to me. Understanding that this was about notions of caste and pollution, I said I am not particular about eating meat, and shall cook only vegetables in the house. Despite this, he refused.

The third option was suggested to me by a female ward functionary. This was a small room at one end of a house belonging to a wealthy upper caste individual. When the ward councillor was told of this option by the female functionary, he dismissed it as unsuitable with a flat 'No' without any explanation whatsoever. Although caste was once again the reason that crossed my mind at that time, it later emerged that the upper caste family was also a strong Communist party sympathizer, which traditionally is the rival to the Congress party that the panchayat president represented. This could also have been a reason for the ward councillor's refusal.

³⁸ 'Pisharody' is a caste whose members take care of temples and make flower garlands for the deities.

The fourth house was an almost certain bet. The ward functionary who recommended it to me said that the owner, a woman in her early sixties, had recently been widowed. After the husband passed away, she had locked up the house and gone to live with her daughter as she was not comfortable living alone. She would appreciate having a female lodger since it would give her some company. The owner was from an intermediate caste, and the house was located at the edge of a 'colony', the spaces of 'lower' caste dwellings. This seemed like a good arrangement, and I was to be put in touch with the owner. I was however not, and when I contacted the ward functionary again, was told that the owner preferred to continue living with her daughter and did not want to come back to this house.

This was when I formally stopped looking for houses and decided to stay at my own home – which was nearly an hour away from the field site – and travel to the field regularly. I did not know the reason why the first and the third houses were denied to me until much later, when I became familiar with people in the field. One day towards the end of field work, a ward functionary asked, "Why do you think the man who went to take the keys came back without them?" I said I did not know. She continued, "He asked me about you. He thought you were one among them and wanted to confirm it with me. I told him, "No, no, she is one among us'." 'Them' referred to the 'higher' caste, of the man who was the owner of the house. 'Us' referred to the community the ward functionary and I belonged to: Christians.

As to the house of the widowed woman, the explanation came from the owner herself whom I met a few times during fieldwork. As we settled comfortably into a conversation, she said, "Had I known you, I would have let you stay with me. But I did not know anything about you then. So I asked a lady about you and she said you were married. I then asked the woman who got in touch about the house, and she said you were not. This did not sound quite right to me: how can a married woman be mistaken for an unmarried one or vice versa? Then I thought you might be one of those women with a dubious past. I talked to my son and daughter about this confusion and they also felt it was best to not let out to a woman whose past we could not be sure of." The confusion was not without merit: I had mentioned to one woman that I was married, but not to the other. Unlike most married women, I wore none of the markers of a married woman, because of which the woman I had not disclosed my marital status to assumed I was unmarried. As a person who was an 'insider' in this context, identifiable conformity to some of the important social norms seemed important, if only to get an entry into the community

without being judged. Indeed, my gender and community had already become important to the field work experience.

2.4.3. 'Madam from the top'

One of the first things I did in the field site was to familiarize myself with its geography (more about this in the next chapter). I walked with a ward functionary through the length and breadth of the ward to see where different institutions were located, where various residential areas, schools and other buildings etc. were. Along the way, I was introduced to people who would stop by to have a chat. This was what a conversation occasionally looked like:

Passer-by (P): What's up? Who's this girl with you?

Ward functionary (W): This madam has come from London to do some research here. I am showing her around.

P: Oh, is she from the panchayat?

W: No, no. She is higher up than that. She is from the 'top'(sic), from London.

At that point of time, most of my life had been spent in Kerala, and I had lived in London for under a year. I felt uncomfortable with this introduction and shared this with the woman with me. However, she wilfully ignored it and went about introducing me thus to everyone she could. Introducing me as an 'outsider', as someone from the 'white' world (even though I looked just like another local woman, a shade darker if anything) was a matter of pride, something that boosted her standing among people in the locality. My status as an insider was less worthy than my status of being a researcher from London.

This presented a unique problem. I believed that the field was home, and my insider position meant that there was no 'hierarchy of purity of field site' as pointed out by Gupta and Ferguson (1997, 13). Fieldwork was not to study the 'other' as an 'outsider. Before fieldwork, I had reflected on the statement that "the ethnographer's perspective has effectively to become that of both an 'insider' (emic) and an 'outsider' (etic) (Agar 1996), and by taking this emic and etic perspective, I had sought a balance of subjectivity (Bourdieu, 1997 in Tilly, 2006) and aimed to arrive at a balanced position. In the field however, it seemed that my position as an 'outsider' was more valued, at least as I started out. While these dilemmas resolved themselves as people got used to my presence, this presented a conflict in the initial days of fieldwork.

Finally, I draw attention to some incidents during field work that were disconcerting for me as a researcher.

2.4.4. Caste Through the Process of Fieldwork

This brief section is about how local caste dynamics affected field work.

I had as my field assistant, a middle-aged woman who accompanied me for a few days. We shared a very warm relationship. Two things troubled me despite this. One was her liberally mentioning to others that she was related to the vice-president of the panchayat, and that her father's family name was the same as that of the ward councillor's. This was her way of revealing her 'upper' caste status and family connections. I found it inappropriate on several occasions, especially when her audience belonged to less-privileged people. This immediately put a gap between me and the people we were interacting with. While I wanted to approach them on more neutral terrain, her revealing her upper caste identity was an indication of caste pride, and sharing it in front of me made people assume that I shared it too. In fact, she did not stop there, but took the liberty of airing her views against caste-based affirmative action in India while talking to people who were entitled to these. This was a major *faux pas* as far as I was concerned, because a) It amounted to discriminatory attitude, b) I did not share her view, and c) this was a deeply polarizing topic to bring up casually. This meant that I had to often gently disagree with her, particularly if she shared it in front of people entitled to these benefits. To disagree in this context was deemed as an ethical imperative.

The second instance that registered strongly in my mind and disturbed me for a few days was when, to a man who asked about it, I mentioned that I belonged to the Latin Catholic community. There was a sea-change in his tone, which had been respectful until then. He asked almost derisively, as if he had just outed a lie, 'You are a Latin Catholic, eh?' The casteist undertones of this comment were very evident. Latin Catholics are very different from the dominant Syrian Catholics in Kerala who claim to be converted from Kerala's upper caste Brahmin communities. Latin Catholics are predominantly coastal folk, particularly from fishing communities, and are extremely marginalized, living in precarious situations. By default, this man assumed that I was a Syrian Christian. His tone implied that I had somehow lied, misled, or tried to pass as an upper caste individual, which I had not. The only way he arrived at these assumptions would have been through the fact that I was studying in London, which indicated class status and educational achievement, traditionally correlated with upper caste status.

Through some days of turmoil when I felt my integrity as a researcher challenged, I wondered: How was a person from a marginalized community in a vertically stratified society supposed to do ethnography? As certain as I was that I had done nothing wrong, I had not been prepared for the derision I detected in the tone of my respondent.

2.4.5. Crisis of Positionality

The researcher usually is assumed to be, by default, an upper caste person. In my case, the privilege of being a ‘madam from the top’ broke down very quickly and I was reminded of my social location – religion, caste and gender – in stark ways. These experiences, unique to those who inhabit less privileged social locations, offer a new way to conceptualize ethnography from the viewpoint of the marginalized. How had positionality, particularly relating to caste, been addressed academically? What space did I, a Bahujan woman, inhabit as an academic?³⁹ This was my crisis of positionality. This default ‘upper’ caste, upper class social location ascribed to the researcher is what Chacko, another researcher doing fieldwork in India draws out:

In the course of my interactions with villagers, I realised that the prevailing view was that I was an upper-caste (and -class), educated urban woman. Even after villagers had questioned me about my religious affiliation and it became clear I was not Hindu, the upper-caste myth persisted, probably because a high socioeconomic standing is often associated with upper-caste populations. (Chacko 2004, 55)

In this situation, the researcher is confused by the default assumptions, but do not seem to have faced a finer caste breakdown of her Christian identity as I did due to my ‘insider’ status.

Subramaniam, who identifies as an educated, upper middle-class, upper caste woman doing research abroad seem to locate caste as something external to her, out there among others. She writes,

The restrictions upon entry into the village’s main area are well understood by the harijans, who may attend a meeting of the panchayat village council, but cannot venture along the way or afterward near the households of upper-caste groups. These were the

³⁹ ‘Dalit’ and ‘Bahujan’ are political assertions. ‘Bahujan’ in Hindi literally means ‘the masses’ – and refers to the large population of ‘lower’ castes who bear the brunt of caste inequality. Several activists and researchers have used ‘Dalit’ interchangeably with the governmental category of Scheduled Castes. Latin Catholics are classified as Other Backward Castes (OBC) by the Government of Kerala. I politically identify as a Bahujan woman.

caste rules I had to be aware of in order to interview the dalit women.... I did not decline food or water when offered by women from dalit households, to ensure that I was not perceived as an upper-caste woman conscious of being “polluted” by her respondents. Being cognizant of these issues was strange: They would be inconsequential associating with people from my own caste and class. (Subramaniam 2009, 210)

These experiences made me aware that many researchers have been able to write ethnographies with relative ease because they inhabited privileged positions ascribed to the researcher, without being conflicted like I was. In fact, instances described by the celebrated Indian anthropologist M.N. Srinivas in his book *The Remembered Village* (1978) shows how, during fieldwork, he benefitted immensely from his position as a Brahmin man. It is interesting to read even now, his conformity to expectations by villagers to behave *like* a Brahmin researcher. The excerpt below is an example where Srinivas describes finding a cook for himself:

After some searching, I found (such) a person in our domestic cook’s younger brother, a young man barely out of his teens, who wanted to earn some money while waiting for a job. Everyone assured me that he was a ‘good boy’, and he was willing to learn how to cook. It was also pointed out to me that he was a Brahmin from an orthodox family and this was helpful as elderly villagers would expect me to behave like a Brahmin. I discovered later that the advice given to me was extremely sound – Nachcha, my cook, was a social success with the men who mattered... (Srinivas 1980, 9–10)

‘Caste in Life’ (2011), a book that explores how Indian academics encountered caste in their lives, offers an interesting snapshot of positionality being obfuscated, by taking one’s own social location to have no consequence on how research is done. One academic, after elaborating his upper caste family history and experiences, declares quite ironically that ‘Caste (and religion) is a non-reality for me at a personal level.’ What is extraordinary is that it comes only three-hundred-odd words after this statement: ‘I can think of no better punishment for my worst enemy than that he should be born as a SC/ST woman in one of India’s backward district in his next life.’ (Debroy 2011, 5)

In the light of the above comments, it is worthwhile to examine the excerpt below, written by another Indian researcher.

Not only did my positionality change regarding different participants, it was also in flux within single field events. For example, after one urban mother commented on ‘our’ social position as ‘Indian women’ prior to an interview regarding her daughter’s schooling, she immediately ascribed a higher social position to me in socio-economic terms during the interview when talking about her job: I go to people’s houses in the housing colony to wash clothes. I go to the homes of like ... like people of your status ... (Srivastava 2006, 215–216)

It is interesting that the difference in positionalities of the researcher and the respondent is understood as a ‘socio-economic’ one, one that the researcher later on identifies as ‘social class group’. Similarly, in her self-reflexive account about ethnography in India, Parameswaran (2001) draws attention to her background of being an urban, middle-class Indian woman from Hyderabad who is also a graduate student in the United States. She writes:

Differences in class, cultural capital, and my affiliation with America were responsible for my pleasant experiences with library owners, most of whom were lower middle class and did not have any formal education beyond high school. My position as an “America-returned” academic, which provoked many questions about material life in the United States, brought home to me the mythic aura of America that now surrounded me. (Parameswaran 2001, 82)

While she often identifies class as an enabling factor in her fieldwork, caste – neither hers, nor her respondents’ – is paid attention to. It is the class-caste overlap that enables researchers to locate themselves and their respondents in ‘class’ terms, to collapse caste into class analysis. But this is an insufficient acknowledgment of social realities. Reluctance in acknowledging caste is somewhat surprising, since there is a significant body of feminist work that recognizes the importance of positionality. (Haraway 1988; Lewis 1996; Rose 1997; Scott and Shah 1993) As Moore (1994, 78) writes, ‘feminist politics and feminist practice have always required a clear sense of position and of the politics of location.’

Stack (1993) retrospectively writes about doing fieldwork as a young, “white, working-class, politically active, single mother” in an African-American community, and the ensuing tensions generated by political beliefs and positions. Naples (2003, 13–33) reflects on the evolution of her own positionality as a feminist researcher as she engaged with various feminist

epistemologies. Assumed superior locations of researchers have also been problematised. hooks questions feminist scholarship, and writes about whiteness and maleness as critical factors contributing to the perception of authority and expertise (Hooks 1989, 42–49).

The problem of location of those who produce knowledge is one that researchers from Indian background have been keenly aware of and engaged. Critical insights by Mohanty (1988) as to how images of ‘third world women’ are constructed by Western feminist work on women and how that ‘countries. She writes that it is in the production of this 'third-world difference' that ‘western feminisms appropriate and colonize the constitutive complexities which characterize the lives of women in these countries. It is in this process of discursive homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world that power is exercised in much of recent western feminist writing, and this power needs to be defined and named.’(Mohanty, 1988, 63) Mani (1990) writes about her own location as a third-world woman, ‘a Marxist-feminist who had come to feminism in India’, for whom living in the United States intensified certain ‘modes of knowing’. (1990, 30).

Narayan (1993) asks pointed questions about the location of researchers,

Can a person from an impoverished American minority background who, despite all prejudices, manages to get an education and study her own community be equated with a member of a Third World elite group who, backed by excellent schooling and parental funds, studies anthropology abroad yet returns home for fieldwork among the less privileged? Is it not insensitive to suppress the issue of location, acknowledging that a scholar who chooses an institutional base in the Third World might have a different engagement with Western-based theories, books, political stances, and technologies of written production? Is a middle-class white professional researching aspects of her own society also a “native” anthropologist? (p. 677)

While several researchers wrote about their location vis-à-vis readers outside India, their locations within India have not been explicit. Nevertheless, the social location of those who produce knowledge, particularly theory, in the social sciences in India have come to be problematized from the 1990s onwards. Guru (2002) warns about an ‘epistemological imperialism’ that is exclusionary, and shows commitment to scholarship, not to the cause. He characterises the situation of hierarchy within the academia using caste terminology: that of Theoretical Brahmins and Empirical Shudras. Jodhka (2009, 37) too points out the same and

writes that “the history of anthropological knowledge production from India has been shaped by a body of overwhelmingly upper-caste male scholars and their preoccupations, while no Muslim, Christian, Dalit or tribal scholars are present.”

One way through which this criticism was addressed was through coining something called ‘dalit feminist standpoint’ (henceforth DFS) drawing directly from the Standpoint feminist theories. It is useful to examine the evolution and claims of DFS that emerged in India. Arguably, it was formulated as a claim to counter Gopal Guru’s argument that ‘Dalit women talk differently’. He made this claim to argue that feminism in India, due to its upper caste and upper class nature, did not capture the realities of dalit women in India (Guru, 1995). Against this backdrop, it is instructive to read the rather brief formulation of DFS that Rege offers in her response. She writes,

Though Guru's argument is well taken and we agree that dalit women must name the difference, to privilege knowledge claims on the basis of direct experience on claims of authenticity may lead to a narrow identity politics. Such a narrow frame may in fact limit the emancipatory potential of the dalit women's organisations and also their epistemological standpoints... The dalit feminist standpoint which emerges from the practices and struggles of dalit woman, we recognise, may originate in the works of dalit feminist intellectuals but it cannot flourish if isolated from the experiences and ideas of other groups who must educate themselves about the histories, the preferred social relations and utopias and the struggles of the marginalised. A transformation from 'their cause' to 'our cause' is possible for subjectivities can be transformed. By this we do not argue that non-dalit feminists can 'speak as' or 'for the' dalit women but they can 'reinvent themselves as dalit feminists'. Such a position, therefore avoids the narrow alley of direct experience based 'authenticity' and narrow 'identity politics'. For many of us non- dalit feminists, such a standpoint is more emancipatory in that it rejects more completely the relations of rule in which we participated. (Rege 1998, WS 45).

A brief discussion about the standpoint theory that evolved in the West as part of deep discussions and deliberations in the 1970s and 1980s is useful here. This was a feminist critical theory about relations between the productions of knowledge and practices of power (Harding, 2004), and sought to be an opposition to ‘androcentric, economically advantaged, racist, Eurocentric, and heterosexist conceptual frameworks’ (p. 6). She sees this as a powerful

relocation of women from being the object of enquiries to the subjects of knowledge. When used by groups that faced multiple marginalization – of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. – to generate knowledge, this was an important shift.

According to Nancy Hartsock who tries to develop a feminist historical materialism, standpoint theory has distinct epistemological and political claims. One of this is that “the vision available to the oppressed group must be struggled for and represents an achievement which requires both science to see beneath the surface of the social relations in which all are forced to participate, and the education which can only grow from struggle to change those relations” (Hartsock 1983, 285).

Like Hartsock, Harding too reinforces this point when she writes that “Each oppressed group can learn to identify its distinct opportunities to turn an oppressive feature of the group’s conditions into a source for critical insight about how the dominant society thinks and is structured. Stand point theories map how a social and political disadvantage can be turned into an epistemological, scientific, and political advantage.” (2004, 7–8) Legitimately, standpoint theory has much to offer marginalized groups, and a full discussion of their positionality is imperative to any claim that is made from such a theoretical position.

However, her own struggle for a vision to change social relations are absent in Rege’s articulation about DFS. Instead, ironically, Rege, a Brahmin woman, is seen as someone putting forth a standpoint, which, if anything, should have come from Dalit women. It is also curious to note the voice Rege assumes here. She uses the word ‘we’ to speak about something that emerged out of the struggles of ‘dalit women’. This gives rise to confusion about locating her voice: have dalit women forwarded this position as a resistance, or is it a Brahmin woman’s interpretation of dalit women’s articulations? Or has she already transformed her subjectivity? Without naming and engaging with the caste location of the researchers, what DFS seem to have conveniently sought is a transformation of subjectivities. How do their position and experiences influence their ways of knowing? Is it to be easy, especially when a deep reflection about the speaker’s positionality, and the epistemological challenges it poses is evidently absent? Can all upper caste researchers can undergo a ‘transformation’ of subjectivities? In fact, Visweswaran (1997, 616) points out that relying upon gender standpoint theory erases difference through the logic of identification. DFS not only ignores this criticism but goes one step further to assume that non-dalit women (including ‘upper caste’ women) can ‘reinvent’ themselves as dalit women. Ciotti (2014) criticizes

Rege's exercise of understanding gender and caste through Dalit women's testimonies and other autobiographical literature, as an 'othering' that foregrounds the 'authentic other'.

Such questions are raised by Lata P.M. who identifies as a Bahujan woman. She asks whether Rege, an 'upper' caste feminist, is representing the mainstream upper caste women while she proposes the DFS. She adds that 'When Sharmila (Rege) presents herself as a non-Dalit representative of the so-called main branch of the feminist stream she tries to free other upper class/caste feminists from their guilt and calculated silence on caste.' (Lata P.M. 2014).

In short, it appears that DFS helps circumvent critical questions about the researcher's location. The speaker's location, Alcoff (1991, 7) points out, 'has an epistemically significant impact on that speaker's claims and can serve either to authorize or disauthorize one's speech.' About the epistemological and methodological issues in the problem of speaking for/about 'others' that necessarily raises the issue of representation and discursive practices, she writes:

We must also interrogate the bearing of our location and context on what it is we are saying, and this should be an explicit part of every serious discursive practice we engage in. Constructing hypotheses about the possible connections between our location and our words is one way to begin. This procedure would be most successful if engaged in collectively with others, by which aspects of our location less highlighted in our own minds might be revealed to us. (Alcoff 1991, 25)

Additionally, by putting forward 'dalit feminist epistemology' while describing herself as a *non-dalit* academic, Rege falls back on creating a binary of available social locations: dalit and non-dalit. This, while it does centre the 'dalit' location, erases the graded nature of caste inequality: caste is not a dalit-not-dalit binary! But engagement with the graded nature of caste is necessary. Ramdas (2012) helps us understand why:

In a caste society with the chief characteristic of graded inequality, anti-caste feminism anticipates naming to go all the way through. An Arunthathiyar woman intellectual will name the higher sub-caste location of the Pallar or Pariyar women whose articulation or silence may conflict with or overshadow the feminist assertions of the Arunthathiyar women. This is not available for an easy reading as name-calling the Pallar/Pariyar women intellectuals, but it is in fact naming the hierarchical difference ... Therefore, location is central to caste debates, whether they happen in universities or Panchayat meetings or inside inter-caste marriages.

For me and other women sharing similar social location to mine, there are consequences to this obfuscation of graded nature of caste through the *dalit - non-dalit* binary.

- 1) It erases/invisibilises our experiences as Bahujan women through *mis*-representation. This difference in experiences, power and social capital between the upper castes and non-dalit lower castes is erased through this binary. By conflating all lower castes other than ‘dalits’ along with Brahmins and other upper castes, our experiences of caste and oppression, of the kind I outline from my fieldwork experience, are erased.
- 2) This obfuscation of lower caste experiences has located several Bahujan women as oppressors alongside Brahmins and other dominant castes in the non-dalit oppressor category, preventing them from articulating the truths about their realities. Several of us, arbitrarily classified by the state into OBC communities find ourselves being talked of and identified as only oppressors in an oppressor-oppressed binary through a misplaced use of feminist epistemologies.

2.4.6. Implications to this thesis

While the Indian academics did not offer a valid language for my experiences, I drew inspiration from academic writings by scholars like Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks.

Hill Collins (1986) outlined the challenges that black women faced within academia, especially in sociological research, and wrote that their unique status made them ‘outsiders within’ the academy

Some outsiders within try to resolve the tension generated by their new status by leaving sociology and remaining sociological outsiders. Others choose to suppress their difference by striving to become bonafide, "thinking as usual" sociological insiders. ... A third alternative is to conserve the creative tension of outsider within status by encouraging and institutionalizing outsider within ways of seeing... (Collins 1986, S29–S30)

hooks (1989) writes that moving from silence to voice itself is a revolutionary gesture.

As metaphor for self-transformation, it has been especially relevant for groups who have contained so many feelings – despair, rage, anguish – who do not speak... Speaking becomes both a way to engage in self-transformation and a rite of passage where one

moves from being object to being subject. Only as subjects can we speak (Hooks 1989, 12).

While these thoughtful articulations provided much-needed clarity about the need to claim my voice, I looked to spaces outside the academia for the language to assert and claim my social location. Writings by women from various social locations helped me think through the complications of caste and gender, and the operation of graded inequality.

This brings me to a realization that where I come from and where I stand is a valid source of knowledge to offer some methodological and epistemological reflections. More importantly, my own location outside the more commonly used dalit-non-dalit binary makes it imperative that I do not indulge in using methodologies that erase a large number of people who are non-dalit non-upper caste, i.e., individuals who occupy locations outside this binary.

In that sense, inter-categorical complexity, and an intersectionality approach which complicates simplified understandings are but a natural position to adopt.

In the last section of this chapter, I will briefly make note of the ethical aspects of this research.

2.5. Ethics

Every effort has been made in this research to stick to the guidelines set out by the Developing Areas Research Group (DARG). Organizers and participants in public meetings that I observed were told about my presence and purpose. For personal interviews, consent was obtained orally before interviews. In situations where participants were unwilling or expressed reservations, there was no effort to push for further answers. To protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents, all names have been anonymised. The name of the field site too has been anonymised and identifying details have been omitted. Additionally, care was taken even while designing the study to ensure that it does not rest on the disclosure of information that may be too confidential for research purposes, or can cause harm to the respondents. Additionally, personal aspects shared by respondents in trust developed over field work period has been left out from analysis.

All information collected during field work are stored in a personal computer in an encrypted file. Primary fieldwork information was not stored online or sent over the internet. If, at any

point of time, information has to be sent over the internet, it will be encrypted using encryption software.

I will now move to the next chapter where I will also detail the context of Kerala and the field site.

Chapter 3: Context and Background

Through this chapter, I situate this research in its context and provide information about the field site. Accordingly, it is divided into three sections. In the first, I outline the context in which this work is located, that is, the development trajectory of Kerala. In the second section, I briefly explain Caste in Kerala. In the third section, I will outline some features of Perur, the field site.

3.1. The Context

Even as India performs badly on development indices such as the HDI, Kerala, a South Indian state stands out from the other states in the country (Balakrishnan 2015). A relatively small Indian state with an area of 38,863 square kilometres, it has a high population of about 33 million (33, 406, 061 to be exact) that accounts for approximately 3% of the total population of India. (Census of India 2011). Consequently, it has a high density of population, of 859 persons per square kilometres.

The historical context for this work is Kerala's acclaimed development trajectory, popularly known as the 'Kerala model of development' that coupled low economic growth with high human development indices noted in the 1970s (Oommen 1999; Parayil 1996). These have been largely attributed to the role of the communist party in the state. In the first election in 1957 since the formation of the state in November 1956, the Communist Party of India (CPI) was elected to power, and subsequent elections have alternatively returned the Congress and the Communist parties to power. The introduction of land reforms in the early 1970s⁴⁰ have been cited as a milestone redistributive policy, which many attribute the equitable development to. In the mid-1990s, identification of the low economic growth as a crisis (Isaac and Tharakan 1995; Kannan 1990) prompted a new wave of democratic decentralization named the People's Planning Campaign by the then-ruling Left-wing ministry (Isaac and Harilal 1997; Thomas Isaac and Franke 2002). This move to devolve powers, especially fiscal powers to gramapanchayats went hand in hand with measures to strengthen people's participation in governance and decision-making.^{41,42}

⁴⁰ This has been through implementation of the Kerala Land Reform Amendment Act 1969

⁴¹ The Kerala Panchayat Act which outlines the measures to devolve powers to the Panchayat, available at <http://www.ispepune.org.in/PDF%20ISSUE/2007/JISPE407/2010-02-06/08DOCU-2%20KERALA.PDF> accessed at 14:33, on April 11, 2014

⁴² a summary of this narrative of Kerala's development can be found in Kannan and Pillai (2005)

The participatory governance implemented also were seen as exceptional, and this achievement was also attributed to the political labour movement (Mohan and Stokke 2000). Thus, for many authors, Kerala has been an outstanding example of social development that accompanied a class-based mobilization (P. Heller 2001; Patrick Heller 1999; Mannathukkaren 2011). The establishment of Kudumbashree, the state-wide women's network of self-help groups aimed at poverty eradication is also noteworthy.⁴³ This organization, initiated by the Government of Kerala jointly with the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) was formed in 1998. With a membership of close to 3.5 million women, Kudumbashree is the largest such network of women in the country⁴⁴ and a powerful presence in Kerala's public life. This seems to have allowed the break-down of traditional barriers and many women have found their way into public roles through this route.⁴⁵

These broadly form the narratives about Kerala that predominate in the development discourse. However, studies at different times demonstrated that Kerala's development continued to exclude the historically deprived – the Scheduled Castes (Sivanandan 1979), Scheduled Tribes (Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam 2004; Shyjan and Sunita 2008), agricultural labourers who happen to be lower caste men and women (Mencher 1980) and the fisher folk (Kurien 1995). Researchers have also highlighted the 'gender paradox' in Kerala (Kumar 1994; Mukhopadhyay 2006), where high education and health indices of women co-exist with low work participation rates (WPR)⁴⁶. The Kerala State Human Development Report 2005 also notes that the WPR of women from Dalit communities were higher⁴⁷ implying that unlike the women from non-Dalit communities, low economic status makes more Dalit women (as compared to non-Dalit women) seek work for pay. Eapen and Kodoth (2003) show that in Kerala too, as in other parts of the

⁴³'Kudumbashree' that translates into 'prosperity of the family' is the network of a large number of women in Kerala. The mission statement of Kudumbashree is 'to eradicate absolute poverty in ten years through concerted community action under the leadership of local governments by facilitating organization of the poor for combining self-help with demand-led convergence of available services and resources to tackle the multiple dimensions and manifestations of poverty, holistically (available on <http://www.kudumbashree.org/?q=vision>, accessed at 17:50, 11/05/2014)

⁴⁴It is comprised of 215883 neighbourhood groups (NHGs) across the state, each group consisting of 10 – 20 families. Thrift and Credit societies form one of the main activities of the NHGs. This encourages savings for the poor and enables them to access loans at low rates of interest and more quickly from formal financial institutions.

⁴⁵As evidenced by the report 'Kudumbashree dominates local polls' in *The Hindu*, October 21, 2010 (accessed at <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/columns/sainath/kudumbashree-dominates-kerala-local-polls/article841001.ece> on January 16, 2013).

⁴⁶The WPR of women in Kerala is 22.9 as against 25.4 at the All-India level (Government of Kerala 2006)

⁴⁷The Rural WPR for SC women in Kerala is 32.7 as against the state average of 23.8 for Rural Women (Government of Kerala 2006)

world, despite educational attainments, employment patterns and domestic responsibilities in Kerala show a gender-differentiated pattern.

Although the word ‘intersectionality’ itself has not been employed in many studies in Kerala, several studies touch on the aspects of caste, class, and gender, and their intersection from different contexts. Research done in the wake of the discovery of Kerala’s paradoxical development showed that the deprived communities had not experienced occupational mobility (Sivanandan 1979). He also showed that there is an overlap of caste and class. More recently, Deshpande (2000) demonstrated the continuance of this inequality. Despite the celebrated land reforms, 80% of Kerala’s landless are comprised of Dalits and tribes, and the Tenancy Reforms Act and the *Laksham Veedu Paddhathi* resulted in segregation of spaces in localities.⁴⁸ This gave rise to 12,500 Dalit and 4,082 Adivasi colonies in the state (Sreerekha 2012).⁴⁹ Colonies are places within a panchayat/ward where the most marginalized continue living in clusters on small plots of land that were allotted to them by the government. Often, these are named after the government schemes that they were formed under: hence, there are *Laksham Veedu* colonies, and others such as *Harijan* colonies and *Nalucent* colonies (Pramod 2015)⁵⁰. Since these are not preferred locations for living, with economic mobility, members may choose to move out. Additionally, there are hardly any instances of outsiders (from ‘upper’ caste communities) wanting to move into a colony. Larger colonies are seen as fertile grounds of violence and crime. Lack of land ownership by the marginalized continues to be a major problem, and agitations around land by the deprived are on the rise⁵¹. This rising number of struggles for land, it has been argued, signals the need for re-distribution of assets through a second round of land reforms (Rammohan 2008).⁵²

There is little doubt that communist politics in Kerala has been instrumental in many advances in the state. The developmentalism that the left-parties ushered in offered educational and health

⁴⁸The *Laksham Veedu Paddhathi* or the One-lakh Housing Scheme of 1972 provided 100,000 houses to landless agricultural workers who did not receive homesteads under land reforms. Built on small plots, these consigned poor lower caste families into segregated living quarters that were cramped, and often without basic amenities like water supply.

⁴⁹These are at best, conservative estimates, and the numbers can go up to 26000 Dalit colonies.

⁵⁰ *Harijan* colonies were funded by *Harijan* Welfare Department, and *Nalucent* colonies gave four (*nalu*) cents of land for each family.

⁵¹As this is being written, an agitation by a thousand families belonging to Dalit and Adivasi communities has been going on for over three years in Arippa in Southern Kerala.

⁵²This article was written in the background of the Chengara land struggle that started in 2007, and while it has been intensely debated in Kerala, the state’s promises to the landless agitators still remains to be fulfilled.

reforms, and when met with people's 'agency' from below, were critical to advancing human development in Kerala (Lieten 2002). The conflictual relationship of marginalized indigenous communities with leftist parties became pronounced in the 1990's. This complicated relationship of indigeneity with communism has been recently discussed by Steur (2009) who understands the experience of being the most marginalized 'tribal' groups as simultaneously being a governmental category, and being enmeshed in casteism and racism.⁵³

Alongside these developments, a project of recasting masculinity and femininity in Kerala towards a 'working' male and a 'domestic' woman (Eapen and Kodoth 2003) has been in progress in Kerala. Indeed, in her study among lower caste workers in cashew processing units where trade unions were active, Lindberg notes that even though the female cashew workers obtained 'better absolute conditions at work and in society, the power discrepancy between low-caste men and women has increased in favour of men because low-caste women are now seen as weaker and more dependent on men than in earlier decades' (Lindberg 2001). She adds that 'radicalism of males turned to be built upon women's maintaining of the families—a reality which strongly contradicts hegemonic gender discourses and confuses gender identities'. Through the study of role of women in local bodies in Kerala, particularly the Kudumbashree, it has also been shown that the central subject of the 'responsibilized' state welfare is the woman in the 'informal' sector (Centre for Development Studies 2008). The notion of empowerment advanced by the Kudumbashree has been questioned since it appears that active membership in this poverty alleviation scheme excludes deprived Dalit women (Williams et al. 2012).

In the next section, I will try to shed some light into the caste system in Kerala.

3.2. Castes in Kerala

Several researchers have studied caste in Kerala (See for instance, Aiyappan 1965; Puthenkalam 1966; Fuller 1976; Kurian 1986; Rao 2005; Gough 1959; Hardgrave Jr 1964). Some of the

⁵³ For instance, she writes: "In everyday life, most tribal people however distinguish other tribal communities as being different castes, and perceive themselves as endogamous groups in a hierarchy infused with connotations of purity and pollution and a fixed division of labour. Many tribal communities in Kerala thus think of themselves as tribal only through being on the ST list—they do not share one language, religion or occupation. Further, in their relative powerlessness and distance from 'mainstream' Keralese society, many Adivasis hardly distinguishable from the ex-untouchable communities are now identified as 'Dalit' (oppressed). It is only in organising to claim the 'tribal rights' inscribed in the Indian Constitution that different tribal communities have started to call themselves Adivasi and have started to unite." (Steur 2009, 29)

commonly identified features of the hierarchy in Kerala are presented here. Caste ranking places the Nambudiri, who are Kerala Brahmins, at the peak of the hierarchy. (It has to be noted that there are also other Tamil and Konkani Brahmins in various parts of Kerala). The most important caste below the Nambudiri is the Nayar, who are the dominant community in Kerala. One unique feature is that there are no *Vaishya* communities – the intermediary trader castes – in Kerala. Below the Nayar are ranked the traditional service castes, such as the barber and washer man. It has to be noted that there are barbers and washer men castes who service upper caste households, separate from other barbers and washer men who service lower caste groups.

The highest polluting caste is the toddy-tapper, the Ezhava, who were at one point a caste group, but is now a more general name used for several similarly placed groups in the OBC category. The OBC communities also include the carpenters, the blacksmith, and barbers. Below the Ezhavas are the castes now categorised as Scheduled Castes – mainly the Paraya and the Pulaya who are farm hands, particularly bonded slaves of upper caste land-owners.

This is a general picture of caste in Kerala, and there are regional and local variations of caste, which are relevant to people's lives experiences. However, the key feature is that these groups are endogamous in principle. Castes percolate not just Hindu, but also Christian and Muslim communities to various extents. Fuller has explained the complicated hierarchical relationship within different Christian sects – mainly the Syrian Christian, the Latin Catholic, and the Roman Catholic in Kerala (Fuller 1976). The efforts of the Dalits and other lower-castes in Kerala to forge for themselves a new emancipatory identity (including a new religious one, made available by a colonial modernity) is detailed by Mohan who writes that within the caste-based social order of Kerala, “the Syrian Christians followed the social practices of the Hindu upper castes and their social world was not very different” (Mohan 2005:39). This re-constituting of identities in response to the political and social environment has been noted in the case of the ‘fish-worker’ who has started to identify as ‘Dalit’, “reflecting the changing salience of caste in relation to class even in the communist bastion of Kerala” (Sinha 2012, 94). Caste is well-established within Islam too, with nuanced gradations in status. The endogamous relations between various communities within Islam in Kerala too has been noted (see Osella and Osella 2007).

Family structure, including the joint family in Kerala too has had its own variations.⁵⁴ The joint family in Kerala in matrilineal and patrilineal households are known to have had different forms of organization, and property ownership. In Kerala, both matrilineal and patrilineal systems of inheritance were in place while endogamy and hypergamy were practiced in ways that left the caste system intact (Rao 2005). Majority Brahmin household followed patriliney, while dominant Nair communities were matrilineal and patrifocal. There have been variances across regions and communities too. (Eapen and Kodoth 2003). Indeed, the practice of matriliney in the dominant Nair communities are thought to have contributed to the educational achievements, and consequently the human development of the state (Jeffrey 1992).

Several factors contributed to the break-down of the joint family system (in whatever form it existed) in Kerala: the increasing family size, the land-reforms which meant one landowner could not hold more than a stipulated area of land, resulting in partition of property among family members to keep it within the family (Mencher 1976), (Radhakrishnan 1981)⁵⁵ the gradual changes and abolition of matrilineal system by the British (Puthenkalam 1966), and a resulting in super-imposition of patrilineal over matrilineal inheritance structured and the gradual shift to patrilineal nuclear families (Kodoth 2008).

On the other hand, there is less material about families of the marginalized. Kodoth (2008) mentions that Thiyya families in North Malabar had no problem forging relations with Europeans because of their low-rank which later enabled their upward mobility. The Ezhava families following matrilineal system in Malabar has also been noted in this paper. But Sanal Mohan writes that no data is available about the slave families and their social world (Mohan 2015: 39). Slavery was formally abolished in Central Kerala where the field work was carried out in 1872. Even though it was legally abolished, the practice continued well into the twentieth

⁵⁴ It is important to note that there is no consensus on what constitutes the 'joint family', and what the oft-repeated lament about the disintegration of the joint family means (Shah 1964). The 'joint family' was a mechanism through which property was controlled (Bailey 1960), through customary rules rather than formal legal mechanisms (Shah 1964).

⁵⁵ Radhakrishnan writes, "Sensing that the days of landlordism were numbered, the landlords made tremendous efforts to circumvent this danger by partitioning their holdings among their kith and kin in advance. This, coup- led with the slow progress in land reform implementation due to a decade-long political instability in the state had paved the way for a massive process of bogus land transfers. These transfers took the form of partition on paper, or voluntary transfers due to 'natural love and affection' for which a provision existed until 1974, and conversion of land into plantations" (pp A-135).

century, and several rebellions in Kerala were as against exploitative labour relations between the upper caste elite and the lower caste labourers.

With that brief note about caste in Kerala, I will now introduce the field site.

3.3. Oridam Panchayat, Perur Ward: Basic information

In this section, I attempt to give a well-rounded picture of the field site, Perur, and Oridam Panchayat that it is a part of. I will discuss the administration, nature of land, demography, and the local development activities in the locality.

3.3.1. Administration

Oridam is the name of a gramapanchayat comprised of seventeen wards, and Perur is the name of a village which is part of the gramapanchayat. While Perur is the name of a village, administratively it has been divided into multiple wards. The ward boundaries were re-drawn for the local election in 2010 to create three wards from Perur – East, West and Centre. Fieldwork was focused on the Perur East ward, which in this study will be referred to as Perur. Pertinently, in a major administrative re-organization, Oridam gramapanchayat was merged with another to form a new municipality. This meant that the Oridam gramapanchayat ceased to exist since November 2015, and ward boundaries have once again been re-configured. This also means that the ward is gradually changing its classification from ‘Rural’ to ‘Urban’ in government documents. However, as the subsequent sections and chapters will show, this will have little to no effect on the findings that emerge from this study.

In its last five years as a gramapanchayat, between 2010-2015, the United Democratic Front (UDF), the Congress-led right-leaning coalition, won the majority of seats in the local elections and formed the governing council, led by Balan. In the term prior to this, between 2005-2010, the gramapanchayat was led by the Left Democratic Front (LDF) formed of the two main communist parties. Between 1995-2005, Oridam panchayat was governed by the UDF. And before that, from 1979-1995 (with a four year break for administrative rule between 1984 and 1988), it was led by the LDF. This means that the panchayat has seen its share of both LDF and UDF leadership, as well as administrative rule in an interim period. This provides a good background for analysing local government in contemporary Oridam as arising from policies of both fronts, without any one coalition being solely responsible for the circumstances in contemporary Oridam. Since the ward boundaries have been re-drawn it is hard to say how

exactly power alternated, but the current elected representative, a Congress party member from Perur, has a long-serving history, having been re-elected for the last fifteen years in Perur (except in the current term starting from 2015 when he contested from a different ward, even as the Congress won yet again in Perur). In the election held in 2015 (after completion of field work as well as reconfiguration of administrative units), the LDF has emerged victorious in the newly formed municipality.

3.3.2. Land

The total area of Oridam gramapanchayat is 575498 *cents*, of which 163758 is wet lands, and 308318 is dry land (Census 2011).⁵⁶ Agriculture is the mainstay, and land under Oridam panchayat contributes to the relatively (in proportion to the total production of paddy in the district as a whole) large amount of paddy cultivation that is undertaken in the region. Coconut is widely grown and is one of the important crops. Banana, plantain, arecanut and pepper are some of the other common crops grown in the region.

3.3.3. Demography

The plan document for the 12th Five-year-plan (between 2012-2017) printed and circulated by the Oridam gramapanchayat states that its population is 33,616 (approximately 7500 houses according to a local source) with 4202 members from Scheduled Caste (SC) communities. According to the latest 2011 census data, there are 1774 households in the whole of Perur village, totalling a population of 7672. Of these, 1110 individuals (or 14.5% of the population) belong to the SC community.⁵⁷ The exact population for the Perur ward itself is not available, but a fair estimate can be arrived at using the electoral roll which gives the list of registered voters in the ward for the local body elections in October 2015. According to this list, there are 1400 voters, that is, 1400 individuals above the age of eighteen who have registered as voters in the ward. This seems to tally with rough estimates that I had compiled from a list obtained from a ward functionary that put the population (including children) at approximately 1650, with 479 households, of which 98 (20.5%) were classified as SC. The main religious groups in the ward are Hindu and Christian, the former comprising the majority. There was only one Muslim family in the ward and this family took on the responsibility of maintaining the old mosque in the ward.

⁵⁶ *Cent* is a unit of measurement of land. One cent equals 435.6 square feet.

⁵⁷ The village has a very small Scheduled Tribe (ST) population –18 individuals (Census 2011) but none of these individuals lived in the ward that I carried out field work in.

The discrepancy in the percentage of the SC population for the panchayat according to the census (14.5%) and the SC households of the ward estimated from local sources (20.5%) can possibly be due to Perur having one of the largest SC colonies in Oridam Panchayat.⁵⁸ It is very likely that Perur has a higher proportion of SC communities which was reflected through sampling.

This composition was kept in mind when choosing respondents for questionnaires. 101 individuals were approached in total, all of them at their homes. Their caste-religious profile are as follows: 22.8% Christian, 36.6% OBC Hindu, 21.8% SC, 1% Muslim and 17.8% Forward Caste Hindu. This is broadly representative of the distribution in the panchayat. In the absence of exact data regarding the population composition, a local dataset availed from a ward functionary was used to make approximations. Therefore, while exact proportionate sample size cannot be claimed, an attempt was made to keep to an approximate proportion of different communities and castes.

3.3.4. Local Development Activities

Some of the local development activities in which local bodies are involved are: functioning of the MGNREGS, Kudumbashree, Primary Health Centre, Veterinary Hospital, *Anganwadi*⁵⁹, as well as disbursal of benefits through the Panchayat.

Local-level data available from the MGNREGS website show that 2530 job cards are registered in Oridam panchayat⁶⁰, 308 of them from the Perur ward. Of these 308, 66 have never reported for work. However, this means that over 2000 people have been workers in the MGNREGS at some point or the other since 2009 (when it was implemented in all the districts in Kerala).

Kudumbashree is active in the panchayat and the ward, with 309 Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs). The data procured from their local office show that altogether there are 4872 members, 669 (13.7%) of which are SC, 1023 (21%) Minority (Christian, in this context) and 3180 (65.3%)

⁵⁸ 50 of the 98 SC households in the ward belong to the Kunnumpuram colony in Perur, which is the largest of the 22 colonies in Oridam. (Source: panchayat estimate, from a document circulated in a panchayat meeting for SC development).

⁵⁹ *Anganwadis* are state-run pre-school and crèches for young children established under the public health program called Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS).

⁶⁰

http://164.100.128.68/NetMGNREGS/writereaddata/state_out/jobcardreg_1607016004_local.html, accessed 23/12/2016 12:25

general categories (which includes members of OBC). 60% of the members live below the poverty line.

Table 3.1 Kudumbashree composition, Oridam gramapanchayat

Sl. No.	Member Category	APL	BPL
1	SC	71	598
2	ST	0	0
3	General	1416	1764
4	Minority	460	563
Total		1947	2925

(Source: Kudumbashree Report, Oridam gramapanchayat)

Perur ward itself has the largest number of NHGs in the ward, 24, with a total of 374 members, 87 of which are SC (23.3%), 62 (16.6%) are Minority (Christian), and 225 (60.1%) are members of the general category that includes in this instance, communities classified as OBC.

Pensions are also distributed through the local bodies, and according to the 2011 census, 2561 individuals drew pensions from the Oridam panchayat (ward-level data for Perur is not available), of which 350 were elderly, 898 widows, 230 handicapped, 900 agricultural labourers, and 183 obtained unemployment allowances. Some other schemes like *pakalveedu* (a shelter home for the aged), and *Jagratha Samiti* (committees for gender justice) were also implemented, and will be talked about later.

3.3.5. Development in Perur

From visits and conversations, public institutions like the *Anganwadi* and primary health centre, as well as government schemes like Integrated Child Welfare Scheme (ICDS), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Act (NREGA) and the Kudumbashree appeared to be working well.⁶¹ Something that every new visitor to Perur notices the condition of its roads. Even though most parts of Kerala are well-connected by roads, it is not very common to find a panchayat where all public roads are evenly good. Particularly in Perur, there were roads leading up to almost all houses, paved, and maintained in good condition by the Panchayat. Despite the

⁶¹ To investigate in detail, how each scheme is working is outside the remit of this thesis, and what is shared is the general impression about the Panchayat.

relative remoteness of the location, and the few number of buses plying to this region, the roads here were remarkably well-developed. The elected representative Balan (also the then-incumbent panchayat President) was interested in maintenance of public infrastructure like street lights and roads. Oridam gramapanchayat was elected as the best local government body in the state in 2001 and 2002. It was also awarded the *Nirmal Puraskar* in 2008 for its sanitation and waste disposal programs.

Yet, for all these positives, it was surprising to note during fieldwork that there was acute water shortage in some localities of the ward. This and some other issues will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Geography of Caste, Caste of Development

As an organizing principle of everyday life in India, caste goes beyond defining social relations. It often shapes the construction of places and localities. The attempt in this chapter is to illustrate how social inequalities manifest in the geography of a locality in Kerala, development that has been pursued in the field site, and working of local state bodies that are meant to work towards welfare of the citizens. This chapter is accordingly divided into four sections. In the first, I draw out how social inequalities manifest in the geography of a locality, through segregation of spaces that early infrastructure development reproduced. Following that, I zoom into one of the pressing problems in Perur: one of water shortage. I will show how attempts to resolve this problem gave rise to new problems, particularly since the solutions offered were framed from the vantage point of the male breadwinner-female home maker stereotype. In the third section, I will show, through the dynamics of gramasabha (local council) meetings, how an upper' caste worldview is ingrained and upheld in the way of working of panchayat (local governance) bodies, and reinforce negative stereotypes about the marginalized. Thus, I show how development planning that has happened in the locality has left basic concerns of marginalized groups insufficiently addressed. In the fourth, I pull together the arguments from the preceding sections and show what implications discourses in the local bodies have and begin to answer the first research question: "How do social inequalities inform the functioning of the state?"

4.1 Geography of Caste

Kerala often claims exceptionalism as a post-caste society. Caste is often presented as a thing of the past, and segregation of spaces in a village space such as my field site is easy to miss on a cursory visit. In fact, one thing that every new visitor to Perur notices is the excellent condition of its roads. Even though most parts of Kerala are well-connected by roads, it is not very common to find a panchayat where all public roads are evenly good. Particularly in Perur, there are roads leading up to almost all houses, paved, and maintained in good condition by the Panchayat. This was despite the relative remoteness of the location, and that there are only few buses plying to this region. The elected representative who was also the president of the local council was interested in maintenance of public infrastructure like street lights and roads, and several villagers I talked to commended him on that.

However, it is hard to ignore a geography of caste as familiarity with the region increases. Houses, by virtue of their location and construction indicate the caste-class status of their inhabitants. The field site has a location that is clearly marked out as a segregated space - a 'colony' called Kunnumpuram – where exclusively lower caste households, mainly scheduled castes – like Paraya (basket weavers), Pulaya (agricultural workers), and Kanakkan (both fish vendors and agricultural workers), and fewer number of other lower castes like the Karuvan (Ironsmith), Kollan (Blacksmith), and Thandaan (farm hands) etc – are located.⁶² Kunnumpuram is a small hillock and houses have been built on its slopes. At the foot of the hillock, a little distance away from it, there are 'upper' caste dwellings, and they form the centre of Perur. Namboodiris (Kerala Brahmins) with good houses and land are located centrally. Close to these are other upper castes houses: like Pisharody, Nambiar and Nair. A few Christians families (many of who are relatives) live along the main road, near the church, and most of these are well-to-do upper caste Syrian Christians. These are also the houses with the easiest access to the main road. The only Muslim family in the ward lives right next to the mosque on the main road, and take care of it. Vilakkathala Nairs (caste of barbers that were exclusive for serving upper castes), another 'lower-caste', stay close together, as a cluster of houses further away from the main road. Along the road is also an area where poorer, economically and socially backward Christians live (nevertheless, they identify as Syrian Christians and belong to the same parish), away from the main road, near the potters' colony, intermingled with other lower caste Hindu households: like Ezhava and Thattan (goldsmiths), most of whom are daily wage labourers – in occupations like painting, house construction etc. There is a Kumbaran colony, a colony of potters, far away, at the edge of the ward boundary. There are some other smaller lower caste groups like Ezhuthassan, Veluthedathu Nair etc. Altogether, there are about 20 castes here, among what is approximately 480 households. Caste identities of people living here are known publicly.

Kunnumpuram colony is approximately 70 years old. People who settled here were those displaced due to another major 'development' intervention – construction of an irrigation canal, one that still supplies water to the rice fields. It is difficult to pin down the exact year when the colony was established as I found no written record, but it is registered in popular memory and oral histories. There were agitations around the canal construction that started in the late 1940s

⁶² Kunnumpuram literally means the 'hill-top'.

and in 1948: workers in a neighbouring village demanded better work conditions and pay. This agitation is part of the local history of growth of communist party in the region.

The Irrigation project itself has global connections, starting at the time of Indian Independence in 1946 as part of the 'Grow More Food' campaign.⁶³ Santhakumar et al. (1995) note that irrigation projects in Kerala started after rice shortages induced by the second world war. The government started planning irrigation projects to spur rice production, and thus, "the construction of three major and medium projects commenced during the late 1940. Before the formation of the first elected government in the state in 1957, work on 10 major and medium projects had started" (ibid, A-31). The irrigation canals at the field site is one of the 10 projects that started before 1957, to promote cultivation in summer in semi-arid regions, and is based on a dam project.

This irrigation project displaced the lower caste people in Perur. Maniyamma, an 81-year old widow, recollected the memories of displacement that made people relocate to the hillock that is the current 'colony'. She remembers that this happened in the late 1940's. 'Lower-caste' people used to live in the area through which the canal runs now. They lived here because this was a location that maintained the necessary non-polluting distance from the 'upper-caste' households. Once the irrigation project was finalized, they were asked by the locally powerful upper caste families to evacuate and move up to the hillock that was overgrown with thorny bushes. This location was chosen so that the polluting castes would not be any closer to the upper caste dwellings, but will still be available for work in the upper caste households. There were no roads, only a small path through the shrubs that was one-person-wide. Another woman recalls: "I remember very well how this place used to be – I used to come here to visit my cousins and have walked through those roads several times. At that time, small pox was a dreaded disease. The church in the region refused to bury the dead. Instead the dead were wrapped in straw mats and dumped on this hillock because this place was isolated and removed from people's dwellings. The infected who were alive would also be dumped here, left to die. My forefathers who were forced to move up here after being displaced roamed this place, destitute, like zombies among

⁶³ The 'Grow More Food' campaign was launched in 1943 to off-set the shortage of rice resulting from Japanese conquest of Burma in 1937 (Burma was the main source of rice supply to India). The campaign aimed to address food shortage in India by extending cultivation, constructing irrigation works, and putting in place manure schemes, seed distribution and other programmes. (Sherman, 2013)

the dead people here”. These memories not only hold information about the displacement but also expressed feelings of injustice meted out to her people.

The population in the colony increased after the government started handing out title deeds for those who were settled here, sometime after 1970s. Soon, more people from the SC communities – mostly relatives of those already settled, started moving in, and it became established as an SC colony.

One of the long-term consequences of moving up to the hillock was that the displaced people suffered from shortage of water. Traditionally, people depended on manually dug wells that were replenished by ground water – on a hillock, wells did not yield much water. While water from the canal that irrigates the fields were the reason for the displacement, it is ironic that even today, people in the colony suffer an acute shortage of water. Displacement of people for irrigation canal construction (to serve the interest of land-owners who needed irrigation), legalizing these settlements by giving the displaced title deeds (which is not a bad thing in itself but is deemed to be sufficient when it is only meeting a necessity) and continuing difficulties to access critical infrastructure like water, shows a fairly straightforward and continuous translation of caste inequalities into the organization and utilisation of physical spaces. This is not an isolated example; several development projects in Kerala have led to displacement of people, and resettlement into colonies. Aneesh and Patil (2015) show how the Cochin International Airport in Kerala displaced over eight hundred families, most of them from the scheduled castes, and resettled them into colonies. The struggles of indigenous community members in Kerala who are resisting their displacement and resettlement due to a proposed hydroelectric project has also been noted (Nair, 2014). Colonies, often formed in recent times through displacement for development projects, have been identified by Pramod (2015) as spaces of subordination, and he identifies it not as spaces of exclusion but as spaces of ‘subordinated inclusion’ that reminds its inhabitants of their social position. Displacement due to development, and ‘development’ not reaching the displaced people subsequently is an irony that is replicated in the field site too. This means that in addition to understanding daily interactions between people, caste is also important for understanding the spatial geography of localities, and the way these impact the planning of development project and their implementation.

4.2 Water shortage

More than half of the SC population of Perur ward lives in Kunnumpuram colony. There are 50 SC Households and a few OBC households spread out on a hillock. The region has lower rainfall than the rest of the district, and being on the hillock is of little help when people depend on natural water sources. The Panchayat Plan document mentions that Oridam is an area with the least amount of rainfall in the district. To address water shortage, the area under the local council was one of the early sites chosen by the World Bank to implement its community-managed water supply scheme in the early 2000's. As a consequence, there are 32 community-run water management schemes of which 26 were built by the World Bank Project, most of which are in a state of disrepair. Here, it has to be noted that Kerala has several schemes for water supply. These include Kerala Water Authority (KWA) led supply driven piped water supply schemes, World Bank community owned-demand driven Kerala Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency (KRWSA) called *Jalanidhi*, a Government of India-funded Panchayati Raj Institutions lead Sector Reform and Swajaldhara schemes, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) owned and invested water supply schemes, and NGO driven systems backed up by an overriding open well based self- supply.” (Baby and Kurian, 2013)

At the time of fieldwork, in Kunnumpuram colony, water was supplied only at a fixed time, for a duration of one or two hours. This means that households had to collect water for all their activities in that short window. The upper region of the hillock received water for two-and-a-half hours, between 6:00 and 8:30 am. The lower parts of the colony had water only for an hour, from 7:30-8:30 am. Those in the upper portion had an extra hour and half of water supply. This gave rise to bitterness within the colony members, and animosity towards those in the upper part who had negotiated such an arrangement in their favour, led by Sneha, a very active Scheduled Caste woman who is also a Kudumbashree functionary. Those in the lower region were angry that although everyone's lives and livelihoods were affected in the same way because of water scarcity, some among them were getting differential treatment. They signed a petition to ask for resolution for the water issue. According to a household living in the lower area, there were signatures of all households in the petition. Anjali (37), a woman living in the lower part of the colony says, “This mass petition signed by 600 people⁶⁴ disappeared when one particular person got their own water connection and a motor pump.” While Anjali is not taking any names,

⁶⁴ This number cannot be verified, and Anjali's words are being reproduced here.

it is evident that the one person she is referring to is Sneha who stood accused of selling out the joint interests of all colony members.

With Sneha, their most vocal leader silenced with a personal favour done for her, the demand lost its steam. This also made people bitter and distrusting of each other. Thus, state's failure to provide basic amenities and its efforts to neutralise the demands by silencing the leadership without resolving water scarcity became a source of conflict within the affected communities.

Apart from fostering discontent among colony members, this arrangement affected women (and men) whose lives were not structured according to the stereotyped upper caste households where there are male breadwinners and female homemakers (or one where women are working, are in 9-5 regular jobs). Most of the households in Kunnumpuram were different: here women worked alongside the men in unorganized sector or in daily wage employment in occupations where they hardly have 9-5 working hours. The arrangement for water supply while it provided a temporary stop-gap solution was not the best, and put a lot of disproportionate strain on women, and in some situations, even led to strain in family relations. In the next section, I draw out the impact of this arrangement on the lives of some women in colonies.

4.3 Gendered 'Development'

At the time of field work, households schedules their day around the times water is available, so that they can make the most out of running water and also save water for the rest of the day. Managing household chores is almost always a gendered task. Women get up early in the day to store water and to do water-intensive household chores like washing clothes, preparing food, and other cleaning activity. It is worthwhile to examine how water being supplied for at best, two hours, affects the daily lives of people. I consider the household of Abhishek, a twenty-four year-old young man from the Karuvan⁶⁵ community, and Anjali, a thirty-seven year old woman from an SC community.

Abhishek's household has three members – his forty-five year old mother, a seventeen-year old sister and himself. Abhishek's mother is a daily wage construction worker, and his sister attends senior secondary school. Abhishek works as a blacksmith, while simultaneously pursuing a master's degree via distance learning. Abhishek's smithy was a small enclosure on the front-left

⁶⁵ Karuvan, a black-smith, is the name of the occupation as well as the caste and is classified under the OBC list.

corner of his house. As the only blacksmith in the locality who was continuing his traditional occupation, all the daily wage workers and artisans who used metal tools came to him to make or repair their tools. This kept him extremely busy, particularly early in the morning as the workers would need their tools before they left for work. Abhishek started his work at 5:30 a.m. in the morning and carried on until 8:00 or 8:30 am. Due to this, he was not able to help out with collecting water in the morning when it is supplied.

He and his sister were at home when I went to their place. I asked about the issue of water availability and how they were managing. He replied, “Getting water is very difficult. We don’t have space to dig a well of our own. So we are waiting for tap connection to our house. Now we draw drinking water from our neighbour’s well”. He added that the family had applied for water connection from the water authority but hadn’t yet received one. His sister clarified that it was only for drinking and cooking that they had to manually draw water from the well of a neighbour (who also was their relative). For other purposes they had a tap outside their home through which the panchayat was supplying water. They were lucky that the tap was so close to their home, unlike others who had to walk some more distance to fetch water. It was water supplied through the community-owned pipe that was available for only an hour, is collected in two ‘drums’ and is used for other activities such as washing, bathing, and cleaning. So, in all, Abhishek and family relied on three sources of water: the neighbour’s well for clean water for cooking and drinking, the community owned supply for storing water in large ‘drums’ and the state water authority’s connection for other purposes. Uninterrupted water supply could never be taken for granted and they always had to plan to have sufficient water available at all times.

I asked them who took responsibility for carrying water from the well. Abhishek replied that he will be at work in the morning hours, but that he does it if it is not a busy day. His sister added, “If he is busy, and can’t do it, mother and me bring it ourselves.” His mother and sister prepared food for the family before leaving in the morning for work and school respectively. The mother left for work by 7:30 a.m. – when water supply started in the community-managed water connection.

To surmount this problem of lack of availability of running water people like Abhishek had drawn upon their resources – immediate family and relatives, their own sheer physical energy, and managing their time wisely – and devised ways to operate smoothly. The three members of the family, despite all of them being engaged full-time, worked in tandem to deal with the limited

water availability. It helped that Abhishek worked in a smithy at his own home which was a critical factor in making this situation manageable, as his mother did not have additional pressure to prepare breakfast and pack lunch for him well before 5:30 a.m., before she herself left by 7:30 a.m. for work.

This was not the case with Anjali, mentioned earlier. Anjali, belonging to an SC community, was employed in the local milk co-operative as a tester. This was a permanent position (although not carrying the same perks as a state government job) requiring her to leave for work early in the morning, her hours being from about 5:30 a.m. to 10:00 am when local farmers brought in raw milk to the co-operative. She also had to work again in the afternoon between 3:00 and 5:00 p.m., when farmers arrive with their second batch of milk. While this meant she could spend a few hours in between during day time at home to finish the household chores, it also meant that she was not home during the critical one-hour window between 7:30 and 8:30 a.m. when water was supplied to her home. Her household consisted of her forty-three-year-old husband, his mother, and two children: an elder daughter and a younger son, who were sixteen and ten years old respectively. Five members in the household increased the water requirement. Given Anjali's non-availability to finish household chores during the morning hours, her husband, himself a daily-wage labourer who laid floor tiles, had to take on these chores. When I visited the family mid-morning one day, both the husband and wife were at home. I asked whether he had taken a day off from work to which he replied that he was sick. As conversation progressed with the couple, the more important reason for him staying at home came up. Daily-wage workers like him start work at around 8:30 or 9:00 a.m., and therefore, had to leave their homes for work after having breakfast, and preparing and packing lunch any time between 7:00-7:30 a.m. This was difficult in a household of five like Anjali's, especially when the wife was away at work, and water was supplied only between 7:30 and 8:30 am. During this time, water for use for the rest of the day had to be stored, and food for the children going to school had to be prepared. This family was entirely dependent on this water connection (unlike Abhishek's). This meant that the husband was the only one able to ensure water was stored every day.

Having to collect water and manage household chores meant Anjali's husband was frequently late for work, and lost work days. This resulted in Anjali's being the dependable source of income, even though, as a male construction worker, the husband would earn more than her in a month, if he were able to work regularly. This meant actual loss of income for the household. Having only one person's income (that too, a lesser income) to count on also resulted in financial

instability, to arguments between the husband and wife, strained relations between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, and as it turned out, between the parents and children too, creating much frustration and unhappiness in the household.

Here, what I want to illustrate is how a functional household with an enabling environment can be maintained, particularly when barriers are placed in the way of basic infrastructure, only through conformity to the mainstream gender roles: of the male breadwinner, and the female home-maker. At Abhishek's home, both Abhishek and his mother earned income, and the sister attended school, and even though they did not conform to this stereotypical expectation, they were able to pool in resources to make the available facilities work for them. In Anjali's case however, the functionality of the family suffers as a result of the couple not being able to don the stereotypical roles. This is not because any of them are wilful non-conformists, but because a) daily life of people in the colonies is not in conformity with stereotypical expectation, what with most women working alongside men to contribute to the family's finances, and b) the infrastructural barriers in their way directly affects the way their daily life is structured, and consequently, their relationship. In a hypothetical scenario, with water availability guaranteed throughout the day, it is likely that the husband's presence at home is not required at the time when he is bound to leave for work, and their family would not have borne the brunt of the one-hour water supply window. It is also likely that a lot of pressure would be eased off Abhishek's mother's and sister's shoulders leaving them more flexibility with their time.

Several people from the colony including Abhishek and Anjali shared that they wanted to move out of Kunnumpuram as summers were particularly difficult. However, it was impossible for most as 'colonies' were unattractive as real estate, and they are spaces marked as areas of alcoholic men, domestic violence and higher crime rates.

It would appear that the idea of 'development' that is pursued by the local governance body either disregards or is unable to address the most pressing needs of some people –Development agencies like the World Bank on the other hand, funds projects that draw on the resources – time, effort, and money - of the already-deprived for provision of water while the most sustainable solutions may be found only with state-supplied water connections . Instead of improving the supply of water through the Kerala Water Authority Schemes to provide a permanent solution to the water shortage, the community-based participatory schemes had put in place a system where individuals in the community themselves were responsible for ensuring

their own water supply. A study in 2009 in another locality in Kerala where the World-Bank supported *Jalanidhi* scheme concludes that “the people who join the participatory sector are denied the state led services. To the contrary, the people who participate in the state led model do seldom come forward to be a member of the participatory model” (Wahid and Irshad, 2009). This supports the observations in Perur too: the people in Kunnumpuram are no longer assured KWA water supply, and a unified protest against the water rationing through participatory schemes was defused by providing Sneha, their leader a government-assured water supply connection. As a result of this, Sneha ceased to have any stake in improving water supply in the entire locality.

Timing water supply such that women household members could finish their chores in time to prepare food for the husbands who go for work and children who go to school might seem well-timed. However, this risked additional challenges to women who did not conform to this stereotypical expectation. Many women in the colony worked as daily-wage labourers, requiring that they too report to the work site just like the male folk, like that of Abhishek’s mother. This called women to bear additional responsibilities that had to be managed with planning and diligence, at the cost of being over-worked and inconvenienced. Even so, Abhishek’s flexibility in his work hours, and the additional help by his school-going sister enabled working around this constraint. In the case of Anjali, the lack of flexibility in working around this problem created much larger family problems: the household could not keep this schedule and took a toll on her husband’s job, the family’s income, and the entire family’s well-being. There are expectations of gender-conformity ingrained in development plans even though it was ill-fitted to the locality in which the water supply project was implemented. Attempts to surmount it extracts heavy toll on the marginalized people’s lives and its quality. It is in fact, troubling that nearly five decades after Esther Boserup ((1970) showed that in several parts of the world, the male breadwinner-female home maker model (that Europeans believed was universal) not hold up, this idea still seems to prevail in Kerala. What is being advanced through supplying water in the morning times is simply meeting some practical gender needs of women, as Moser (1989) calls it; this has no role in advancing women’s strategic interests. Working from within stereotyped gendered notions which do not match with the class and caste realities of the community that these schemes are supposed to benefit adds more burden on the individuals, particularly women in the community.

4.4. Gramasabha Meetings

Lastly, I will consider how caste and community dynamics play out in democratic spaces, local body decisions, and planning through my participation and observations in local council meetings in Perur. During fieldwork, I attended some local council meetings called the ‘gramasabha’ meetings. The Gramasabha meeting was conducted in September 2014 in the Panchayat Hall, and approximately 150 people turned out for this.⁶⁶ This was a ‘planning’ gramasabha, where the Panchayat accepted new applications for benefits to be distributed through various government schemes. The list of beneficiaries was to be approved from the applications submitted that day. Applications forms were distributed at the entrance. Ward functionary Leena could be seen helping many to fill up their forms. Before the meeting started, women lined up outside the hall where the meeting was held, to fill up forms to apply for benefits. Once inside, men and women sat segregated on either side of the hall. On a rough count, women participants outnumbered men 2:1. On the stage were President Balan, the Block Panchayat vice president Shobha, Panchayat Vice-President Parvathi, a locally powerful male Congress leader who was an ex-councillor, and another male councillor heading a Standing Committee. Most of the women assembled were daily wage workers. I asked some women who were chatting why they had come; they replied that they were there because they had been asked to come. And that if they did not, the ward functionaries might get annoyed with them. Another woman mistook me for a government official and asked me how much money she might get if she put in a request for house repair, to replace her broken roof tiles. I clarified that I was not a government representative. After a brief meeting where the Panchayat President and others spoke briefly, tea and biscuits were distributed by Kudumbashree representatives (Sneha, Leena, Reena) and women started submitting their applications for various benefits: hen coop, goat hutch, goats, calves, chicken, house repairs, grants for building houses, building toilets, widow pensions, old-age pension, disability pension, water connection, etc. There were also applications for pensions such as widow pension, old-age pension, disability pension etc.

Addressing them, the ward councillor told the assembled people that allocations would be made according to ‘*munganana*’, or priority. The order of priority was as follows: first the Scheduled Caste community members, then widows, then the disabled, and then the old. Now we have to

⁶⁶ The Kerala Panchayat Raj Act 1994 in 3A (4) specifies that “The quorum of the Grama Sabha shall be ten per cent of the number of voters of its area”. It is not clear whether the participation meets this specification, but it is likely that it does, given the number of voters is 1400.

note that the ‘non-scheduled caste members’ who were excluded from priority included both upper castes as well as lower castes OBCs like blacksmiths, goldsmiths, iron smiths, and farmhands. This order of priority was re-iterated at every meeting that I attended, and everyone had become familiar with it, so much so that it had become part of people’s explanation as to why they did not get any help from the government: they do not have priority.

4.4.1 Special Schemes to Priority, Priority to Reservation

The priority list came to mean that there was an exclusive treatment towards Scheduled Caste members. From here, it was easy for this discourse to transform into its popular form of widespread resentment that “All benefits go to the SC community members because of reservation.” Very often, the resentment came from the poor people, who were not from the scheduled castes, but from the OBC castes who had been told that SCs were taking their benefits away.

Legitimised from government platforms (especially gramasabha meetings), and repeated by the local upper caste elites, the idea that welfare measures were ‘reservation’ benefits achieved a status of truth. So, did only SC members receive benefits? Examining the list of approved beneficiaries tells a different story. It shows that only 32.4% of the total beneficiaries were from the SC communities. That is, ‘other’ communities benefitted equally from government schemes, and in fact, they formed the majority of the beneficiaries. When only five SC households received assistance for house repair, double the number of beneficiaries were chosen from ‘Other’ communities.

What is ignored while foregrounding this (anti-) ‘reservation’ rhetoric is the actual process and several official criteria that influences how beneficiaries of panchayat schemes are selected. This includes compiling the names of applicants for various schemes by various panchayat functionaries and officials, vetting through working groups, selection by elected representatives themselves etc. It serves to also cover the uncomfortable but well-known fact that political affiliations and personal friendships play a role in deciding who the beneficiaries are. Also, examination of the local council documents revealed that SC communities availed assistance for house construction or repair from the Scheduled Caste Sub-plan set aside exclusively for them. Therefore, strictly speaking, there was no ‘*munganana pattika*’ (priority list) from which beneficiaries were chosen – the benefits were allocated only from special schemes, and very often not from the

regular government schemes unless there were stipulations to adhere to. It appeared that local bodies were spreading misinformation, intended to cause resentment against each other among the poor 'lower castes'.

Table 4.1: Beneficiaries of government schemes, 2014-15

No	Scheme	Beneficiaries – SC	Beneficiaries - General	Beneficiaries- Total
1	House construction	5	10	15
2	House repair	10	24	34
3	House construction for the landless	2	0	2
4	Driving training for Women	3	12	15
5	Toilet Construction	1	0	1
6	Tool kit distribution	1	0	1
7	Manure for crops	0	1	1
8	Goat Distribution Scheme	1	0	1
9	Electrical/Plumbing training	0	1	1
	TOTAL	23	48	71

(source: Accessed online on Oridam gramapanchayat website)

The dangerous consequence of such a discourse was that it translated very quickly into one of the most polarizing debates in India today: that of 'caste based affirmation action, or 'reservations'. Often, asking respondents the question "Have you availed any government scheme?" resulted in an answer in the negative along with the comment "all panchayat schemes are reserved for the SCs, how will we get it?" Thus, government bodies were legitimising discourses that led up to anti-reservation sentiments, while pitting against each other, SC and OBC members who very often lived in similar conditions and shared spaces like the colonies.

As to the people who did receive benefits, especially the much sought-after house construction schemes, they found themselves being made to run from pillar to post. The experience of availing this money made one person say that "By the end of it, we would rather give up on the money than lose so many working days and time, in addition to being made to wait outside government officers and made to feel inferior by government officials. Its not as if the amount

given out is not enough to build a house. We need to have a considerable additional savings or some other source of money to add to be able to make use of the grant.” Availing benefits was a daunting and humiliating process. Such experiences are not isolated, and have been recorded even during the distribution of land ownership during the celebrated land reforms in Kerala. “Many tenants on whom ownership right was conferred did not find the ownership any more attractive as, by the time they got the title, they were fed up of being driven from pillar to post by the Tribunals”, writes Radhakrishnan (1981). Therefore, the development schemes come with their own baggage of reminding the beneficiaries of their ‘lower’ status in the society, often a direct association with their caste-status as well, not just for SC but the OBC communities.

Therefore, the development schemes came with their own baggage of reminding the beneficiaries of their ‘lower’ caste and class status in the society.

4.4.2. SC Gramasabha

In addition to this gramasabha meeting, another gramasabha meeting was convened for people from SC communities alone in October 2015. While I could not attend this meeting due to a confusion in dates, information about the proceedings of the gramasabha was collected later. This gramasabha was convened to inform SC community members about the schemes they can access from the panchayat. From the indifferent responses I got to my enquiries to the participants, I figured that this was just another routine meeting for them. Much like the ward-level gramasabha, this did not offer a particularly interesting or ‘safer’ space for SC communities to voice their demands. Attendance was often because it was expected, not because the participants felt they had any stake in the proceedings. Participation from the SC members was often insisted, to fulfil the quorum requirements. This is similar to what Mosse (2001, 25) noted in a participatory project, as a “Weberian process of routinization” where the “operational demands of a project become divorced from its participatory method and goals”.

A document circulated among the participants in the gramasabha outlined the agenda for discussions, and included a range of issues under the following heads: 1) Basic Facilities, 2) Health Matters, 3) Education, 4) Employment Conditions, and 5) Social Issues (See Appendix 2). Many of the critical issues that people from these communities faced were included under these heads, for instance, landlessness, water shortage, need for electrification of households, providing health coverage, providing care of terminally ill people, low educational achievements, need for skill development, even caste-based discrimination and gender-based violence. This

shows an awareness of the key issues in the SC communities. An important point, which I will pay more attention to in the next chapter, is the fact that conversations indicated that most of the participants in the SC gramasabha were present in the general gramasabha too.

Despite the acknowledgment in the local bodies about these issues, these spaces did not seem to facilitate meaningful discussions. Not unique to Perur, such outcomes in ‘invited spaces’⁶⁷ have been noticed earlier too, and ‘participation’ as a desirable component of ‘development’ has been critically interrogated (for instance, see Cooke and Kothari, 2001). It was clear that this agenda had not evolved in discussions with the intended beneficiaries, or that the beneficiaries felt invested in participating in these spaces except to continue being eligible for any planning or change that could be brought about through participation in these spaces. In his book *Cultivating Development*, drawing upon the experience of being a consultant for a British aid project in a ‘tribal’ community in India, Mosse (2005) writes that the outcome produced by the project was “strongly shaped by dominant local interests and by project objectives... it was knowledge *for* action not *about* livelihoods strongly conditioned by perceptions of project deliverables, and shaped by the desire for concrete benefits in the short term and relationships of patronage in longer term” (Mosse 2005, 91). This resonates with the working of the state-led participatory bodies that has been described above. Proof of this lies in the more direct action that was undertaken by people in spaces outside the official spaces for ‘participation’. I will discuss this in the next chapter.

4.5. Conclusion

This aim of this chapter was to give an introduction into the operation of structural inequalities in the field site, and how they can be seen not only in interaction between individuals and personal experiences of people, but also in the geography, the history of development of the region, in the functioning of spaces for citizens’ participation and in the implementation of welfare programs. Having examined the establishment of the Kunnumpuram colony, the water shortage experienced here, and the working of the local council meetings, and allocation of welfare measures, four key points emerge.

⁶⁷ ‘Invited spaces’ according to (Gaventa, 2006) are those in which people are invited to participate by the authorities, and are institutionalised in some way.

The first is that local caste dynamics translate into a geography of caste, and lends caste to the supposedly-neutral process of 'development' too. This does not challenge the structural inequalities inherent in the society. Interventions of the developmental state at various times has resulted in displacement, formal establishment of colonies, infrastructural deficits, inflow of international funds, intervention of international development organizations, imposing mainstream stereotypes about gender roles on those whose lives don't conform to those expectations thus constraining their choices, and withdrawal of the state from providing further support to those who need it. Development interventions had the pre-existing caste and gender dynamics of the locality embedded into them.

The second is the contradictory idea of development: on the one hand, development comes to mean building roads and such infrastructure, and on the other, critical issues like that of sustained water supply that is universally available unaddressed. These are It did not appear as though the local bodies were interested in finding a permanent solution for this issue, given those affected had been demanding a solution over the years. Their protests were sought to be contained by temporary arrangements, and by silencing their leadership through personal favours extended to them. Related to this is the entry of international development agencies that awed a retreat of the state from its active involvement in ensuring water supply, while offloading responsibility on to the individuals and the community that needed their services..

The third point is that even within development projects, conformity to gender roles is expected, failing which people become unable to take full advantage of these provisions. This means that the planned the projects themselves become impediments to changing women's and men's expected gender roles. In that sense, these projects, even as they try to (and often, as we saw, do not) meet people's needs, they do not advance any strategic gender interests.

The last point is about the spaces for participation that the much-touted decentralization experience of Kerala has opened. Resembling 'participation' advanced through the 'good governance' agenda, these 'invited spaces' seem to hold little transformative potential to address structural inequalities. What is more worrying is that they explicitly seem to advance an anti-reservation sentiment, of disproportionate benefits reaching the SC members (even though it had no factual basis), a debate that has polarized Indian society since its implementation. Availing welfare measures, on the other hand, is often a humiliating experience for the intended beneficiaries.

There can be no doubt that what is at stake here is the exercise and experience of social citizenship as defined by Marshall. Segregation of spaces according to caste-class lines itself raises issues of equal access to resources, absence of continuous water supply in spaces that are already marked out as places of deprivation indicate a lack of commitment to upholding equal rights to all. As Fraser and Gordon (1994) write, ‘Social citizenship’ conveys the idea that “in a welfare state, citizenship carries entitlements to social provision. It would bring social provision within the aura of dignity surrounding ‘citizenship’ and ‘rights’. People who enjoy ‘social citizenship’ get ‘social rights’ not ‘handouts’.” (p. 90) However, the notion that seems to predominate is that welfare measures are charity, not rights. Thus, those who receive it become beneficiaries, or citizens. This is fully encapsulated in the anti-reservation sentiment, where those who avail it are seen to snatch away entitlements from more deserving people. What we see is a curious phenomenon: differentiated citizenship rights, even when they are not being used by those entitled to it, is invoked to deny social citizenship rights.

Taken together, we can see that the development pursued in the local bodies seems to be biased towards the locally powerful groups, and jeopardize the experience of full citizenship for others. The Kerala model of development that claims a sort of exceptionalism, especially vis-à-vis caste dynamics in comparison to the rest of the country, is problematic. Caste and gender operate in the everyday working of government spaces, and are alive and active in the villages in Kerala. In the next chapter, I will examine the public spaces in the village and the discourses legitimised there, and discuss the implications it has on citizenship experience.

Thus, the experience of development in Kerala appears to be a mixed bag for its citizens, requiring more attention and careful discussion. In the next chapter, I will examine the public spaces and the discourses legitimised there, and discuss the implications it has on citizenship.

Chapter 5: The Public: A Caste-Gender Ordered Space

In the preceding chapter, I described the working of the local government bodies, focusing on the experience of the marginalized communities in their interaction with these institutions, in an attempt at demonstrating that social inequalities have a bearing on the functioning of the state in Perur. I have argued that relations of power shape the geography of the field site and inform development projects and processes. In this chapter, I attempt to broaden out and focus on the larger and more abstract 'public spaces' in the locality. The focus here is not on the state and its interaction with the marginalized, but the constitution of the 'public spaces' that are formed through state mediation, and hence having an import on citizenship experience. The analysis in this chapter is expected to add to the operational question; "What are the discourses legitimised by the state in the field site?" that I started out addressing in the previous chapter. It is also expected to shed light on the question: "Do structural social inequalities find reflection and validation in the discourses of the state?" The answers to these will help address the first central research question about the ways in which social inequalities inform the functioning of the state.

Public space is hardly neutral and consequently have been subject to scrutiny in many ways. In *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas (1991) detailed the evolution of the public sphere (particularly focusing on Europe) over time, from the lack of distinction between the public and the private, to forming distinctive public and private spheres following capitalist interests, and to the reshaping of the public sphere through the mass media. Valentine (1989) has shown how social relations of gender shape public spaces, and women's experience in therein. Fraser has argued that 'participatory parity' in the public sphere is not realizable in stratified societies, and focuses on the exclusions in the Habermasian public sphere that idealises rational criticism and debate: even formal licences to participate cannot offset the impediments to participation created by social exclusions (Fraser, 1990). In this chapter, I focus on the public spaces, particularly those involving discourses mediated by state-bodies and examine how structural inequalities - caste, class, and gender – contribute to the experience of these spaces for individuals who interact in these spaces. I present information about public meetings– often, related to development activities – and the discourses legitimised here, and analyse the underlying operating principles that order these spaces. I will show a) how this ordering is produced and maintained as a result of identifiable actions, through an interplay of several factors, and b) the function and impact of this order on people's lives.

Consequently, this chapter is structured as follows: In the first section, I will present some examples of meetings organized by people themselves, mediated by the state or involving state functioning. In the second, I will present details of meetings directly organized by the local government. In the third, I will examine the discourses legitimised in these meetings. In the last section, I will conclude by summarising the findings.

5.1. Meetings Organized by People

There are numerous meetings in the field site. These include meetings of church-based groups, meetings of men's and women's self-help groups, meetings organized by the panchayat, meetings of various political parties, meetings organized by various state authorities, meetings of other civil society groups – like public libraries, various organizations, farmers' groups etc. During fieldwork, I attended several public meetings organized by the local governance bodies (which are in addition to the gramasabhas, organizing which were mandatory for the gramapanchayat). In the following sections, I will draw on relevant events from the meetings that I attended.

5.1.1. Men's Self-help Groups

In the previous chapter, I have shown that the field site had an active Kudumbashree network. Perur ward had the highest number of Kudumbashree units: twenty-four. Since several researchers in Kerala have studied these groups, I took a conscious decision to not study these groups.⁶⁸

Since Kudumbashree was tied up with the implementation of several schemes, most critically the MGNREGS, in many people's minds, it had become part of the MGNREGS itself. The financial support Kudumbashree network offer women for entrepreneurial activities had become popular. Indeed, it has been noted that in a coastal hamlet, against falling male incomes, Kudumbashree women were able to consider profitable microenterprise options, and successfully assert their own vision of economic activity (Devika, 2016). The neighbourhood groups (NHGs) in Perur too tried to increase their savings so that they could qualify for grants called 'matching grants'.

⁶⁸ For some studies on Kudumbashree that are appreciative of its activities, see Oommen (2008); Arun, Arun, and Devi (2011); Kadiyala (2004); Chathukulam and Thottunkel (2010)

However, it was surprising to find that newly-formed men's self-help groups modelled along the lines of the Kudumbashree NHGs were beginning to appear in Oridam. In Perur ward, there were two such groups and I attended one meeting of each group.

It emerged that the formation of these groups were influenced by two factors: a) the 'matching grants' made available to women for entrepreneurial activities that the men too hoped to be able to obtain, and b) the joint farming women undertook on fallow lands which put the land to good use even as generating profit for the members, which the men thought they could carry out more profitably. Both these men's groups were asked to register formally so that similar government assistance could be extended to them. When I met them, these groups had realized that there weren't any equivalent schemes for men, and were considering registering as a society under the Societies Registration Act. Until a decision was taken, they had followed some formal book-keeping and records in the hope for assistance from the panchayat for their activities. Another group of elderly, led by Jayan, the ward co-ordinator, is not considered here as it is associated with the '*Pakalvedu*' initiative, and hence were recognized by the panchayat.

5.1.1. Men's SHG: G1

The first men's group that I went to, Group 1 (henceforth G1) had 20 members and was formed three years ago. They met weekly, and collected hundred Rupees (approximately ₹1 in 2015) per member every time. Although most members of this group were between 40 -50 years of age, there were a couple of younger members too. Their meetings were usually held at 6:00 pm on Sundays, on the open terrace of a three-storeyed building near a bus-stop. I had heard about this group from other people. Women who were doing joint farming through their SHGs had told me that this particular men's group, G1, had made a good profit through rice cultivation in a large plot of land belonging to a Nair land-owner. Balan, the panchayat's President was also associated with this group but he was not present at the meeting I attended. One of the key members who held the group together was Kumaran, who was also the convenor of the gramasabha meeting in Perur, and whom I had seen as an active member. It was known that he shared a good rapport with President Balan.

Among the group members, I was only familiar with Kumaran, whom I had met earlier at Gramasabha meetings. So, I introduced myself, and the other group members also told me their names and occupations. None of the group members held a permanent government job; some were self-employed, some small entrepreneurs, and a few others were daily wage labourers.

There were also two young men who were lecturers, albeit on contract in a government college. One person was a farmer (Kumaran), one was the owner of a die-and-mould company, one person played a trumpet in a band for a living, another worked in a local factory, one was employed in a local tuition centre, one undertook stage decorations, one person was an auto rickshaw driver, and another was the driver of a 'tipper' (a kind of small truck). One member did gold dye works, one was a tile worker, and one person was a student trying to get a job in digital imaging. It was clear that not all members were able to be active in the group farming business and everyone agreed that Kumaran was taking care of the main regular job: watering the farm. This was of course, too much of responsibility on Kumaran, and there was a discussion about everyone having to contribute equally to the works.

The meeting was held in a jolly spirit, with men happy about the exclusive space they had for themselves to discuss several issues. Many, if not all, said they enjoyed coming to the meeting since they had a space to freely discuss many local events and incidents, political developments, and listen to each other's opinions. It was somewhat ironic then, to hear from the same people that the same kind of sharing in women's meetings was not a positive thing, and was dismissed as gossiping. Men felt that the women 'crib and bitch' and there is infighting within groups, while their own group had a friendly relaxed atmosphere. Some of it could be true, as the composition of women's groups had to fit stipulated Kudumbashree guidelines, whereas the men's group was comprised of known friends. As part of a formal procedure, the G1 group also kept records, and minutes of the previous meeting was read out aloud.

The meeting that started at 6:00 pm went past 7:15 pm. I could not stay until it ended since I had promised to attend one more group's meeting and left while the men continued. I asked them what their agenda for the remainder of the meeting was, and one person told me half-jokingly but half-honestly as well, that the moment I left, the discussion will be about me. I felt that their saying it loud was indicative of the fact that my interactions with them had been friendly enough for them to be able to say it openly to me. While it may seem that a concession had been made for me by allowing me in that male-space, it has to be noted that the opportunity to attend the meeting came about because of my familiarity with Kumaran. Kumaran himself was close to the ward councillor Balan, and had seen me talk to Balan and others during the ward council meetings. Therefore, the requisite trust had already been built and I entered this space, not as a curious woman researcher, but as someone who had directly interacted with the locally powerful people. It was also understood that my interaction would be monitored by Kumaran, and I stuck

to general questions about the purpose of the group, the reasons for formation, the division of tasks etc. The acceptance of my presence has to be seen in that light.

5.1.2. Men's SHG: G2

The next meeting that I attended, of the second group (henceforth G2), was about two kilometres away from where G1 was held. This was in a more open place than where G1 was held: on a road-, in front of a shop that had closed for the day where people could assemble and sit comfortably on the floor. A low-voltage bulb was lit so faces were visible. People walking past would often stop to say hello, and my presence added to the curiosity. Less formal than the previous group, they had no group ventures like farming, or other profit-oriented activities.

This meeting went on until 9:00 p.m. at night, and this seemed to be the biggest liberty enjoyed by the men. They could sit in a public place, not too far away from their respective homes, and discuss everything under the sun, at a time when women and children might be engaged in household chores or watching television. This weekly meeting on Sunday evenings was something many people looked forward to. While I was there, several topics came up for discussion in the group. They discussed the death of a member's brother-in-law, the opening of water supply in a canal for irrigation, the constant absenteeism of a member, the approaching annual festival in church and the history behind it, and even the cyclone Hudhud that had hit Andhra Pradesh and left much destruction in its wake.⁶⁹ They also discussed with interest, the recent liquor ban that the state imposed: it was a contentious topic and many people had differing opinions on the ban. When I asked what they think of similar women's SHGs, G2 members felt that had the assistance that the state offers Kudumbashree groups been offered to men's groups, they would have fared much better. As explained earlier, they felt the women were not being entrepreneurial enough, and were wasting their time in gossip. In that sense, it was a waste of resources, they felt. While this sentiment might be correct, especially given these men were themselves struggling to make ends meet, it seemed that the benefits these groups held for women, specifically in enabling them to access capital and entrepreneurship, had not been highlighted enough, and the families of these women had not been yet able to view these groups positively. The why and wherefore of this aspect will be dealt with in the next chapter.

⁶⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyclone_Hudhud

The composition of the group was less diverse than the previous group. One key member, Rajan built '*pandals*' and was paid daily wages.⁷⁰ Another member was a contractor. Another key person, Jayan was a retired government employee who was also the co-ordinator of the activities in the ward (and hence, a ward functionary). One member was a driver, some were in construction as daily labourers, and others in agricultural work. Needless to say, if not poor, most of them were barely above the poverty line, living in precarious conditions, and were employed in low-skilled jobs.. This also meant that for them to find time and means to get into an SHG activity that generated profit was harder than it was for G1 members. They would find it hard to devote time for the farming activities like G1's after a full day of manual labour. In the absence of government assistance, they would also not be able to pool together, the initial investment necessary to start farming, which G1 was able to do. If they had money, they said they might start a catering business.

However, not being able to do any of this was not a big problem for them as their *raison d'être* was more public-spirited: to provide funeral assistance. The members of G2 were the lead members in the local *Maranaananthara Sabaaya Samiti* (MSS) (roughly translated to 'Society for Funeral Assistance') which had 84 households enrolled as its members. This was a unique kind of association that households in the locality (that were members of the MSS) got in touch with when a death occurred in their households. The society offered assistance in conducting funeral rituals, as well as financial assistance. As locals who were familiar with the family, the members of the groups helped out by doing the running-around to help inform kith and kin, put up a *pandal* for those who come to pay their last respects and raising funds towards the funeral expense. There was a marked public-spiritedness in G2, overshadowing considerations of profit. More critically, it responded to an issue that people needed assistance with. The composition of the group is not homogenous, given people from several communities are likely to be included in the 84 households. The beneficiaries of this group are 'lower' class people. In that sense, the society represents a significant cohesion by surmounting caste and religious barriers, given that different communities have their own particular rituals and customs. However, it has to be noted that almost all the members of the group are involved in daily wage labour, and this *de facto* provides a certain uniformity in social class, and to some extent caste status. Nevertheless, the key point was that the society had been formed, like several trade unions, from a shared experience of financial troubles. It also has to be noted that most caste groups have their own

⁷⁰ A *pandal* is a small make-shift pavilion, usually made of bamboo or palm poles and cloth.

associations whose members assist with things such as specific community rituals, and this extends to death rites. This society, distinct from such caste-based groups for performing rituals, focusing instead on financial assistance among the poor is a novel form of voluntary association. The existence of burial societies, to help surmount the financial costs have been noted as early as 1944 in South Africa (Kuper and Kaplan, 1944), and 1981 in Botswana (Brown, 1982) and also in Ethiopia and Tanzania (Dercon et al., 2006). However, these tend to be groups of same tribe or community. Noting that voluntary associations which are neither government or NGO-like, started out as exclusive societies for ethnic groups, have broadened out to be inclusive, and in Ethiopia have even started getting involved in development activities, Dercon et al (2006) suggests harnessing these networks for implementing other development activities. In the context of Kerala, that these associations emerged recently despite the lauded development trajectory and establishment of participatory social institutions warrants further investigation. Cleaver argues that social institutions have an ‘essentially constraining nature’ as far as the chronically poor are concerned. “For such people,” she writes, “the scope to determine the terms of their public engagement is negligible and the likelihood of them acquiescing to sanctioned social relationships and inequitable institutional arrangements are very high.” (Cleaver, 2001). From the previous chapter, it is clear that institutions were embedded in the social structure, and were limited in their transforming potential. This is where this society, that exists as a space of voluntary association, neither affiliated to the government, nor to any NGOs a window to view local politics. One of the key members of G2, Rajan was a public-spirited person, and he had been also active in an earlier group called the Citizen’s Rights Committee, a group which no longer exists. Rajan was an upper-caste man, the only one in the group. The story of formation and dissolution of the Citizens’ Rights Committee will also be discussed in the next chapter.

The working of G1 and G2 show that notwithstanding the impact of Kudumbashree on women as individuals and the economic empowerment that may result from this participation, the take-away from Kudumbashree in the public discourse seems to be that it is an easy way to access financial instruments. Kudumbashree NHGs work primarily as thrift groups in the locality (and in a way does justice to its goals, started as they were with the explicit agenda of poverty alleviation).⁷¹ The availability of matching grants, and access to several other financial

⁷¹ The data obtained from the Kudumbashree official in the ward gives details of the thrift activities of each group in the locality and the amount of money they have saved, the total thrift collection of 13 NHG units (out of the total 24) standing at Rs.12,26,505 (or approximately £12,300). In Perur ward itself, there are 24 Kudumbashree groups with 374 members:87 SC, and 62 ‘minority’. Here ‘minority’ means

instruments through the Kudumbashree, was expected to promote entrepreneurial activity. This financial assistance was what attracted many entrepreneurial men towards trying to form men's self-help groups. In G1, the motivation was profit-making, and a good number of participants who were leaders in the group were entrepreneurs themselves. In G2 on the other hand, the group already existed and decided to call itself a men's SHG only because of the potential financial benefit. This is as much a result of the way Kudumbashree functions in the locality as it is of the way the scheme foregrounds poverty alleviation through women's participation – thus instrumentalizing the role of women. Therefore, men's SHGs may not be in principle an irony: Kudumbashree was founded with the goal of poverty eradication, and one of outcomes of this attempt was to be the empowerment of women. Warnings against such an approach had been made early on, not in the context of Kudumbashree, but in the context of expanding microfinance institutions or activities (Mayoux et al., 2000). A sharp contrast has been drawn up between the poverty-alleviation and feminist-empowerment paradigms that underlay microfinance activities. In a feminist empowerment paradigm, gender awareness and feminist organization are instruments towards gender equality and human rights. On the other hand, in a poverty-alleviation paradigm, small savings, loan provision, group formation for community development etc. are instruments towards increased well-being, community development and self-sufficiency

Vis-à-vis their impact on public spaces, the irony is evident to an observer: men's SHG meetings are held in public spaces. They claim the public spaces easily and late into the night, until that time when men felt they had exhausted their discussion. Kudumbashree meetings on the other hand do not qualify as public meetings, held as they are, away from the public eye, in households or governmental spaces, and before dusk, and lasted for a fixed time. In the men's SHGs, the women's NHGs were disparagingly talked about, to show how different they are from gossiping and complaining women, who do not do anything. Profit is an explicit motive in the men's SHG (G1 seemed to have made impressive profits) whereas women's groups always are geared explicitly towards thrift. This is why, despite men's SHG mimicking women's groups, men voiced that the benefits handed out to Kudumbashree NHGs are a waste of resources, and they themselves would have managed better if they had been given that benefit. There could be truth in this line of reasoning as many people in G1 were already entrepreneurs and they could use a

'Christian' as there is only one Muslim family who are not KS members. The rest of the 225 members must belong to the OBC, Nair, Brahmin and other 'Forward Caste' families.

shot of capital at low interest rates (as is available for Kudumbashree members) to make more profit. Finally, the most remarkable fact is that one of the most powerful people in the locality, Balan is a member of a self-help group! This raises the rhetorical question, ‘who doesn’t need self-help?’

Next, I will discuss two interesting incidents – one of spontaneous gathering of women, and another of a planned meeting not happening – that will further shed light into the local organizing outside formal institutional spaces.

5.1.3. Two Incidents

As a researcher, one of the exciting days in the field was when thozhilurappu (or employment guarantee, the local MGNREGS workers, from both SC and OBC communities put up a spontaneous protest. This was a flash gathering of MGNREGS workers from Kunnumpuram led by Sneha, outside the ward councillor Balan’s home, demanding work that they were assured under the MGNREGS. MGNREGS work had not been allocated from the week before to these workers. Also toilet construction proposed under MGNREGS was being carried out in non-SC households when there were SC households that had demanded such works. The women were demanding that the promises made in several ward council meetings, of giving priority to SC in all development activities, were held up!

When the women gathered outside the councillor’s home, he was forced to acknowledge this protest and respond in a democratic way to address these concerns. The flash protest served its purpose, and promises were made to address the issue. Before reading much more into this protest, another driving force behind this protest too has to be considered, and this will be done in the next chapter. However, what is clear is that the women, in posing this demand, not in gramasabha meetings, but in a self-determined place and time, held the local democratic bodies to account, and through the leaders they accepted. This clearly did not go down well with the ward councillor. When I met him a little later, while I was talking to Leena, he refused to acknowledge her presence with the customary nod. Implied was that she, as the MGNREGS supervisor should have not let such a thing happen. She knew that the president was angry, he had called her to express his displeasure that she let this protest happen (and as I will show in the next chapter, had something to do with the on-going tug of power between her and Sneha)

If the spontaneous gathering of MGNREGS workers were confined to women from the colony and was unplanned, another meeting that was planned to address some concerns was strategically scuttled. This was the meeting of potential-beneficiaries, called because of disputes arising from the allocation of hen coops and goat enclosures. The meeting was to be held on October 10, 2014. The context briefly is as follows. Hen coops and goat sheds were distributed under a government scheme. Those who had applied for these, but did not get these were unhappy. There were two elements to the dispute: one was that only a few SC families that applied were deemed eligible and others were left out. The other was that some families in the general category list (mostly OBC families who were in equally deprived conditions like the SC families) were not included as beneficiaries. Disputes arose as to how the beneficiaries were selected.

In a conversation between Leena and Reena, two ward functionaries (through her involvement with the Kudumbashree) discussed this issue. Both women agreed that it was pointless to give goat and hen coops to so many SC households, and that the panchayat should have learnt from the previous experience: the SC households could not take care of these animals as each homestead was located in a small area. They hardly had any space in their premises – a yard or barn, to rear hens and goats. The animals would die soon because of the lack of facilities. So it was better to give these out to households which had some more homestead land, so that the distributed animals could go on to become productive assets. Leena also expressed some disappointment that people like herself were not receiving these, and benefits were going to the SC households who couldn't use these properly. This was certainly a strange situation where the condition of being deprived made it logical to exclude the deprived from further assistance. In contrast, some women from the SC community were angry because they had not received these while some of their neighbours in the same situation had. Some women from OBC communities felt that SC communities enjoy disproportionate benefit and wanted to know why they had not been given the benefits when they could have taken better care of hens and goats. This was a clear case where the discourse in the panchayat meetings led to conflicts because they were not based on facts.

To continue, the issue had become a big headache, especially for Kudumbashree members who were the ward functionaries. Women demanded accountability from them. The beneficiaries wanted a new meeting to be called to explain the allocation. A meeting was scheduled. However, it was not in any of the ward functionaries' interest to hold this meeting as the allocation could not be explained without setting the record right: which meant that the hollowness of the claims of

the order of allocation being 'SC, Widows, Disabled, Elderly, and General' will be proven wrong. Leena did not want to be put under the scanner. Here, I would like to note that on an earlier date, about one-and-a-half months before this incident, I had been at an MGNREGS work site where the MGNREGS *mates* Leena and Reena were sitting and working out the list of potential beneficiaries of the scheme.⁷² Therefore, they did have some role in making the first list of potential beneficiaries, even though the final decision about allocation was not theirs. As this was a quickly organized meeting, people had to be informed over the phone. Leena sat in the panchayat hall and called many of the interested people over the phone to inform them about the meeting.

Leena was very strategic: both in making the calls, and the information she relayed to people. She called most of the key people but kept the calls short, without letting it ring a full round, and did not call them back again. She counted on the fact that most of these people would not call her back, giving her a valid excuse: that they were not informed because they did not attend her call, neither did they call back. In her defence, Leena was using her personal phone. As no money was given towards these expenses, she did not want to shell out her own hard-earned money to organize a public meeting (where very likely she herself would be questioned!). Her second strategy was to relay information in a discouraging way. She would tell someone that not many people are going to attend; to someone who was complaining, she would pacify and say that the list was final anyway, there won't be much changes despite this meeting, and why do not they apply the next time; to someone else who started questioning the allocation over the phone, she would ask to come and talk at the meeting; to others, she would say her phone balance was running out and cut short the conversation, and to some others, she would say, 'come if you have time' in a half-hearted manner. It certainly helped that the meeting was kept on a working day, in the afternoon, between 2:00 and 3:30 p.m. Combined with the half-hearted invitations, the net effect was that nobody expressed willingness to take time out to a meeting that was organized at an inconvenient time, was likely to be poorly attended, and in the end would yield no result. This was precisely the desired outcome. Clearly, emotion, affect, choice of words, modulation of language, all could be used to the advantage of the powerful.

Here, I want to highlight two things: how people are not entirely happy with the working of the local bodies, and how this discontent was not allowed to surface in disruptive ways, and was managed by functionaries. This has to be read with the embeddedness of these institutions

⁷² 'Mates' are worksite supervisors who have responsibilities such as marking attendance in the muster roll, maintaining measurements, identifying works to be undertaken etc.

within the caste structure, and also with the following sections where I will show how caste operates through discourses. In both instances of the spontaneous gathering in front of the house of Balan, as well as the meeting that did not happen, what was visible was that people were questioning decisions regarding allocation of benefits made in the local bodies. Hence, these institutions and their non/functioning become sites of challenging hegemony. The hegemonic nature of these institutions will become clearer as I move into the next section where I explain the conduct and nature of a few other meetings organized by the Oridam gramapanchayat where people not just from Perur but other wards too participated.

5.2. Meetings in Perur ward organized by Oridam Gramapanchayat

During fieldwork, I had the opportunity to attend three public events organized by the Oridam gramapanchayat: inauguration of the *Jagratha Samiti*, inaugural meeting of Pakalveedu, and a seminar for SC communities. All of these were highly publicised, with the presence of distinguished personalities as chief guests. The details of these meetings follow.

5.2.1. The *Jagratha Samiti* Meeting

This meeting, held in August 2014, and was to inaugurate the official formation of a *Jagratha Samiti* (translates as ‘Vigilance Committee’). The *Jagratha samiti* is envisaged as the decentralised unit of the State Women’s Commission, which in its most local level is to be set up and operational in every ward of a Panchayat.⁷³ The aim is to make gender justice mechanisms accessible to women, particularly poor women at the local level. The basic function of this committee is to accept complaints relating to gender-based issues from women and girls and resolve these, to intervene in any problems that come to their attention, to provide legal and non-legal aid, to address gender issues in the locality, and to liaise with local bodies to create a safe and enabling environment for girls and women. According to the circular relating to the *Jagratha Samiti* issued by the State Social Welfare department in June 2007, these committees, at the panchayat level, should comprise of the following people: the panchayat president, ICDS supervisor, one female ward councillor, the Circle Inspector/ Sub-inspector of the area, one female social worker from the SC/ST community or one female ward councillor from the

⁷³ The rules of the Vigilance Committees and information about their roles are to be found in detail on the Kerala State Women’s commissions website. A handbook in Malayalam can be accessed.

SC/ST community, the doctor in the primary health centre of the area, the CDS chairperson, an elected member from the ward-level *Jagratha Samiti*, and a female lawyer.⁷⁴

For the inauguration of this committee, a member of the State Women's Commission Ms Mayawas the chief guest.⁷⁵ Since I was at the meeting, I was also invited by President Balan to meet her and we exchanged pleasantries. This meeting had been given wide publicity and many women had turned up. Altogether, approximately 250 individuals were present, mostly women. On the stage were eight men and three elected women representatives, a total of eleven people, as speakers. The program was organized in two sessions. The first session saw all the speakers give their felicitations, and a key note address by Maya. This was followed by speeches by men present on the stage. The CDS Chairperson of the Panchayat found a space on the stage, so did Shobha, the District Committee Member. Oridam Panchayat Vice President Parvathi Teacher also was a speaker in the first session.

Maya started her talk by admitting that the *Jagratha Samitis* do not always work as expected. She gave a few examples of horrible incidents that had come to her notice in her official capacity. The first was the incident of a 14-year-old school boy caught drinking vodka in class, and his parents refusing to accept this about their son. In the next example, she elaborated on the rape of a very young girl by a stranger on a public bus even as she was sitting in her father's lap. This details of this example evoked strong emotions in the audience. Next, she gave the example of a young school-girl who was an active participant in her own prostitution, by going to meet clients even as her parents thought she was going to school. She ended this talk by issuing warning to older women gathered there – that not just young people, but they too might be duped by fraudsters in the present era of mobile phone communication. She took the opportunity to talk about misuse of mobile phones, not just to trap women, but also to trap young boys. To this narration with much flair and dramatic effect, the audience listened in rapt attention. In her speech, there was no mention of how *Jagratha Samitis* are supposed to work and deliver justice at the local level.

⁷⁴ The stipulated composition at the ward-level is slightly different, but since the inauguration was for the panchayat-level committee, I have outlined the related stipulations. Briefly, at the ward-level, women active in local clubs, libraries and groups as well as local government functionaries are expected to be in the committee.

⁷⁵ All names of speakers at events have been changed.

Another male speaker on stage talked about how soaps were leading women astray. He gave examples of women sitting glued to the television for hours at a stretch in the evenings, neglecting husbands who come home after work, and children. The women watch soaps, and forget to prepare dinner. This was a big problem, and as he made several such ‘funny’ remarks many in the audience nodded their heads in approval. In between, the lack of interest in news (as against serials) was also mentioned.

The key speaker for the second session was an advocate, Ms Ashwati. Advocate Ashwati, who was to talk to the audience about legal aid, started by talking about misuse of mobile phones, the same point Maya had made. She gave examples of older women who were led astray by younger men, particularly auto drivers, van drivers, and bus cleaners. Taking cue from the earlier male speaker, she elaborated the bad effects of serials on women: erosion of family values. Apart from this, another surprising point she made was that sexual relations between consenting unmarried adults were illegal. She said this was the case because the religious rituals associated with marriage has legal validity. As a consequence, she said, a child born out of wedlock becomes illegitimate. She dwelled on the horrors of such a child’s fate in life. The logic therefore, was that sexual relations between unmarried adults were illegal because a child born out of wedlock does not have a legal father. This certainly was not just bad logic, but also a misinterpretation of law. In the end, she narrated the story of a girl getting a divorce merely fifteen days after her marriage. Condemning this divorce, she said there was a need for families to get involved to prevent this and advise the bride, and the divorce was a failure of parenting as well. In this case too, not one law that favoured women – for instance, the Domestic Violence Act, the Dowry Prohibition Act, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, Inheritance and Succession Rights of women, Marriage Laws – was mentioned even in passing. Instead the focus was on the sanctity of marriage and the role of good parenting. Given this talk was given to a large audience of women and prefaced by women being led astray by mobile phones and television, it assumed the tone of victim-blaming, while endorsing stereotyped gender roles, and in that sense, was almost anti-woman. Additionally, it led to the belief that this was the official position of the *Jagratha Samiti*, which was co-ordinated by the State Women’s Commission.

5.2.2. ‘*Pakalvedu*’ for the Elderly Inauguration Meeting

Another large public function organized by Oridam Gramapanchayat was the inauguration of the *Pakalvedu*, a day-care centre for the elderly. This was also located within the boundaries of

the Perur ward. This was an initiative of devised under the National Health Mission activities in Kerala (Hashir Ahammad, 2016). Especially relevant in the context of Kerala where the decline in fertility rate, increase in life expectancy, and falling population growth rate has resulted in a stage of demographic transition where the population is ageing (Kerala Human Development Report 2005, pp 20-33), the idea was for local bodies like Panchayats to take responsibility for the care of the elderly who are left alone at home during day time. It planned pick the elderly from their homes in the morning, to provide lunch in the afternoons, arrange for comprehensive health care in associating with healthcare providers, to issue a health card that ensures access to healthcare facilities for the aged, to care for those who had been confined to home due to ill-health, and to offer counselling facilities, should they require it. Needless to say, the initiative was ambitious and realizing it would take years of committed follow-up. (What was certainly taken care of at the moment was building the infrastructure: the actual building where the elderly could spend their day. The ward co-ordinator Mr Jayan was very enthusiastic about this initiative and told me that he was heading one group of the aged, the members of which were expected to regularly avail the facilities of *pakalvedu*.

The inauguration itself was a grand event where a famous male music composer and a famous woman writer were the chief guests. Two other writers, both of them women living in Oridam – a poetess who lived in the region, and another retired teacher who had penned the history of the region – were also invited guests. Larger in scale than the earlier meeting, this event had many other speakers on the stage. All the elected representatives were present, and some were on the stage. Unusually, names of representatives from the opposition LDF were also on the brochure although they were not present on the stage. A lunch was also arranged after the event. As was usual in all other meetings, Kudumbashree members served tea during the program.

A small program honouring all the people in the panchayat over the age of eighty was also arranged as part of the inauguration. Each person who had crossed eighty was called to the stage and honoured with a *ponnada*, (a gold-bordered shawl, that would be wrapped around the shoulder) for their contribution to the area. All these ensured that there was a larger crowd than normal for the event. Key points made by the speakers at this event are briefly explained below.

Introducing the concept, one of the older ward councillors said that the *pakalvedu* is a facility for older people to stay while their children go for work, so that they are not left alone, uncared

for at home. On the pamphlet distributed on the day of the inauguration, and in the speech of Perur ward councillor Balan, it was lauded as an initiative to address the problems of the elderly.

One of the two chief guests, the music director in his early fifties delivered a touching speech about how parents should not be treated as a burden by grown-up children. He gave examples of children forgetting to do meaningful things for parents, or finding time to spend important festivals like Onam with them. He sang one of his touching songs, and added that the culture of Malayalis (people in Kerala who speak Malayalam) was one of deep respect for parents and family. He lamented the erosion of that culture.

The popular author who was the second chief guest was in her late eighties, and spoke of her own life. Her children had crossed sixty and become 'senior citizens' themselves. Even though they cared for her in the best way possible, she said that it still felt like a burden. She described her loneliness after her husband's passing, and added that at that particular stage in her life, she was lonely, especially having had a busy life when younger. Nevertheless, she added, she did not see herself using facilities like *Pakalveedu*. Among Namboodiris like herself, there was a saying, *Lokasamasta sukhino bhavanthu* (May there be happiness unto the world).⁷⁶ That notwithstanding, she shared that she found life a burden at that point. Her faith made her live life to its natural end. The speech struck a chord among the audience, with a large round of applause after it ended.

The woman author from the locality, a historian and a teacher, talked about the issues of the aged as arising from the disintegration of the family, particularly the movement from the joint to the nuclear family structure. She dwelt on the merits of the joint family, on the value of motherhood, and the respect a mother had to command in the old age. The next speaker, the younger poetess in her late 40s, on the other hand, provided a different perspective. Presently a widow, she shared about her and her late husband's decision not to have children, and the shock when her husband passed away rather unexpectedly six years back. This forced her move from Dubai to Perur village where the couple had built their retirement home. In a very candid talk, she spoke of struggling with her depression and of age catching up slowly, the lack of an anchor in life that she felt, and how writing poetry was a spiritual journey for her. She also recited one of her poems on stage.

⁷⁶ Kerala Brahmins are called Namboodiri.

At the end, after honouring the elderly, a session was held by an advocate, for legal awareness for the elderly. Here too, like the earlier talk by Ashwati, instead of talking about the many legal issues like dealing with property rights, especially for women after the death of the spouse, about financial assistance from the state, care facilities for the elderly, or about mental abuse of the elderly in households, the advocate gave a moralistic story about the children not taking care of the old parents. Many among the audience had doubts about inheritance laws but the advocate gave no direct answers.

5.2.3. Seminar for SC communities' Development and Inauguration of Panchayat Hall

This was a half-day program where two separate functions were held together: one was a 'seminar' to form a comprehensive development plan for youth from SC communities, and the other was the inauguration of the newly-completed Panchayat Hall named after a Late headmaster of the local school.⁷⁷ This headmaster, Mr Krishnamurthy Iyer also served as the Panchayat President between 1976-79. Two state ministers inaugurated these programs.⁷⁸ The seminar for SC communities was inaugurated by the then-State Minister for Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Backward Castes. The Panchayat hall dedicated to the memory of the late headmaster, was by the then-State Minister for Co-operation, Khadi and Village Industries.

The pages inside this pamphlet gave information about the programs and the speakers. A printed 6-page document which outlined the comprehensive program for the development of SC youth (see Appendix 3 for translated version) was also distributed along with this. This document gave some statistics about the number of colonies in Oridam, and the number of students in schools from the colonies. It also put forward construction of paved roads, electrification of 28 non-electrified houses, and making drinking water schemes functional (which has to be seen as a tacit acknowledgment of the non-functionality of existing schemes). Other programs were to provide grants for house construction and repairs, as well as providing houses for those without either land or house; none of these were special schemes, but activities that had to be carried out by the local bodies.

⁷⁷ Although it was called a seminar, in its conduct, it was more like a meeting in organization and participation.

⁷⁸ Iyer is a surname that immediately indicates the Brahmin caste status. It is also specifically a Tamil Brahmin surname, as against the Namboodiri who is a Malayali Brahmin.

On the day of the program, there was a significant turn-out, over 250 people in participation for this program. Many youngsters, particularly young women, from the SC communities were present because it was publicized that youngsters could apply for financial assistance for skill development programs. Women (not as many men) had gathered well ahead of time, before the ministers arrived, and waited inside the panchayat hall. Men stood outside, to meet the ministers personally, and possibly get photos clicked with them. Not one woman was seen in this gathering of men outside the hall to welcome the ministers. Even though the vast majority of participants were women from SC communities, only two of the thirteen speakers were women. Except for the minister himself, no speaker on stage was from the SC community. The women speakers were Shobha, the District panchayat standing committee chairman for public works, and Parvathi teacher, the Panchayat Vice-President. Among the audience was present, two elected SC women ward councillors of Oridam – they had no role except as audience, even though they might have been best equipped to speak about the topic at hand. (I know this also from having talked with both of them separately about issues in the ward). Also present was Sneha, the woman who led the flash protest of MGNREGS workers, who was articulate and would have liked the opportunity to speak. As always, Kudumbashree representatives were present and these women served tea in these meetings.

Most speeches were related to inauguration of the panchayat hall and dedicating it to the memory of the ex-head master. His son and a close associate were present. The Minister for Co-operation made inaugurated the building by cutting a ribbon. He declared the building open and added some good words about the initiative. He spoke very little and soon left for another engagement.

After this, the official speeches were held. I will briefly cite some of the key points in the talks by key people at this function. In his welcome speech, President Balan mentioned that the land and the school was handed over to the Nair Service Society (NSS) by the head master, and was being run by them now. He praised the generosity of the schoolmaster. He also mentioned that ₹65,00,000 (then approximately £65,000) was set aside for SC development by the Gramapanchayat. Benefits for Scheduled Castes had doubled, he said, and this was due to the bold moves made by the SC Welfare Minister (who was on-stage).

The SC Welfare Minister talked about the key housing scheme available for the community members, including financial assistance for buying land and building houses. He expressed his opinion that the biggest hurdle for the community is the lack of employment: there are educated

youth who are unable to obtain good jobs. This, he said was because public sector jobs are being cut whereas SC members are not able to get into the private sector.

The next speaker was Mr. Ramamurthy Iyer, the son of the ex-headmaster/Panchayat President Krishnamurthy Iyer. His father was well-respected by people, he said. So well respected, that we dissuaded him from getting into politics when he was forced to by his friends. After all, pious people like him are more sensitive to criticism and mud-slinging and politics was necessarily a place of these. We are people who hear *Gayathrimantram* in the morning and *Sandhyavandanam* in the evening, he said, to mean that politics did not befit such piety. He quoted a Sanskrit Shloka from Gita and added that if people remember him now, it must be because of his good Karma. He ended his talk to a heavy round of applause. Even through this talk, he drew a line of distinction between people like himself (Brahmins) and others, even the powerful politicians, who would just not be as pious. While I sat there, I wondered how the politicians on stage perceived these remarks and how these passed without any problems. It would appear that *Sanskrit Shlokas* and upper caste belief systems found a place in almost all public meetings, as the common-sense of the dominant.

Another Panchayat-functionary, the Chairman of the Working Committee on Development, who was held in high regard by many spoke about the backwardness in many areas of the Panchayat. Education was critical in upliftment. But the problem, he said, was that people who enjoy the benefits continue to enjoy further benefits. This has to stop, and there must be a balance. In saying this, he was once again calling into question, 'reservations' and using the popular trope that 'all benefits go to the SCs'. He then recollected the regal way in which the ex-Headmaster walked through the school corridors when he was a student himself in the school. This he said, was a '*Suvarnakaalaghattam*' (golden age). Ex-Headmaster Iyer was very fond of him. He added, "Someone like him having to do the job of a Panchayat President – even the thought is difficult!" In line with the previous utterances, to be a politician, even if it was a Panchayat President, was seen beneath a pure soul like Mr Krishnamurthy! He continued, "Although he stood elections and became the Panchayat President, there was no blemish or bad name for his family because of his '*pothuvyavaharam*' (public activities)!" The caste codes ingrained in these utterances were simply hard to miss.

Parvathi, the panchayat Vice-President, after offering her initial remarks, in her brief address said that there is a lack of participation by the SC communities in the Gramasabha, and they should

participate more actively and voice their demands. It seemed certainly strange because evidently, the largest single group participating in not just Gramasabha, but also all public programs were women from SC and OBC communities.

The next speaker was another teacher, Mr R Menon, whose father was also an elected member. Mr Menon reminisced about how his father Mr S Menon had donated the land where the government veterinary hospital currently stands. He also mentioned the generous land contribution by Mr Krishnamurthy Iyer and said that he is happy to join in the honouring of the great man. In doing this, it was clear that he was also claiming his spot as an equally generous man's son, and demanding public recognition and memorializing of his family too!

After the ministers left, most of the audience too did. The remaining participants belonged to the SC communities. In this forum, one of the things the president did (just as the vice-president Parvathi also did earlier) was to highlight the low participation of SC communities, particularly boys and men. In the meeting, most of the participants were women. Although the hall was overflowing, only two rows in the front were occupied by men. Few men stood at the back, constituting on a rough count, approximately 1/8th (12.5%) of the participants. It appeared that the intended audience for public events were the colony inhabitants (mostly SC but also other backward castes). While other voters of the ward hardly faced any pressure to participate, even young boys from the colonies were asked to participate, whether they liked it or not, a reminder of what has been called the 'Tyranny of Participation' by Cooke and Kothari (2001). These researchers write that 'tyranny is the illegitimate and/or unjust exercise of power' and participatory development can facilitate this not because of certain individuals or processes but because the tyrannical potential of participatory development is 'systemic' (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). The insistence on increased participation of the men from the colonies was despite the fact that a good proportion of not just the gramasabhas but of any public meeting is constituted of SC and OBC community members. Most were women who often attended these meetings at the expense of their daily wages. The expectation seemed to be that men should also sacrifice their work days, and children should take an interest in these activities by default, or because of some obligation.

Clearly, women from deprived communities more often than not, constituted the 'public' for activities of the local governance bodies. They were also the active members, functionaries of the local programs and schemes – the Kudumbashree, the MGNREGS, the gramasabhas. The

demands of democracy on these women also extended to the men and children in the families too, a demand not likewise expected of upper caste households or women.

Also mentioned in this forum were the findings from a study carried out amongst the SC community. This was printed in the pamphlet distributed at the meeting. This document said that there was a need for social and economic intervention among young SC men. What the issues were that necessitated this social and economic intervention was outlined in the last section of that document and was repeated by Balan in the public meeting. Following were the problems the identified, translated from the document circulated (See Box 5.1 below).

This list seemed less like findings of a study, and more like mainstream impressions of the colony written out in scientific-seeming language, using percentages and numbers. If it did not pathologise several communities by implying that the youth, particularly men of the community faced problems *en masse*, it certainly reinforced negative stereotypes of the colony as a place of violence, crime, drug abuse, backwardness and hopeless, and blamed it on the psychology of the inhabitants. Many statements squarely blame youngsters in the community rather than serve as a useful statement of a problem. For example, the first problem identified, that, '*Most youngsters study only until the SSLC, or Plus two at most. They do not try to go for higher education, or to find skilled areas of employment or training.*' Here, the blame is on the youngsters for not trying to develop themselves academically or in other skills. Later, they are also blamed for not sticking to any jobs, for living beyond their means, and not having a saving mentality. Another statement squarely said that a good number of youngsters in the SC communities were substance abusers. Many were vague, and immeasurable, and non-verifiable statements, but when presented as findings from a survey, carried some authority. A statement like '*The proportion of youngsters who think differently from their traditional ways have now risen to about 50% (sic)*' did not convey what the traditional thinking would be of the young men under question. However, it did present these men as 'traditional, unwilling to think differently', as if they were set in their 'backward' ways, in what seems like an attempt to match up with the stereotype of men from lower caste communities. Circulated as it was publicly, this can only mean that the panchayat anticipated little or no challenge to such a document. This implied a degree of powerlessness, specifically of men, in these communities, to question such sweeping statements made publicly.

Box 5.1: Problems identified among SC youth.

Basic Problems Identified by the Gramapanchayat among the SC youth.

1. Most youngsters study only until the *SSLC**, or *Plus Two*** at most. They don't try to go for higher education, or to find skilled areas of employment or training.
2. Only 25% of SC boys pursue education beyond *Plus Two*
3. Girls fare better than boys in studies
4. Less than 1% of SC people in the panchayat are employed in government jobs.
5. Only 0.5% SC men are employed abroad.
6. Majority of youngsters educated below SSLC are those who don't stick to any jobs.
7. Less than 1% of youngsters set up their own business.
8. Among the youth, a considerable percentage of young men regularly use addictive substances.
9. This substance addiction leads them to socially exploit in many ways (*sic*).
10. Although they earn high wages daily, the lack of thrift and reckless spending leads many to indebtedness, and borrowing at high interest rates, making life very difficult.
11. Many young women are forced to take up jobs to sustain their families.
12. The proportion of youngsters who think differently from their traditional ways have now risen to about 50% (*sic*).

*SSLC – Secondary School Leaving Certificate Exam, roughly equivalent to GCSE in the UK

**Plus Two – Roughly equivalent to A-levels in the UK

Source: Printed document distributed at the Comprehensive SC youth development Seminar (See Appendix 3).

After the meeting, I asked Balan about the survey on which the findings were based. He said this was the finding from a survey carried out by the SC promoter, and asked me to get in touch with Mini, the SC promoter for the area. When I shared with him that I feel uncomfortable about these statements, he said that they were yet to properly compile the figures and this may not accurate. Later on, I asked Mini for the survey results, or the questionnaire if they had any, and she said she had no idea about this as the SC promoter preceding her had carried out this survey. Suddenly it appeared as though there might have been no survey at all, and even if there had been, this had never been analysed, and these findings were indeed common sense impressions, not findings arrived at systematically and scientifically.

This common-sense discourse legitimised in public spaces, when examined against discourses about the situation of Dalit women and men in India is revealing. In a paper that explores masculinities, the authors make claims that are not too far from the discourse in the gramasabhas. They write that the men are not interested in traditional occupations, and the hyper-masculinity of dalit youth is violent, and oppress women, both from their own communities, and others (S.

Anandhi et al., 2002). In another paper, Anandhi (2013) looks at ritual practices in a Dalit community and portray the men as ‘partaking’ in patriarchy that bear resemblance to Brahmin patriarchy. This has to be viewed as stemming from the same kind of anxiety expressed by Kannabiran and Kannabiran (1991), pointed out in chapter 1, when they write, “The problem of articulation (and indeed understanding) arises when Dalit men, having gained access to power, decide to adopt the methods of the upper castes in exercising this power. It is not uncommon to see Dalit boys molesting or passing derogatory remarks about upper caste girls”. This logic of hyper-masculine oppressive Dalit young men seems to have caught on, and we find Still (Still, 2008) writing that “Where possible, then, Dalit men seek to control and restrict their women in the name of honour and prestige.” Indeed, she goes on to argue that Dalit women are suffering as a result of the advances made by Dalit men in India.

It would appear that the discourse in the gramapanchayat, while apparently not based on any research finding, but stereotypical and discriminatory attitudes find reflection in academic literature too.

5.3. Discourses

From the discussions above, two major strands in public discourses can be identified:

- 1) Caste-related discourses, and
- 2) Gender-related discourses

5.3.1. Caste-related Discourses

In the earlier chapter, I have examined in detail, how a dominant discourse of ‘All benefits go to SCs at the expense of other deserving poor’ which is conflated with an ‘anti-reservation’ rhetoric is constructed and maintained through official participatory governance bodies. The anti-reservation discourse is, a polarizing debate which goes against the constitutional provisions for marginalized groups. What this section aims to show is how, additionally, narratives of superiority of some castes (and as a corollary, the inferiority of others) is inscribed into public spaces, public memory, and history through discourses legitimized by the powerful. Even though the official ward council meetings and the inauguration events had the poor SC and OBC community members as its participants, the only way caste as structure of social inequality came up for discussion was in discussing the ‘SC’ communities and in constructing an anti-reservation sentiment. This served to make the OBCs a part of the ‘general’ category along with upper caste

communities. Even though the distribution of benefits did not follow the discourse set in the public meetings, such a view was aired, meanwhile ignoring that OBC communities too avail reservations. Through very complicated manoeuvring, a simple discourse conflating caste with SC, and SC with reservation was built in the locality.

Public spaces carry caste legacies. In the field this can be evidenced in the process through which the ex-headmaster came to be memorialised in public, despite his family's relocation from the area, and the valorization of upper caste family traditions. Their having lived there once-upon-a-time gets marked, their memory engraved on a public space, and refreshed through public speeches. It was precisely such a claim to being memorialised for posterity that Mr R Menon too staked when he mentioned the donation of his father. However, the large area of their dwelling given up by the 'lower' caste people to construct the irrigation canal that still irrigates farm is not remembered or invoked. Their sacrifices (rather than contribution) as these, coming from a place of absolute poverty and powerlessness in society was not as much voluntary as forced, does not find a place in public memory. The generosity, doing away with the surplus, of the powerful, rather than the forceful dispossession of the powerless gets memorialised.

In the pakalveedu meeting, there were also nostalgic recollection of the merits of the joint family. The caste-class nature of the nostalgia for the joint family that has largely disappeared are evident when looking at the caste and class location of the women speakers. These women belonged to identifiably upper-caste communities. They were well-off, and none of them had financial insecurities to worry about in their old age. They were talking on a stage which was also occupied by men and women from similar backgrounds. All these author-speakers talked from a position of having support, financially and in the form of care from the rest of their family (if not their spouses). However, the audience was not as homogenous in their social location as the speakers on stage. The audience comprised of older men and women who found themselves living with their children, but had no land or other financial resources to fall back on. Many old parents were being cared for by their sons and daughters, not within what can be called a 'typical' joint family system, but by caring for them within the limited spaces, using the limited resources and facilities available. For instance, I found an old blind woman in her seventies living with her blind daughter who was in her forties in the Kunnumpuram colony. Another daughter came to cook for them and took care of their many needs shuttling between her husband's home and her own.

Collective memory inscribed on public space is itself marked by asymmetry in power, and serves to perpetuate it. Thus, interventions of the developmental state, as mentioned in the previous chapter, also results in structures that marks out 'lower' caste spaces, while leaving 'upper' caste markers on 'public' spaces in a steady continuous and historical process.

5.3.1.1. Hidden Transcripts

If the public meetings and discourses generated therein were a confirmation of the persisting and deeply entrenched caste relations, it could be assumed that the unquestioned acceptance of these show a compliance of the subordinated communities. Indeed, when issues of SC communities were discussed, none of the local representatives from the SC communities were ever invited to the stage. The proceedings and decisions were never questioned by the concerned communities. It is useful then, to understand what transpired in official functions as a 'performance' that conforms to a 'public transcript' Scott (1990, 2). Here, the "*public* refers to action that is openly avowed to the other party in the power relationship, and *transcript* is used almost in its juridical sense of a complete record of what was said. This complete record, however, would also include nonspeech acts such as gestures and expressions". For Scott, a *public transcript* is "a shorthand way of describing the open interactions between subordinates and those who dominate." He also warns that "any analysis based exclusively on the public transcript is likely to conclude that subordinate groups endorse the terms of their subordination and are willing, even enthusiastic, partners in their subordination" (Scott, 1990, 4) Indeed, this is what the hidden transcripts in the locality proved. "Hidden transcript" is used by Scott to "characterize discourse that takes place 'offstage,' beyond direct observation by powerholders. The hidden transcript is thus derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript." (Scott 1990: 4)

These 'hidden transcripts' surfaced in private conversations, and that too, likely due to my 'outsider' status; often outsiders are told what cannot be said in front of individuals one knows. During an informal chat, conversation turned towards various aspects of the Kunnumpuram colony. This was when some of the following anecdotes and memories were shared.

At a time when lower caste people – particularly the Thandaan (presently OBC), Kanakkan and Pulaya (both classified as SC) castes were the farm hands in a predominantly agrarian community, payments were often paid in kind by the upper caste land owners to tenants on whose land they

were working. Cash payments if any were paltry. Punishments were severe, and people recounted memories of men shot and drowned in wells for minor transgressions. There were also memories of the *kanjikuuzhi* (gruel hole, a hole dug in the ground lined with leaves) into which rice gruel would be poured. Bonded farm hands were allowed to scoop rice and gruel from these holes with a leaf of jackfruit tree folded into a *kumbil*, like a spoon. Small portions were served, and hunger was never satiated. Women recollected how workers would cleverly punch holes into the leaves before rice gruel was poured so that water would run into the soil, and the gruel hole would take longer to fill, while trapping more rice.

All the unquestioning complicity shown during public functions disappeared as two women shared about the changes democracy had brought about in the approach of the upper caste folks in the locality, as evidenced in the conversation I had with two women living in Kunnumpuram. One of them said that her old father still followed the caste codes and would show the customary respect to an upper caste person. I asked if people still felt the need to obey the caste rules, to which I received the following reply.

Woman 1: Things are changing now. They do not address us with our names like they used to. They call us 'chetta' or 'chechi' or whatever is age appropriate.⁷⁹

Woman 2: Yes, they know that now they cannot do to SC people what they used to earlier. We are also normal people. So they call us chechi-chetta. They come for functions in our house if we invite them.⁸⁰ Otherwise, they would not come at all, no? Forget the house, they won't even come in the vicinity. If this were the older times, I would have to move away from this place if they set out from their homes. That's how rules were back then⁸¹. Now we will say, 'maripodo thambrane' (You go away, thambran⁸²!) if they make such demands. We

⁷⁹ 'Chettan' and 'chechi' meaning 'elder brother' and 'elder sister'- and depending on age, Malayalam variants of 'uncle' and 'aunt' are the respectful ways of addressing strangers. Here, she is referring to the custom of addressing lower caste people by their names, irrespective of their age, while respectful ways of addressing people were reserved only for upper caste people.

⁸⁰ This refers to the practice of untouchability where the house of a lower caste person would have been off bounds and polluting for an upper caste person to visit.

⁸¹ This refers to the caste practice where a necessary distance (of 64 feet) was stipulated to be maintained between a Brahmin and the labouring castes. Noises (shouts or drumbeats) would announce to the people that an upper caste person was travelling, and lower caste people had to hide (and be not just untouchable but un-see-able) and maintain the necessary distance to avoid pollution of the upper caste body. Transgressions were punished.

⁸² 'Thambran' is the respectful address for the powerful upper-caste land-owner. Thamburan means 'god', and shows the equation of godly power with the upper castes.

still call them thambran though. But this is what we are thinking inside. We are not going to move away because thambran is coming from the other side. Earlier, they would make some noises to indicate that they are coming, and then we have to hide from their sight so they do not get polluted. Who will hide these days? Will anyone do it?

Another person from an SC community shared their thoughts about what they view as misfortunes that have recently fallen on the upper caste family. Coming from a place where the lower castes was seen to have been historically wronged, these misfortunes on the upper caste family, I was surprised to note, was viewed as ‘divine justice’.

Our parents worked for them, and gave them their lives’ effort, and so they are all big people now. They have property. But do we have the money to buy a plot of land? Can we give all that we have to get land? The price is going up. If my ancestors could keep their earnings for themselves and their children, we would have had something now. In those days the thambran owned the right to even a stem of tapioca that they planted in the soil! I have heard my parents say that they would work till their bones wore out but they would not be paid wages. There were no wages then. Then they would come back from work and when night fell, sneak back to the thambran’s field to dig out one or two tubers of tapioca. Why should they have had to? They planted it themselves. Then they would cook and give it to their children, and before daybreak, they would carefully bury the skin and waste so there would be no traces of having eaten it. This is how it used to be when they thambrans ruled. They still live there. Raman Thambran does. Not that they have done something themselves. But anyway, they are suffering for all of that, no?

What do you mean?

Now, the thambran waits to get the bus and would walk in the opposite direction towards the bus when it came. Will the bus stop for them then? It will stop only in the bus stop.

You mean he is not in his right mind?

I do not know. I think he has lost it. May be lost his memory. I have heard my mother say that thambratti (thambran’s wife) used to simply run through their compounds. She was mad. So they are suffering for their deeds. God is punishing them for doing all this to us.

These memories and feelings of injustice articulated very clearly are at odds with the public

transcript. In the public performances dominated by upper caste men where people marginalized communities are silent, attend silently and leave. However, memories and oral traditions banished from the public spaces have not been forgotten, and indeed have been kept alive. By interpreting the *thambratti's* madness and *thambran's* memory loss as retributive justice, the hidden transcripts reveal strong feelings of being wronged which have to be kept under wraps, and still cannot be publicly expressed.⁸³ The awareness that past injustices led to the present state of deprivation leave no space to imagine that the public discourse of 'all benefits go to the SCs' would have been accepted by the SC communities. Even though the public transcript never mentioned 'upper' caste communities as perpetrators of casteism, conversation in more private spaces clearly names these communities and their cruelty is vividly remembered. Critical aspects left unsaid in public finding mention in private conversations are indicative of the hostility expected in the public spaces, were these to be mentioned. This resembles what Scott has referred to as Concealment, or extreme cases of 'certain facts being widely known, but never mentioned in public. Facts that are known by all are effaced from public discourse' (ibid:51). Here, it also has to be noted that while I was able to obtain a privileged peek into the hidden transcript in 'lower' caste spaces, the same cannot be said of the upper caste spaces.

Open declaration of the hidden transcript is 'symbolically a declaration of war', writes Scott (ibid:8). The flash protest by women from Kunnumpuram was perceived as such, and was an unexpected show of strength that was off script. What made it stand out was that the protestors were comprised entirely of women and led by a woman from within the community, indicating successful organization and leadership within the community, hitherto invisible in public. Little wonder then, that it did not go down well and Leena earned the wrath of the ward councillor.

Both this flash protest by women, as well as the discontent of potential-beneficiaries (described earlier) that forced the panchayat to organize (and eventually scuttle) a meeting to explain their decision can be understood as the working of what Fraser (1990) has called the 'subaltern counter-public'. Identifying these as constituted by subordinated groups, she writes that "these counter publics emerge in response to exclusions within dominant publics, they help expand discursive space. In principle, assumptions that were previously exempt from contestation will now have to be publicly argued out." (Fraser 1990, 68). The simmering discontent of the lower caste people who were denied hen coops and goat sheds had to be managed – an official public

⁸³ I cannot over-stress the bond of trust with which these feelings were expressed and do not want to venture into any judgments.

meeting where this could be voiced was a threat to the uncontested way in which these official spaces had hitherto functioned. There was every possibility that this would happen. The discontent had to be managed without providing the opportunity for the subaltern voices to surface and threaten these spaces. However, these incidents offer a glimpse into the ongoing process of subaltern contestation that is carefully prevented from surfacing through the upper caste exercise of power in the locality. The documents that are publicly circulated by the local authority aid in this process. Through this, what I have tried to show is how public spaces are used to perpetrate violence and in general are part of the apparatus of domination, exclusion, invisibilization, forgetting, etc. on those it seeks to 'develop'. This is made possible by the caste-ordered nature of these spaces, which despite inclusion of the marginalized as participants, exclude them and pass judgments on them using an upper caste common-sense masquerading as scientific facts. Inviting members of the excluded communities to further judge them and pass remarks about them that are based from the viewpoint of those who exclude them, while pretending to be interested in the welfare of the excluded is a way through which the public spaces become caste-domains, and discourses turn into a violence in itself. This unabashed exercise of power is not likely to be an isolated phenomenon, and is very likely found replicated in many, if not most, panchayats in Kerala.

5.3.2. Gender-related Discourses

In public meetings, there were hardly any opinions expressed that did not conform to gender stereotypes, even when they were about empowerment of women. In the *Jagratha Samiti* formed with the explicit purpose of assisting women to address gender-specific issues in the locality, what found space were concerns about women's sexuality, and their role in the smooth functioning of the family unit. Women, girls, and young boys were presented as vulnerable, needing to take extra caution, as they could be easily led astray, particularly with the ubiquity of mobile phones. Even grown adult women were not granted agency, and equated with little boys who were lured by bigger men (thus equating sexual abuse of women with paedophilia). There was little discussion on how to foster healthy relationships and establish safe boundaries between men and women, boys and girls, and the young and the old. These more productive conversations were abandoned for those that reinforced negative stereotypes about both women and men, instilled a fear of technology, fear of public spaces (by mentioning even little girls are not safe in their parents' hands on public transport), blamed women (for instance, announcing that children born out of wedlock are illegitimate and suggesting women are to blame) and to

misinterpret laws (saying that religious validity of marriage translated into illegitimacy of children born out of wedlock) while omitting to mention legal safeguards, and stressing on traditional roles and wisdom of elders (parents should have dissuaded daughter from divorce!).

It is not surprising that horrifying stories of rape where the blame lay on women themselves, or on parents' who were not mindful enough of their young girl-children were shared. Rape was presented as the critical issue that needs addressing, but even this was confined to a description of graphic details rather than an analysis of power. All this did was to drive in the point that public spaces were not safe for women, and its corollary, that women should protect themselves by not venturing into public spaces. Patriarchy did not find a mention anywhere. There was no mention of the role of men in the situation and in changing male behaviour. None of the other umpteen critical issues around gender - like differential wage rates for men and women, non-participation in public leadership roles, violence against women (aside from rape), property rights for women, reproductive rights, healthcare needs, devaluation of care jobs – were deemed fit to be discussed. When mentioned, gender was always associated with the sanctity of the family unit and the preservation of the values and traditions, and women's contribution towards that end. The specific situation of women in colonies did not find a mention in any of the meetings, even though they comprised most of the audience.

If this weren't enough the same crowd of women assembled were told to mend their ways: by not watching soap serials, and by not ignoring the tired men who come home after a hard day's work.⁸⁴ Women watching soaps have been frequently presented as less-than ideal wives, mothers who prioritise television over their families, and as women who are out of touch with reality and having no general knowledge. These women, who supposedly spend the whole day at home, are expected to serve tea to the husband who comes home after work, that too at prime time. This begs the question: who are these women who spend the whole day at home? Are these all women or women who have the luxury and choice to not work? The discussion below will afford more clarity into this question. While I do not want to get into the merits of the argument about women watching soaps (and there are indeed various angles from which television shows have been considered and written about. See for instance, works by Usha (2004), Mini (2015), Shaju

⁸⁴ There is much to be said about the assumptions involved in this advice: that a majority, if not all women assembled there necessarily watch soaps, that they stay at home, or get home earlier than the men after work, that the women are all married in heterosexual relationships, that all the women are in the working age range, and so are their partners, who are healthy and working, and that the basic structure of the family is of an earning husband and wife, and dependent children.

(2013), Aravind (n.d.) etc. that discuss television viewing habits, popular impressions, the gendered ideas about viewership, and the stereotypes they perpetuate in Kerala.), the endeavour has been to show the prevalent mainstream opinions that find their way without contention, as accepted 'facts'. More importantly, what is repeated in the local-level meetings becomes part of an accepted discourse, offering no possibilities to counter the dominant common-sense.

Lastly, I want to highlight the lack of attention given to any of the many specific issues, and the focus instead, on 'problems' that are not really problems. As an example, I would like to cite two 'problems'. These are: a) "Girls fare better than boys in studies", and b) "Many young women are forced to take up jobs to sustain their families" (See Box 5.1). Although these have been presented as facts that are 'problems', it is not clear why these are problems, and what the basis of these 'facts' are. Are girls faring better than boys in terms of marks scored in school (primary, secondary, or high school), or in college/university, or in terms of the total number of years they get educated for, or in the pass/fail rates? Does it imply that girls from SC community are stealing the chances of boys from the SC community? If yes, it merely reproduces an anxiety resulting from a now-popular discourse that girls outnumber boys in educational institutes.⁸⁵ While is not clear from the document why this is a problem, an understanding of caste and patriarchy does enable us to interpret this as an effect of having internalized patriarchy, and the discomfort produced by non-adherence to familiar patterns produced in a patriarchal order. In the absence of any study in Kerala exploring whether higher enrolment of girls in certain courses challenge gender norms, this has to been as nothing more than a patriarchal anxiety and speculative fear-mongering.

The other statement, that women are forced to find work to sustain their families is a similar one in its ambiguity. If on the one hand, young women seem to be getting educated (as the previous statement complains!), the educated young women being able to find jobs should be a laudable achievement. If on the other hand, the women are forced to abandon their education to fend for their families, then the earlier problem stands contradicted. Since women finding jobs has been problematized, it should be neither of the two. In addition to making the earlier 'problem' suspect, this statement indicated that women are not sitting at home, but looking for

⁸⁵ This discourse has emerged recently in Kerala, often with respect to the enrolment rates for 3-year degree courses (non-professional courses) in Kerala. It is not clear whether this cuts across all educational institutes (not just government-aided colleges), migration to professional courses, and what it means for the society. What this discourse has done however, is to somehow disparage the educational system that enables women to secure high marks and consequently get admission to various courses.

jobs. Additionally, this does not seem to be jobs commensurate with high educational achievement, since fieldwork observations show that most women in colonies are employed as manual labourers or domestic helpers (as explained in the previous chapter too). Therefore, the problems identified by the panchayat seems to be in fact not a concern about women, but a veiled statement of another problem: that lower caste men are not taking care of their families, and are forcing their partners to work in low-paid jobs. This problem encapsulates a) an accusation against lower caste men, and b) reveals the thought that ideally women who are taken care of by their husbands should not have to work. This in fact, fits with the earlier stated analysis of hyper-masculinised Dalit men who do not want to do their traditional occupations and treat women badly. However, both a) and b) are problematic assumptions because historically, being slave castes, or similar lower castes, very rarely have women from SC and OBC communities have had the luxury to not work. They have always been involved in low-paid work, whether as domestic help, or as farm workers, or as basket weavers, or as fire-wood collectors, in addition to household work, not only to meet their family's requirements, but also because it was expected of them from their caste-gender location. The high Work Participation Rate (WPR) of women from SC community (32.7) as against the OBC (22.6) and other castes/communities (22.1) has already been noted (Government of Kerala, 2006).

In Perur, one Nair landlord recollected to me about his childhood when several SC communities were bonded labourers who had to obey the commands of their owner. From the narratives I have presented about the displacement of the SC and OBC communities to Kunnumpuram, as well as the lack of resources that I have described in this and the previous chapters, the picture that can be drawn up of SC communities (and majority of OBC communities) in the region is one of landlessness and poverty. Slavery was formally abolished in Central Kerala where Perur belongs to in 1872. Even though it was legally abolished, the practice continued well into the twentieth century, and several rebellions in Kerala were as against exploitative labour relations between the upper caste elite and the lower caste labourers. Older people in Perur still remember several of these exploitative relations as early as the 1960s.

This raises the question: how were domestic relations historically shaped between men and women of slave castes (as well as other 'lower' castes like 'thandaan') who were slaves? Slavery significantly affected formation of family units as fathers, mothers, and children were sold off or exchanged (as this older landlord I met too recollected). This further raises a second significant question: In the absence of proven record of land ownership or any other resources,

what is the historical origin of patriarchy in these communities if it were not for the preservation of property within bloodlines? The argument, even from the current situation of SC communities do not show material conditions that allow for evolution of community-specific patriarchal relations that could be termed ‘dalit’ patriarchy.

The tenuous argument then, is that a concept of group-differentiated patriarchy such as ‘dalit patriarchy’ is an ahistoric concept that does not aid in understanding the caste-gender specific relations that exist not just in Perur, but in caste-stratified societies.

However, discourse in the public (and reflected in academic literature too) present working women as victims of irresponsible men in the community is propagated through public platforms.

5.4. Conclusion

The following conclusions can be made from discussions in the preceding sections.

1. Public spaces are dominated by discourses that privilege men, particularly those from upper caste communities. I have shown how preferred outcomes are created by emotion, tone, and skilful manipulation. These discourses are constructed by engraving upper caste men’s names into public memories, upholding of upper caste norms – including that of a joint family system, gender relations, cultural practices like chanting gayatrimatram and sandhyavandanam etc. That public fora can be used to express upper caste pride and practices indicate the long distance that Kerala has to go towards democratisation.
2. The narratives legitimised in these spaces have successfully conflated caste with SC, and further equated social welfare schemes with ‘reservation’. In doing so, an anti-reservation stance (contradicting constitutional provisions) is propagated through the local bodies, serving to locally polarize communities on caste lines by rousing an anti-SC sentiment.
3. On the other hand, this leads to dissatisfaction and conflict among both SC and OBC communities, many of whom share similar circumstances and experiences. In their own way, they expressed their dissatisfaction: by organizing a protest in front of Balan’s home, as well as by demanding accountability regarding the allocation of benefits. The privileged discourses, the public transcripts, that create set performances in public spaces

are challenged by subaltern counter-publics. These stand against the docile beneficiaries that Kudumbashree creates, something that will be explored in the subsequent chapter.

4. Emerging forms of voluntary associations, like the funeral assistance committee seem to have overcome these polarizations, and tries to substitute for the lack of state assistance towards mounting expenses, especially of people from lower-caste and lower-class locations.
5. I have also shown how, through their gender discourse, local bodies were able to mobilise a moral discourse. Narrations of gruesome violence in the public spaces dissuade women from public participation. It has been argued that one of the functions of such of stories being iterated in public is to instil a fear of the public spaces in women (Valentine, 1989)⁸⁶, and to re-inforce the notion that the private/domestic space is the realm of women (Pain, 1997).
 - a) When read along with other problem identified, that is, of a violent hyper-masculine lower caste man, and the non-recognition of the dalit-bahujan women who have not had the luxury of being confined to a safe domestic space, this problem assumes a much more serious import. Dalit Patriarchy that has been proposed by some authors is an ahistoric concept. The true function then, of all these inter-related, co-existing discourses is to construct an incomprehensible, and artificial problem statement with internal contradictions while keeping under wraps, the structure, function and outcomes of a caste-society. In this discourses, it would appear that dalit women need to be saved from dalit men. Concepts in theoretical literature like Dalit Patriarchy do not conform to observations in the field, or to historical trajectories of Dalit communities, but closely resemble the disempowering discourses in public spaces.
6. Through this, what I have tried to show is how public spaces are used to perpetrate violence and in general are part of the apparatus of domination, exclusion, invisibilization, forgetting, etc., particularly for those it seeks to 'develop'. Clearly, disempowering discourses were advanced in public meetings. These discourses, instead of empowering the marginalized: the lower castes and women, perpetuated a hegemonic upper caste norm: what I would like to call a caste-gender order in public spaces.

⁸⁶ Valentine uses the instance of the murder of a young woman in London to show how the discourse it generated served two functions: a) a fear of public spaces (instead of men responsible for crimes) is instilled in women, and b) its corollary, an assumption that home is the safe place to be in for women.

The idea of a 'caste-gender' order draws from Raewyn Connell's conceptualisation of a 'gender order'. Connell (2009) writes that "when we look at a set of gender arrangements, we are basically looking at a set of relationships – ways that people, groups, and organizations are connected and divided.... It is important to note that not all gender relations are direct interactions between women on one side and men on the other. The relations may be indirect – mediated, for instance, by a market, or by technologies such as the TV or the internet. Relationships among men, or among women, may still be gender relations – such as hierarchies of masculinity among men" (p.73). It seems meaningful to talk about hierarchies of masculinity in the field site, with men from lower caste, particularly SC communities deemed to be abusers from whom women in these communities need protection. As I showed in the previous chapter, often men work in tandem with women in families – their wives, sisters, or mothers – to surmount adversities such as water scarcity, and keep the household running. What is clear then, is that structural social inequalities find expression not only in material living conditions, but are also reflected in the narratives and discourses. Powerlessness of the communities at the receiving end leaves these discourses unchallenged. This once again points to the lack of realization of social citizenship rights, an inability to participate in the public discourses as equal citizens bearing rights.

I will take these ideas into the next chapter where I further break down the interactions of the state and the people who are most closely associated with it: the ward functionaries. Here, I will throw more light specifically on the working of the caste-gender order, and explain how it results in appropriate performances in the public.

Chapter 6: The Personal is Political: Local Power as Local Caste as Local Politics

Introduction

The previous chapter has served to illustrate how public spaces are ordered, the discourses that produce this ordering, and the contestations to that order. I have brought out a key issue of such discourses rousing sentiment against the constitutional provision of affirmative action in completely unrelated scenarios, merely reproducing the common sense of the dominant in the locality. In this chapter, I look at the politics and power in a locality and argue that rather than function as an abstract legal or constitutional category, people's experience of citizenship in relation to the state are shaped through the local particularities of configuration of power.

That is, the purpose of this chapter is to illustrate, with empirical data, how citizenship is both a status and a practice, and while it is a legal state-individual relationship, the experience of it is dependent on status hierarchies within societies, thus also bolstering arguments made in the earlier two chapters. In this chapter, I focus on the interactions between people's lives and public politics to build my argument. This I do by considering examples of men and women who have/had a direct relationship to the functioning of the local bodies that is, they currently hold or previously held various positions and degrees of responsibility and power in the selected locality. The analysis in this chapter is expected to lead towards answering the second central research question: "How to people's experiences shape their interaction with the state?"

I discuss in detail a few instances at the interface of public life and personal life, and try to understand how gender, class and caste relations surface in the public spaces and interactions. In the discussion following this, I link the empirical fieldwork data to theoretical debates about gender and caste in the public sphere in India and outside, and also to the understanding of citizenship and its relevance to the concept.

6.1. Working in the 'Public': People in Relationship with the State

Narratives of people actively involved in public life of the locality are used here to analyse the nature of their interaction with the state. These are men and women who have either been elected to the posts they hold, or have been working in positions that involve liaising with people and the state, making their roles critical in the local level. I consider nine individuals, people who until recently were, or currently are involved in public activities, particularly in functioning of the local government. These include a man and a woman from the SC community (Mahesh, Sneha), two Christian women from backward communities (Leena and Sherly), a woman from an OBC community (Shobha), an 'upper' caste woman (Padma), and three 'upper' caste men, Rajan, Devan, and Balan. Rajan is not directly involved in running any local government activity, but is a leader of the Funeral Assistance Society (as described in the previous chapter) in the locality. Devan and Balan were respectively, the former ward and the incumbent ward councillor (at the time of field work).

I want to add that even though the focus is on nine individuals, of which five are women, and four are men, these narratives wade through events involving other people too. In that sense, in this chapter, more than nine individuals and their views, some complicated social relationships, and important local events will be described. The outnumbering of men by women is not because women have more active political life but because I consider the most local level functionaries of the panchayat happen to be from the Kudumbasree, who, as I will show in the conclusion, also happen to belong to particular social locations. The way Kudumbashree workers have come to be embedded into the working of the panchayat has been outlined in several papers earlier (Devika and Thampi, 2011; Williams et al., 2011, 2010).

Kudumbashree had seven Area Development Society (ADS) members⁸⁷ in Perur. Of these, five were active while two were not – one was busy with her new-born, and another had recently succumbed to cancer, and had yet to be replaced formally. Her work was divided between two members. Of the five active members, one had school-going children and while she was active, was a reluctant participant on many occasions. Another was hard-pressed for time as her elder sister required a heart surgery and she was the primary care-giver. While I did spend some time with her, I did not meet her frequently. The rest of the three most active members of these five

⁸⁷ ADS members are selected from the NHG group presidents and secretaries. In Perur, there were 24 NHGs.

were Sneha, Leena, and Sherly. I spent many hours with them, and developed a good rapport, often dropping in to their homes while at work. Here, I would like to concentrate first on the narratives of Sneha, an SC woman, and Leena and Sherly, both devout Christians.

6.1.1. Sneha, Kudumbashree NHG president, ex- CDS member

I was already familiar with Sneha from an earlier fieldwork stint four years ago. As I remembered, she enjoyed the confidence of the Panchayat President Balan and was active in all the panchayat activities. Enterprising, smart, and efficient, she had a keen interest in politics. The president was supportive as she went through a domestic crisis, and she felt she could rely on him in case of an emergency. So I mentioned her name to the president in our first meeting before starting fieldwork, and he said, “Ah yes, you can contact her too, but it will be more useful to contact Leena because she has all the information you need.” Sneha no longer seemed to be in his good books.

Despite the president’s dissuasion, Sneha was one of the first people I met in the field. This was mostly to do with the rapport we had shared during the earlier fieldwork stint. Also, I remembered her as a popular and efficient Kudumashree functionary, and thought she could help me with establishing some contacts. She remembered me. After catching up with her, I requested her to walk with me and show me the ward boundaries. Having a good grasp of the geography of the region, being popular in the region as well as being very talkative, I thought she would be a good person to familiarise me with the field area. We walked for three hours each on two days, walking and talking, and chatting with people we met on the road, covering most of the areas under the ward. (After this, she put me in touch with Leena and asked her to show me arounds the area of the ward where she worked. Leena in turn, spent one morning with me, and later put me in touch with Sherly who took me around the region that she worked in. It was during these walks that much of the community-based geography of the ward came to light). Sneha was keen to show the plantain cultivation they were undertaking as part of her Kudumbashree group’s initiative to grow organic food while putting fallow land to use. In these walks, as I mentioned in the previous chapter on Methodology, she took pride in introducing me to others as the ‘Madam from London’. Although not systematically, a snapshot of her political involvement was shared with me over this time.

Sneha grew up in a neighbouring village and came to the locality where she now lives after marriage, when she was barely eighteen. She has been active in public politics for well over a decade. Always interested in public life, she immensely enjoyed her public roles. She was aware

that she did not look like the stereotyped ‘SC’ woman - dark-skinned and poorly dressed – and mentioned that appearances could be deceptive in her case. Indeed, she was fair, dressed neatly, wore basic gold/gold-plated jewellery that indicated her married status, and carried herself with dignity. Although she had not been educated past the tenth standard, she says she was always a smart and quick learner, something evident to me in our interactions too. She made no pretence of being the demure, soft-spoken woman who was uninterested in the traditionally male-dominated world of manipulative public politics. She spoke boldly, understood scheming and cunning involved in public politics, and wanted to work her way up in that world.

Having gone for numerous training programs organized by various government departments under various schemes for skill development, she was aware that she had been side-lined despite possessing the skills and acumen to be a politician, and was able to attribute this experience to her caste. In all these programs, she says, she had been noted for her quick grasp of ideas and implementation, and was personally congratulated. For instance, she recounted with much happiness, a program that one male and one female leader from the locality had to attend. She and the current president, Balan, represented the panchayat. In this program, she was told that she had bright political future. It was not just her claim but my observations that confirmed that she was an active public worker. For instance, at the major meetings where state-ministers or prominent public personalities attended, I noticed that she was always present in the front row, trying to catch their attention. She would also be at the front to see them on the way out, and would shake hands with them or drop a word or two about their speech if possible. Her proactive participation and interest in public politics was very evident to me.

She thought that she could carve a space for herself in politics, especially since she seemed to have outperformed other trainees with her at many programs. She was disappointed when despite her work, she was side-lined and not allowed to be a woman candidate when 50% representation for women was reserved in local bodies.⁸⁸ Sneha had hoped that she would be considered as the candidate for the ward. However, her hopes were dashed as Balan became the nominated candidate once again. She was bitter and disappointed about this and once pointed

⁸⁸ In the local level elections in Kerala in 2010, 50% reservation for women in local governance bodies were implemented. This meant that 50% of constituencies (or one extra in panchayats with odd number of wards) were reserved for women candidates. Many a times, candidates with no experience of political activism were chosen as sufficient local women leaders to fill the women’s quota simply did not exist in the political parties, especially at the local level of functioning.

out to me that it cannot be a co-incidence that all the important functionaries in the panchayat were from the Nair caste, a claim not without some truth.

More aspects on Sneha's public role will surface through the narratives of Leena and Sherly too, as their public activism was built through Kudumbashree work.

6.1.2. Leena, Kudumbashree NHG president, CDS member at the start of field work

Leena, on the other hand, was a woman of little or no political ambition. Sneha had told me in one of our interactions that she was the one who suggested Leena's name to the President to the role of ASHA worker⁸⁹, thus bringing her into public life. She had not foreseen Leena replacing herself as the CDS representative from the ward and the chairperson of the Panchayat. She mentions that Leena has not been grateful and has forgotten the favour she has been done. As a result, the relation between Sneha and Leena have some undercurrents of hostility. Despite this, Leena tries her best to avoid confrontation, the reason for which will be explained shortly.

Leena (as will be explained in the following chapter) had to strategize within her household to move into the public domain. Her upward political movement was not intentionally planned or pursued, and was more of a matter of chance, of being around at the right time as an appropriate candidate. When I started field work, Leena was the CDS chairperson. She succeeded Sneha in 2012 (and was succeeded herself by Sherly in January 2015, a little before when my fieldwork ended). Leena had a tendency to speak vaguely and to muddle up thoughts and ideas. As I will explain while describing her personal situation in the next chapter, muddling up was a conscious strategy she developed in order to avoid giving straightforward answers to her husband. This strategy proved advantageous in her public role too, to navigate tricky issues (and when used with me too, sent me on meandering paths before getting to the information I needed). It also endeared her to the President as she would never explicitly say or do anything to question him or put him in a spot. Vagueness was a political strategy; it gave her room to manoeuvre.

⁸⁹ ASHA or Accredited Social Health Activist is a trained female community health activist under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). "Selected from the village itself and accountable to it, the ASHA will be trained to work as an interface between the community and the public health system," says the NRHM website. (<http://nrhm.gov.in/communitisation/asha/about-asha.html>, accessed on 12 January 2017)

While I was in the field, the Kudumbashree local-level elections that occur once in three years were scheduled. The hostility between Leena and Sneha were out in the open as elections drew closer. The election was to be on January 24, 2015. On December 23 2014, just a month before the election, I was to meet Leena in the morning in the Panchayat Hall next to her home at ten in the morning. When she did not turn up, I called her. She asked me to wait, but would not allow me go to see her at her home which was just a stone's throw away. It was an hour and a half before she turned up. Later, as we were walking and talking, Leena told me and my field assistant that she was held up because of an argument between herself and Sneha. Sneha had gone to the MGNREGS work site that day morning, as soon as work started. Since MGNREGS was implemented through Kudumbashree in Kerala, both Leena and Sneha were designated as the MGNREGS 'mate', the person responsible for maintaining the muster-roll and over-seeing the MGNREGS workers. Sneha then started marking attendance on the muster roll. This was a problem as it was the first day of a new work schedule: the rule was that if a worker did not report on the first day of a work schedule (typically covering a certain stretch of work in an area involving a few work days with a fixed number of workers), they cannot participate in that work on any other work day of that schedule. The worker can re-join work only in the next work schedule. Usually some small relaxation of rules was done and muster-rolls were not marked at 9a.m. sharp on day 1 so that those who are late to work are not excluded from work altogether for a few days. When Sneha went and marked attendance at 9a.m. sharp, the intention, Leena believed, was precisely to inconvenience the workers so that they would protest, and Leena who was the CDS member from the ward (and also responsible for the muster rolls in that particular work schedule) would be held responsible. The sentiment against Leena among the workers, almost all of whom were Kudumbashree members, would then get reflected in the Kudumbashree election. This meant she would not be re-elected as the ADS representative to the CDS. When Leena got to know about this in the morning, she quickly ran to the work site to pacify the workers (and this was why I was left waiting), but the damage had been done. Tense moments ensued.

A few days after this incident, on January 2, 2015, Leena was once again visibly agitated. Yet another incident had occurred. As we were walking the President passed us in a car and saw us. Leena nodded at him in acknowledgment but he did not nod back and return Leena's acknowledgment. Leena figured he was upset due to some events in the morning. The morning had seen a group of women assemble in front of his house and agitate against not being given

MGNREGS work on a timely basis. I have already described this flash protest in the previous chapter. To briefly recap, the women were from the ‘colony’ which was inhabited by the SC and backward community. Work wasn’t allotted from December 27th, and the women wanted to have work and use up their 100 work days. There had not been a new muster roll. The group of women also took issue with toilet-construction by MGNREGS workers in non-SC households even though there were eligible SC households that had to get priority (as the discourse in the public meetings went). The President was angry at this questioning of his decisions by MGNREGS workers, called Leena and demanded that she ask the workers to disperse. Leena had replied to the President that she indeed had not been handed over a new muster roll or work schedule and had not answer to the workers’ demand. Coming from Leena who usually obfuscated things, this was a strong statement that she would not take responsibility, and this made the President upset. She told me later that she had given this reply because the fault hardly lay with her, and solving it was not in her power. Leena believed that this flash agitation was instigated by Sneha to portray Leena as inefficient and incapable of handling her responsibilities. To me, on the other hand, this also a demonstration of Sneha’s acceptability as a leader among her community and her ability to mobilize people based on issues of importance and relevance to them. She had also directly challenged the President, in her political strategizing, a challenge unexpected from her caste and gender location.

We met another ADS member Reena on the way who stopped to talk to Leena about the incident. Leena was anxious to vent her frustration and discuss this in detail with Reena. They shared their displeasure with Sneha’s activities, but Reena did not seem eager to say much more. After Reena left, Leena mentioned that Reena had left abruptly without contributing to the conversation because she was afraid of Sneha. I was curious and asked her why. This is when she said that many including Reena fear that there may be consequences if they criticize Sneha. She was hesitant to say much more, and it was only after some persuasion that I learnt that many people believed Sneha practised black magic, and could make people fall sick, even die. Rumour had it that she was responsible for the death of an ADS member roughly a year back (the young woman under 30 had succumbed to cancer). Leena said she herself had bad times – including being hit by a motorbike and seriously injured, apart from various other ailments, and she was cautious herself to not publicly speak against Sneha.

Another time, Leena seemed to imply to me that Sneha doesn’t have many supporters. With these incidents, it did not seem to be quite right. When I enquired about it, I was told that indeed,

she does have a lot of support in the colony, mainly because many families there are from her specific caste and are blood relatives, but she had very few supporters outside the colony. Apparently, her favouritism towards her family members were widely known. Leena also said that before the Kudumbashree election, Sneha had served her neighbours a feast of biriyani to ensure their support, which she did get. Clearly, Sneha was serious about her political life.

All this spoke of Sneha's political ambition and how other women workers of Kudumbashree disapproved of it. It was unexpected from a woman to be politically ambitious and play that game. The lack of this ambition seemed to be precisely what endeared Leena over Sneha to the President. She was meek, unquestioning, and obviously lack of political interest. Once, at her home, Leena showed me an application form which she had been asked to fill up by the President. It was the official membership form of the Congress party (Indian National Congress)! Leena was uninterested to apply despite being repeatedly requested to be an official party member. However, she felt that one day she would have to oblige the president if he insisted. Often, she spoke of the President as someone she was heavily indebted to, as he had supported her in her public life while she dealt with difficult circumstances at her home. I realized in another conversation that a huge debt was owed to him in her mind also because he had helped her get good treatment when she was injured in an accident. That is, men like Balan pursued a politics of obligations with the less powerful, making it difficult for them to assert independently.

6.1.3. Sherly, Kudumbashree NHG President, CDS member

All these tense moments and fierce pursuance of CDS membership should have led up to either Leena or Sneha being the CDS member. What actually happened was surprising and disappointing to both. In a surprise twist, Sherly was elected as the CDS chairperson while Leena continued as the ADS representative to the CDS. This, Leena informed me rather disappointedly, was because she also holds the post of the ASHA worker. However, she found relief in that she was still a CDS member. In fact, this was hardly surprising, given that Leena had never been a powerful person in the locality despite her responsibilities and replacing her was not going to be contested. Sneha remained only her NHG leader, without being elected to any higher post, putting an end to her plans of building a political future through Kudumbashree participation. Even though these decisions were the outcome of an election (which was carried out not through voting, but through consensus in a gathering), it seemed to have been taken

beforehand, elsewhere, away from the Kudumbashree groups themselves. I learnt that the ward counsellor (who is also the President) had a key role in the meeting, and he proposed the name of Sherly to be the CDS member, and she was unanimously elected.

Sherly was a public-spirited and vocal person. In her late thirties, she was energetic, had two children who went to school, while her husband was a daily wage labourer. Her household comprised of herself, her husband, children and her ageing mother-in-law. She threw up a contrast to Leena in her boldness and clarity of thought. Enjoying support from her family, Sherly managed her public role and personal affairs with more comfort than both Leena and Sneha. While she did not actively pursue the post of the CDS member, she did not seem unwilling to take on the responsibilities. It is possible that she had been consulted before the election to check her willingness. What emerged from the discussions was that the Kudumbashree CDS election was not a straightforward affair where the ADS representatives chose their preferred candidate. The post being important in the implementation of the NREGA, and the role of the Kudumbashree being critical in the implementation of the NREGA, the panchayat-administered program, it was critical that the CDS chair did not have political affiliations that went against the incumbent party. The CDS chairperson was preferably an able, but compliant woman who did not ask too many questions. There were rules about how, where and what kind of work was to be undertaken, and the CDS representative had key role in decisions regarding these.

Sherly ventured no opinions, good or bad, about the other CDS members. She said that the others were working in other areas, and they hardly crossed paths. Being a recent entrant to Kudumbashree, she did not know all the households as well as the others who worked in the other areas. In fact, as we went to different households, she enjoyed listening to them talk and knowing more about them. Often she connected to people we met as parents of her children's classmates. This was often helpful in easing conversation as her children were class toppers and prize winners in extra-curricular activities, and this indication of a particular type of cultural capital⁹⁰ helped to establish a level of trust between the people and herself: it seemed to convey that she was a good parent who took interest in her children's education. Her own relatively

⁹⁰ Bourdieu identifies educational qualifications as a cultural capital objectified, and presented in an 'institutionalized state' in the form of certificates (10:1986).

better education (she finished higher secondary school) stood by her in good stead in efficient book-keeping that was required of Kudumbashree functionaries.

In a frank discussion after getting elected, she said that one of the key problems with Sneha was that she would not keep proper records. Sneha would also charge a small commission for helping women to secure their loans. She told these things, not as gossip or allegations, but straightforwardly, as known facts. According to her, Leena on the other hand, had completely neglected areas of the ward that were directly not under her and therefore, making workers in those areas discontented. All work had been concentrated in places where Sneha and Leena lived and worked. Sherly wanted to give workers in her own area more work than they were currently getting, and seemed to have a vision about what to do when she started functioning as an active CDS chairperson.

Sherly had a good relationship with the President Balan. Particularly, I felt that her good relation to him came through the recommendation of another ADS member, Devi, who could not attend the Kudumbashree activities with the same level of involvement as Sherly. Devi's sister was sick, needed a surgery, and had to be cared for. Devi was from an impoverished Nair family. Sherly was a good friend of hers, lived not too far away and covered for her while she took care of her sister. Devi was trusted by Balan and it appeared to me that Sherly was chosen because Devi was unable to take this responsibility.

6.1.4. Mahesh, Permanent Government Employee, Ex- SC Promoter

Another public office that had direct impact on the life of the beneficiaries, particularly the SC community, was that of the SC promoter. This is a post under the Block Panchayat reserved for SC community members (the Block secretary being the reporting officer).⁹¹ The role of the SC promoter included keeping information about families under the scheduled caste list, letting the members know of welfare programs, assisting in accessing these programs, helping to report cases of atrocity against the members, etc. Every panchayat has one SC promoter. The SC promoter of Oridam was Sini, a woman in her early forties. She did not live in Perur but in another ward of Oridam. I met her for information regarding the SC communities in Perur but she said she had only recently taken charge, and did not have enough information. She guided

⁹¹ Reference to the Government Order issued by the Government of Kerala in 2010 that explains the role of the SC promoter.

me to Mahesh, her predecessor, who she said might know better. Mahesh lived in Kunnumpuram.

How Sini had succeeded Mahesh was interesting. Sini had once gone to the Block Panchayat office to apply for financial assistance for her bed-ridden husband's treatment. A daily wage labourer who was the sole breadwinner of the family, he had met with an accident at the work site and was severely injured. She was in her early forties, her daughter was married, and she was in dire financial state. This was when she saw a notice outside the office asking for applications from SC candidates with suitable education for the post of the SC promoter. A vacancy had arisen since Mahesh had got a better-paid permanent government job. Although she had no experience, or idea about what this job entailed, she applied because she needed an income. She discussed with Mahesh about her responsibilities before taking up the job. She was happy to take it up as it seemed that she was not required to be in office from 9-5, 5 days a week, and she would not have to compromise on caring for her husband.

Mahesh was in the good books of the President. At least, he gave the impression that he was. He was inducted into this job of SC Promoter through Sneha's recommendation. They were relatives. Estranged from his alcoholic father, he lives with his mother and had other relatives living near-by. With his job as SC promoter, Mahesh was able to advance in life. He established good relations with the panchayat functionaries. His network grew and with this, he was ultimately able to secure a government job which made him the rare person in the colony to have a permanent stable government job.

Mahesh had very poor opinion of his neighbours. As will be explained in the subsequent chapter, he was quick to point out their flaws, particularly focusing on alcoholism and violence in the community as the main problems. At least a few people in the colony perceived him as an opportunist who did not do much for the community. One person I talked to said that the sentiment among people in the colony was that Mahesh intentionally ignored deserving applications to settle personal scores. One of his neighbours from the same caste as Mahesh said, "If our guys here get our hands on him, we will break his bones and knees. The less said about him, the better. He is utterly useless. The only way to get anything done was to go with a pretty girl. Only then would he will listen and get things done, to impress the girl." Apparently, he withheld doing things that was in his power, particularly about loans and schemes. Mahesh on the other hand, dismissed these things as jealousy.

He saw politics in its common-sensical meaning as a party-based affair, and was keen to cultivate his political contacts. Individual leaders and their personalities seemed to hold a charm for him: he talked about his closeness to a particular elected representative in the locality who was like a mentor to him, and how this mentor was well-spoken, and ‘cultured’. He did not seem to have much regard for Balan whom many others spoke highly about. Interestingly, on a day that I met him in the morning, I also happened to meet his mentor at a public function in the evening. He told me when we met, “So, you met Mahesh today?” I was surprised, said yes, and discussed my work with him. I learnt that immediately after I left, Mahesh had called his mentor to inform about my visit, check up on my political affiliations, and discuss the questions that I had asked.

To me, this indicated not only a practice of politics of appeasement, but also a mechanism of surveillance. Mahesh seemed to me, from our discussions, as well as from this instance, eager to please, get into the good books of the higher-ups by giving them information. Given that our conversation was part of my research and nothing too ‘political’ was asked, this behaviour seemed strange. Mahesh’s attempt struck me partly as a show of loyalty, because the political party in power seemed to have helped him in his permanent job appointment.

6.1.5. Devan, Householder, Ex-Ward Councillor

A stark contrast to all the above experiences is that of Devan whom I met couple of times. Sneha thought it appropriate that I go to his house while we she was showing me the ward boundaries because Devan was an ex-ward councillor. Forty-nine-year-old Devan, lived with his sick mother in an old but well-maintained house which used to be his mother’s family house. Unmarried, he was the primary care-giver for his mother, and spent most of his time home. He did not go for work elsewhere; he had sufficient land to make an income out of, and live comfortably.

He was the elected representative of the area between 2005-10, (when the ward boundaries of Perur village was different). He withdrew from public life since his mother had a stroke in 2011 to become her primary care-giver. Most of our discussions centred around his perception of public politics and about how citizenship to him was a spiritual Hindu concept.

He was the panchayat member at a time when the Left Democratic Front (LDF) was in power in the panchayat. The reason why the LDF won in the area, he said, was because the Congress party in Kerala had only recently split to form a new Democratic India Congress (Karunakaran) faction that aligned with the LDF. Devan was also a supporter of this faction. This split became

a blow to the Congress party in the elections. He shared his opinion that the lady panchayat president of that term was a puppet - controlled by the male vice-president. Incidentally, all these people mentioned continued to be elected representatives during my fieldwork, and I had met most of them. He was unhappy with the governance in that term. The housing schemes which were originally named after Rajiv Gandhi (a Congress leader), he said, were re-named in the state to reflect the leadership of the communist party. Similarly, he felt that the implementation of the decentralisation program in Kerala was diluted from its stronger original version proposed by the centre. I asked how exactly this was accomplished, and he said that there was dilution in the way funds for the local bodies were to be channelled. These were Devan's impressions, and I have not attempted to verify these. More than the factual accuracies, what interested me was him sharing these opinions as commonly known facts. These illustrate the nature of opinions shared by men involved in public politics. No woman shared such thoughts. Clearly, public politics meant two separate things for men in public politics, and for women in public politics. I will dwell more on this in the discussion section.

What also fascinated me was Devan's entry and exit from politics. He said that he was not very interested in education, and after school, turned to looking after his land and property. Many of his family members were active in politics. He told me how political work ran in the family. An established Nair family, they had split several years back and settled to the North and South of Perur. The two branches developed independently but retain a considerable say in politics. (In fact, Padma, whose political entry I will discuss next is from the other branch of the same family tree). Devan was not particularly interested in elections or politics, but when he was requested, he agreed willingly, and stood the election, and won. Winning an election for him was not a big deal, his own large extended family comprised a good number of voters, and their influence was substantial. As his mother's health failed, he let go of his public activism and returned to his filial responsibilities. The ease with which political activity could be a choice at one moment, and family responsibility at another, and how one can be abandoned for another indicated a certain amount of freedom: an easy access into the political world and an easy disengagement.

As someone elected to a public office, I asked him his views on citizenship. It was interesting to listen to Devan's ideas of citizenship. In his opinion, *pourathvam* (citizenship) was linked to *pouranikam* (relating to the *puranas*, the Brahminic scriptures). He felt that citizenship was living according to the practices of the ancient Vedic golden age, according to the rules and beliefs in

the scriptures. He linked these to *Rama rajyam*, the rule of Lord Ram in the epics, when all was well and there was prosperity.

All these illustrated how politics in his understanding was clearly linked to the dimensions of national politics, policy changes, central government decisions, historical memory, and most critically, electoral calculations. Also, swiftly connections are made from legal constitutional understanding of a political concept like citizenship to belief systems with which these concepts are not linked, particularly given that the evolution of the political ideas of citizenship has much to do with. The last point of interest was how men like Devan could easily move between the worlds of public politics, and personal responsibilities. The doors of the public politics were always open to him, and this was not something he had to work for. It was handed down to him by virtue of being born in a particular family, his social location. His relative lack of interest in educational achievements, formal employment, traditional duties of marrying and raising a family, and owning status symbols like a car, a modern house, or lifestyle did not conform to mainstream norms, despite which, he did not stand out as an eccentric man, and his acceptability was not affected. In fact, it was very much possible that he could make a re-entry into local public politics, if his care-giving responsibilities did not take up his time.

6.1.6. Padma, Householder, Co-operative Society President

From a different branch of the same family tree as Devan, Padma had a rather uneventful and smooth entry into her public role. She was elected as the president of the co-operative society while I was doing fieldwork. I had seen the flex boards put up for her electoral campaign. The co-operative society was an important body in the panchayat, and elections to this body, and to the post of the secretary and the president of the governing board are often vested with political interests. These societies were established across Kerala and have served a very important purpose of making banking accessible for people. However, they were not exempt from the power struggle within the locality and the party in power sought to control these societies.⁹² In the panchayat, the contestants formed a block favoured by the UDF with Padma as the contestant for the post of the president. There were flex boards in the panchayat with the pictures and names of the candidates. I was interested to go and meet her and one day, went with Sherly to her house. Her house was in a, among many well-to-do houses. Resembling Devan's, it was an old house, well maintained in a

⁹² Kannan and Vijayamohan (2004) mention how allegations of political favoritism within the co-operative societies existed since their inception.

spacious compound, indicating wealth and caste position of the inhabitants. Next to this old house, separated by a low fence, stood another huge house of recent construction in its own spacious compound area. This, we were told belonged to Padma's sister-in-law who lived in Dubai but planned to come back and settle down in a few years' time.

Request for an interview with Padma were met with caution and reluctance. She said her husband was not home, and he would be better at answering my questions. After some reassurance that I was not going to make it difficult for her, and I just wanted to have an informal chat, she agreed to talk with me and my research assistant. I was well aware that our appearances indicated a respectable social position and that was key to her agreeing to talk to us. All the time that I sat talking to her, the husband's brother (who was unmarried and lived with Padma's family) peered and listened through the window. During our conversation, it emerged that she was not keen on her public role. It appeared that this new post was thrust upon her although she was unwilling to take on this responsibility. Her husband was an active Congress party worker. They were keen to ensure that the president of the co-operative society was a 'trusted' person, by which was meant someone who would not take unpredictable decisions that could go against the interests of the ruling party. She says that she allowed herself to be nominated as the candidate after being re-assured that she won't have to do anything or shoulder any responsibility. Her husband had promised to take care of all of that. She had not gone on the campaign trail except when it was unavoidable, that too nominally. Campaigning was done on her behalf by party workers. She wasn't expecting to win (and did not want to). Eventually, she did win.

Padma was an educated woman. She had finished a master's degree. She did not want to work after her marriage and her life revolved around her family. In this situation, what was more interesting to me was how matters of public importance seem to be decided within families. I do not want to suggest this is an extraordinary situation – women have often been elected to posts reserved for them that have been de facto controlled by the husband, or women have been wielded as candidates when the husband has run out of their term – both as strategies to keep power within families. What I do want to bring out through this example is how 'upper' caste women with the resources – education and property, as well as power derived through their position in the caste structure – were unquestioningly complicit in this exercise of preserving power within upper caste families. It should not be assumed that this mantle fell on Padma because no other woman in the locality was willing to stand as the candidate if they had been asked. Indeed, Sherly was displeased with Padma being the candidate, and told me that there were other women who were members of

the co-operative society willing to contest the election. (It seemed as though she was referring to herself). She also added that it was unfair for people (like Padma) who had no involvement in these matters (regarding cooperative societies) to be propped up as candidates during election time. This was one of the rare times that Sherly indicated her dissatisfaction with how things worked at the local level. It was also evident that she was voicing not just her own opinion, but something that other people too had been discussing and were unhappy about.

What this also throws up is a contrasting situation where women from the lower strata are active in the panchayat, handling much of the paperwork that is necessary as part of their Kudumbashree jobs, which are not only demanding, but unpaid too. Theirs was a community-oriented activity with no monetary rewards, but one that expects women to be content with their natural roles as sacrificing altruistic social beings even as their contributions are made invisible. On the other hand, this burden seems to be off the shoulders of caste-privileged women who are not only expected to *not* do such sacrificing public activities, but who also seem to enjoy quick public visibility even while their spouses or relatives carry out these roles on their behalf. I will discuss this in the concluding section.

6.1.7. Shobha, District Panchayat Vice-President

The next public person I want to discuss is Shobha, who was in her early fifties. A woman from a backward community, Shobha was the vice-president of the District Panchayat the top tier of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system. This was an important position. I had met Shobha several times at various meetings. Whenever she spoke at meetings, she delivered short, crisp speeches. She was a very active, energetic person who was easy to talk to. Before meeting her, I had met her husband Jayan, in his early sixties, who was the co-ordinator of activities in the ward, as well as an active member of the Men's group (G2) described in the previous chapter. They belonged to a community called Vilakkathala Nair, a caste that was classified in the OBC list, and could occasionally pass off as Nair, but who strictly speaking were not considered by other Nairs as one of them, especially when it came to marriage.⁹³ Jayan came across as a mild-mannered amiable person. Without realizing who she was, I had also talked to Jayan's sister. Jayan was a retired government employee, the only one in the family to have held a permanent government

⁹³ The relatively higher status of Vilakkathala Nairs in comparison with other OBC communities is because they were allowed contact with people in the caste hierarchy above them, being head shavers exclusively for Nairs and Brahmins.

job. The rest of the family, including the sister, lived in difficult circumstances and were daily wage workers. She profusely thanked her brother for the support he gave – financial and otherwise – to improve the family’s situation.

One day towards the end of my fieldwork I went to meet her at her home. To my surprise, the active woman I had met previously was bedridden. She had been bitten by a snake, a viper, about a month before. Her husband was also at home. He was the primary care giver, and did all the household chores. They had two grown up sons, one of whom was married, worked in the software industry, and lived in one of the metropolitan cities in India. The other was a graphics designer who was trying to find a foothold in photography. While Jayan stayed at home for the first thirty minutes of our conversation, he soon left to do some of his public duties, leaving me to have a free conversation with Shobha. This was a marked change from Padma who was being constantly watched and was wary of what she was telling us. Shobha had the full support of her husband in her public activities, and she had enjoyed her public role thoroughly.

She says,

It was not that my husband had not given me any freedom. He had always given me full freedom, but I never had opportunities to go outside and use this freedom.

Unlike Sneha, she did not actively seek out political life but when she did find herself in public politics, she did not shy away, and enjoyed it. indeed, her first public role was in 2002, as the CDS Chairperson of the Panchayat. She was asked to contest to the Block Panchayat elections, for which she resigned her Chairperson post.⁹⁴ However, much to her regret, she lost in the local body elections in 2005. This was because she felt that she was listened to, and more powerful in that position. After the defeat in 2010, she again contested in 2010 for the zila panchayat member position, won, and was selected to be the vice-president.

Born and raised in a relatively urban location, she found her move to Perur after marriage (about thirty years ago) suffocating. In first few months she says, she was ‘crying and hollering’ at her husband. Perur then was an extremely remote location, connected by muddy pocket lanes, with only kerosene lamps, no electricity and old-fashioned people. She found herself judged for her choice of clothes and jewellery. Public activity, she says, gave her a new lease of life. She says,

⁹⁴ While holding this post, she was disqualified to contest elections according to rules of the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act 1994.

I have suffered the 'tension' of a person who came to a rural place from a town. Only my husband has remained the same then, now, always. Everything else was 'negative' for me. Small things made me tense and I was mentally weak. I had headaches, but there was no explanation for that. The CT scans showed nothing for concern. We just slowly become sick... If I am tense, I have body pain, and I realized both were connected. I really started living after 2002, when I became CDS chairperson. I started going out. Then I got better. I got really better... Let me give you an example. For one Kudumbashree meeting, this lady who was a public activist was the chief guest. She told a lot of things, all of which I do not agree with, but, there were some important things too. After the meeting, she put on a song on the music player and asked all of us women to dance. Not one woman budged. Then she just came to our midst and started dancing herself. And then, you won't believe it, not one woman was on the seat. Everyone was dancing. Some of them knew how to dance and others did not but everyone danced. And how! We had so many desires, and we danced them all away!

The experience of both Shobha and Leena (who also found her work with Kudumbashree a big relief from her difficult family life) showed how public work was seen in a positive light by many women – none of them elite! On the other hand, more privileged women like Padma were content in their domestic life and despite holding public posts, did not find any use for them. Shobha and Leena found the smallest of such opportunities make critical difference in their lives and well-being.

Shobha is not naïve in her understanding of public politics. She spoke to me without mincing words that power, privilege, and influence were very important in allocating resources and benefits. In fact, she says she would not contest elections anymore; she believed she had to make way for new faces. This, she says is what many politicians hesitate to do, because they get used to the 'privilege' that political positions offer. She uses the exact word 'privilege' in English. I point this out to her, and say, "You used the word privilege". She replies,

When I say privilege, in politics, I mean the special treatment you get as a part of your official position. In public programs, you get a seat, a stage to talk from, and special treatment as part of what is called 'protocol'. Do you know, a panchayat member is above a Sub-Inspector (SI) in rank? So we can command as elected officials, and they have to obey. Most people do not know that and will call the police man as 'sir, sir...' But a panchayat president is above

an SI in rank and can ask him to do something. These are privileges. Many who get used to it do not want to let go of it. This is why there is a 'kadipidi' (squabble) to get into power."

In fact, this is a point she came back to time and again: the opportunity to have a public space, an audience, a voice. So she tells me that she sorely regrets being bedridden. This snake-bite had taken away her political future completely. It took away more than six months of her political career, towards the end, when she had to be visible if she wanted to contest again. And more importantly, it was a role that she had been thoroughly enjoying. She was certain that there won't be another lease of political life for her, particularly as her health had taken a severe blow, and she was not a veteran in politics to make a come-back after recovery. Indeed, she was only one snake-bite away from political oblivion.

6.1.8. Rajan, President, erstwhile Citizen's rights Committee

One of the bus stops in Perur had this embossed in concrete on top: '*pouravakashsa samiti*' (Citizens Rights Committee). Along-side was the year – 1986 – when it was built. The public-spiritedness of this committee was evident the fact that the bus stop was constructed in memory of a young man who had died, as a way of keeping his memory alive. Talking to people in the area, I found that the the committee had ceased to exist long back. More questions led to the men's group (G2) discussed in the previous chapter, and Rajan who was one of the active members of the CRC.

Rajan, a forty-nine-year-old man, was an active public-spirited person who was well known and was actively involved in public activities. At the time of fieldwork, he was active with the *Maranaananthara Sabaya Samiti* (Funeral Assistance Group), discussed in the previous chapter. It appeared that the vision of politics for the Citizens Committee extended beyond the popular 'left vs right' brand of party politics in Kerala. Formed in 1983-84, this group comprised of a bunch of young men, and Rajan was the chairperson of the group. They wanted to build roads and infrastructure at a time when there were only narrow pocket lanes, and there was no electricity. Rajan recounted how they painted a small signpost for their road because they keenly desired to mark this location. Building the bus stop, the one that I had spotted was a dream for many of them, he said. This materialized however, with a tragedy when a young man died in an accident and the family wanted to keep his memory alive. They were willing to give a piece of land to build a bus stop in. This bus stop now not only memorializes this young man, it also marks the Citizens Rights Committee and also a conflict within the group. Rajan explains

“At that time of building the bus stop, someone in the citizen’s committee made a mistake. Instead of temple road, he wrote ‘temple- hospital road’. That led to misunderstandings. This was not the road to the hospital, and would only serve to confuse patients going to the hospital. Within the Committee, this led to heated discussions and we said it cannot be left that way. So that night, we knocked off those letters.”

“Technically it was right,” pitches in another man sitting with us. “You could reach medical college through this route, but it is a very difficult road to take. If they took this route, the patient would not live to see the medical college!”

Rajan continues, “So the ‘hospital’ part that was embossed in cement, those letters were knocked off at night.”

I ask, “Who did that?”

“Oh, how can we say, it was night!” Everyone laughed. It was clear that they knew but did not want to say who did it.

“Were these members from the committee?”

“We do not know; we cannot say that. But anyway, the next day morning, some letters were not there. If you look, you can see that portion even now.”

I paid attention the next day, and true enough, right at the top - centre was some disfigurement. Although it had been painted over, it was hard to miss. This, according to Rajan, was the key incident that divided opinion within the committee. The final nail in the coffin, he said, was the local level elections at that time. He says,

The lady who won the election that year was a Nair. I am also a Nair. But do you know where the congress meeting to decide their candidate happened? The discussion happened in the local unit of the Nair Service Society (NSS), at their meeting. They were a discussion about who the congress candidate ought to be! They discussed and arrived at a decision, that is, they proposed a name. I was also there. I was young and I said, “Congress candidate should not be decided in the NSS meeting. That is not right.”

Rajan’s objection was that some of the members present at the NSS meeting were Left-affiliated and they were also party to deciding who the Congress candidate should be. This led to a huge

discussion, the end result of which was that people in the part Rajan lived wielded their own candidate who was also a Nair. This ensured that the votes for the Congress candidate were split and the Left party candidate, herself a Nair woman, won by a mere 66 votes. But he has no regrets. He says that the vote is the only way in which our responses can be made to hear, and it has to be utilized as such. After this incident, the Citizens Committee dissolved as their members had their own political affiliations and could not completely agree with this move. This shows the Committee politics as powerful enough to contest the NSS decision, and likely was an intra-caste politics within Nairs. Clearly political/ideological differences were not enough to rupture caste unity, and opposition political party members being present at the NSS meeting where candidate for one party was decided did not seem to bother anyone (except Rajan). It would appear that Rajan and others in the Committee envisioned public politics as going beyond caste politics.

Not only do the facts shared by Rajan compliment the experiences of Devan or Padma illustrated earlier, that there is a seamlessness between the Nair personal/community spaces and the public politics, they also illustrate that very often, being asked to choose between a left-wing, right-wing or an independent candidate do not rise above considerations of the community. It is interesting that although the committee does not exist today, even now, every independence day, a flag is hoisted by Rajan and his friends at the bus stop built by the Committee. These men's public activity do not become snubbed out or erased even after political opposition and dissolution of their groups. Indeed, the existence of the *Maranananthara Sabaya Samiti* and the leadership of men in these groups showed how alternative avenues for organization of like-minded individuals could happen. This stands in contrast with the experience of Shobha for whom public entry had to be facilitated through women's groups and political patronage, and for whom one health issue has meant the end of political career.

6.1.9. Balan, Ward Councillor, Panchayat President

At the end of this section, I would like to focus on the then-Panchayat-President/Perur-Ward-councillor. My first meeting with him was in 2010 after he had just been sworn in as the President after the election (although this was not his first term as Panchayat President). He was active in organizing *gramasabha* meetings and made an attempt to attend every single meeting in all seventeen wards and speak to the people assembled. It is hard to say if the same was done

throughout his term for all subsequent panchayat meetings. Since my fieldwork was concentrated in the ward that he was elected from, his presence in all meetings of this ward was inevitable.

There seemed to be a general impression that the president was very pro-active. Sneha and Leena talked about Balan with respect tinged with fear. One of the people I talked to said that as soon as they informed Balan about the bad state of the road, he had it paved. Mahesh told me about how Balan had taken initiative to build roads to every nook and corner. Indeed, as explained in the earlier chapter, his interest in making all places in Perur, and the panchayat itself accessible by building roads was remarkable.

Balan remembered me from the earlier fieldwork stint when we had met. So, when I told him that I was finding it hard to find a house, he said he would help me. In a gramasabha meeting, he introduced me and said I will be around for research work, and asked if anybody had a place to let out to me.

Attending the meetings organized by the panchayat, my initial impression that there was very pro-active dissemination of information happened through these meetings. Many of these meetings have been detailed in the previous chapter. Impressed, I remarked to another elected representative of the panchayat that a lot seemed to be happening there. I told him that I was amazed that two functions involving two state ministers were organized. To this, he responded wryly, “All that happens here are inaugurations. Nothing else.” This comment made me give more thought to the follow-up programs of all the initiatives that were inaugurated with much publicity. It did seem that inaugural programs and meetings did not often materialise to implementation of plans and programs. After the publicity, the big posters and flex boards, and speeches by important guests, no further activities were undertaken. No meeting of *Jagratha Samiti* was seen, neither were any particular schemes for SC communities put in place after the seminar (if it indeed could be called a seminar). These programs seemed to be nothing more than opportunities for enacting/re-enforcing local power relations, as I argue in the previous chapter. Balan seemed invested in building his image, not unexpected given he had ambition to be nominated as the Congress candidate for the legislative assembly.

There was also some amount of dissatisfaction among elected representatives about the conduct of the President. Two men, one of whom was Mahesh, and the other, Anand, a youngster who was the co-ordinator of youth activities in the panchayat, told me of his explosive temper and

the occasional disrespect he showed to senior party workers and leaders in the panchayat. The proof of this was in the posters I found one day at several public places.

On 5 February 2015, stuck to different public notice boards in the ward were posters with some serious allegations against Balan. It showed the photograph of a notice put out by the secretary of the panchayat. In this notice, the Panchayat secretary declares that he has accepted the resignation of an elected member. Underneath was written in bold, '*Maadambitharam theerkekunnathu aarude nenchatthanu?*' Literally, that could be translated as "On whose chest are you taking out your high-handedness?" This question was addressed to the Panchayat President Balan. Here, the word *maadambi* stands out: used as a synonym for a feudal powerful male, it has clear caste connotations. A *maadambi* was high-handed, and had nothing to fear. A *maadambi* also does not convey the image either of a Brahmin, or a lower-caste man. It specifically denotes the powerful Nair elite who calls the shots, rather ruthlessly. This poster was a clear indication that caste-power wielded by the elected representatives were never away from the minds of all people. This also brought to my mind, a remark made by a woman at the meetings inaugurated by the state ministers. She said, 'look at the stage, do you see any lower caste person?' She had a point, one that I have highlighted in the previously.

The charges listed out against Balan in the poster included the resignation of a panchayat member, eight panchayat secretaries and five assistant secretaries leaving their posts after securing a transfer elsewhere, disrespect of women members of both his own party and the opposition, etc. Apparently, the panchayat member mentioned earlier had resigned protesting the abuses heaped on him by Balan. I tried discussing this issue to a young man who was active in local politics. A supporter of Balan, he downplayed the issue, possibly because he was a supporter of the president. Shobha also dismissed it casually saying it happens in politics, and nobody doing politics will pay more than necessary attention to such things. Some women I talked to seemed unaware of what the problems were. However, another man told me that there was a long-standing discomfort about the high-handed methods of President Balan. He was trying to consolidate his position as the most important leader, keeping in mind, the upcoming local-body elections in October 2015 and the assembly level elections in May 2016.^{95,96} What

⁹⁵ In the local-level elections that happened earlier in 2015, Balan won from a different constituency, but his party was defeated in the newly formed municipality, dashing his hopes of becoming the Municipality President, or a similar prominent functionary.

⁹⁶ This assembly election just got over. Balan was not nominated as the candidate from his constituency. Instead the chosen candidate was another favourite from the district. This candidate won.

was evident was that the allegiances of Congress workers in the region was divided between Balan, and others.

A poor Christian man who was a left-party supporter said that he knew Balan from his school days, and while he was a friend, like all politicians he worked to favour people of his party while others were left in the lurch. This man, despite deserving panchayat assistance because of his dire situation found that this was withheld from him. Similar was the experience of another poor man from an SC community who was also waiting for a house on his mother's name to be sanctioned by the panchayat. He felt this had been delayed again due to his association with the rival party. Shobha also told me her discomfort about considerations of political affiliations of beneficiaries over-riding their eligibility for state benefits.

Shanta, another middle-class woman was miffed with the huge acceptability that Balan enjoyed. She felt that that the reverence that many people show towards Balan was because they were 'frogs living in a well'. She says, "The problem is, no one here knows how to solve any issue. There is one man, this Balan, our president. People here do not know how to do things by themselves. So everyone asks him. I do not think this is good. Others think he is good. He is a typical politician. He thinks he is the only big person. That's because no one here knows anything. For a lot of people, there is no one above or beyond him. It's not like that for me." Indeed, this image of the local Big Man was something Balan had cultivated, with the many public programs, his unfailing attendance at these, and the control he exerted over all activities of the grampanchayat. The control he exerted in the area was palpable and real, and as Shanta mentioned, there was a dependence he had nurtured. This was best exemplified in the case of the women leaders of the CDS: Sneha, Leena, and Sherly, who were dependent on him and not allowed to take any independent decisions. As he had his supporters, he had detractors too. I mentioned in earlier discussions that each of these women I discussed had their own relationship with Balan, but their connection to him was a powerful person who was not an equal.

6.2. Discussion

At the outset, it has to be noted that there is a difference in how men and women recount their public participation. For instance, the participation of Rajan, as part of the Citizens Rights Committee, or that of Devan as the ward councillor for five years, and Padma as the President of the cooperative society vastly differs from that of Shobha as the District Panchayat Vice-President. While Rajan's participation, despite him not having contested formal elections, and

not being associated overtly with any political party, remained consistent over time, Shobha despite being elected through elections had a short political life. Both Devan and Padma moved easily between the personal and political spaces, not because of their choice but because of the power that ran deeper, through family trees, and caste communities. The gendered access to public politics at the most local level is clearly visible in these narratives. Not one woman in Perur ward who was active in politics had chosen it because they wanted that career. The one woman, Sneha, who aspired for such a career found her ambitions thwarted by the local power play. Shobha, who had begun to enjoy her role as the CDS chairperson could not pursue it, and when she did become politically active, it was with the full knowledge that it would not be a permanent career for her. Leena, when she has started desiring to retain her post as the ADS representative to the CDS, found herself replaced by Sherly.

When women like Leena and Sneha started employing strategies – whether it is vagueness, tussle around the administrative rules of the NREGA, or demands for work, they were swiftly put in their place. Raj (2012) recounts a similar experience where a Dalit women ward councillor shared that ‘no sooner had she started voicing her opinions than she was neglected by all members including women representatives.’ Allegations of black magic helped to discredit Sneha’s leadership, as well as to deny her full humanity. Communities at the bottom of the caste ladder – in Kerala and elsewhere, have been noted to practice black magic, often theorized as a form of resistance in a system which offered no possibility of retaliating against cruelty of the ‘upper’ castes.⁹⁷ That ‘lower’ caste women, with hardly any ‘upper’ caste individuals being accused of witchcraft or black magic (and at times, even killed) is also recognized (Agrawal et al., 2014). Iqbal (2015) notes that ‘Identifying *dalit* and *adivasi* women as witches helps preserve caste structures or maintain upper-caste hegemony’. It is, while not an anomaly within a caste society, certainly curious that the same patterns should be reproduced even within the workings of democracy in Kerala. A paraya woman who has political ambitions, and is a good organizer and leader gets cast as a witch.

The narratives that I could piece together were of political ambition being thwarted, and those who did not desire it being propped into powerful positions. Being predictable, and conforming to certain gendered expectations seemed crucial for being allowed entry into the public domain, and for public visibility and recognition of women. Women who have been offered official

⁹⁷For instance, see *Travancore and Cochin Diocesan Record*, 1905 in Mohan(2016).

positions were docile, with little ambition. This has been previously noted in a study in Kerala which identifies that realm of public politics, the 'high' politics is masculinist. Women active in the local community need to affirm a feminine 'public altruism', but this 'holds no possibility of smooth entry into the higher realm of political decision-making.' (Centre for Development Studies 2008: 186-187, 56). As has been the case with Leena, Shobha, and Sneha, stepping out of home into the community life is acceptable, but having bigger ambitions were not. It should come as no surprise then the narratives of women who work as panchayat functionaries, for the most part, revolved around the negotiations they had to do with other women and men in their household and locality. On the other hand, the discussions of many men like Devan, Rajan, or Balan, tended to encompass a larger sphere, often to community-level politics, party-politics, and regional and national-level politics. This is not to suggest that men did not concern themselves over the micro-level everyday events but to assert that women's public world was much more limited – involving implementation of schemes, procedural conformity, distribution of pamphlets, etc. Any attempt to over-step these roles would be met with swift backlash. This is what can be inferred when Shobha says that *"It was not that my husband did not give me freedom. He had always given full freedom, but I never had opportunities to go outside and use this freedom."* It appeared that the freedom in the domestic space, within spousal relationship was not the only critical factor restraining women in their public role. Often, access to public spaces, opportunities available in these spaces, and the patronage (or mentorship) of a powerful male can be critical in continued political participation. In the case of all these women, this access offered was temporary, and women were expected to return to their 'natural' roles within the household. All the women in the locality who entered the political arena was aware of this.

Literature has tended to focus on the roles of men, particularly men from the 'lower' castes in reigning in women into the domestic space. While these stereotyped constructs have already been explored in the previous chapter, what I want to argue is that the operation of public spaces that I have outlined above, as well as the statement by Shobha about her not being able to public spaces despite the freedom offered by her spouse (or even by Sherly whose husband's support enables her public role), offer ways to go past such stereotypes and explore the gendered construction of the public space itself. The argument then, is that through its very structure and functioning (as I have also shown in the previous chapter), there are few spaces available in localities for women to come together and organize independently. Political parties, while not technically exclusive male zones, are exclusionary because of their construct, and accommodate

only women like Shobha who obviously lack interest – this is reflected in fact, in not just the absence of women’s leadership in politics in Perur, but also in the political sphere in Kerala. That Sneha was never offered political party membership, while Leena was being coerced to become a member is telling.

It is tempting to consider Kudumbashree as an avenue for women to organize: indeed, many women shared how this opened up, in a very visual, and physical sense, a lot of spaces in Perur that they had not had seen or had access to earlier. It also offered a route into public politics, not a small achievement. However, the control exerted by local leaders on Kudumbashree functioning and decision-making makes any radical possibility for such groups contingent first and foremost, on non-interference of local leaders/ of dependence that he had nurtured. The negotiations around the Kudumbashree as a political post because of its close links to the panchayat has been explained by Williams et al in 2011.⁹⁸ I have illustrated that decision about who the CDS members of Kudumbashree ought to be were taken beforehand, elsewhere, before the women’s meetings were convened and voting was done by the ADS members.

Additionally, considering Kudumbashree as a liberatory space also throws up a contrasting situation where women office bearers are overworked and unpaid/under-paid. There was a community-oriented activity with no monetary rewards, but one that expects women to be content with their natural roles as sacrificing altruistic social beings even as their contributions are made invisible. Most of these women hail from the lower strata are active in the panchayat, handle much of the paperwork that is necessary as part of their Kudumbashree jobs, which are not only demanding, but unpaid too. This has been recorded previously in the work of Williams et al who write that “Important jobs – enumeration work, extension activities and information exchange, and even mustering effective performances of the state’s commitment to public participation – are therefore falling increasingly on the shoulders of Kudumbashree women, whose under-paid or unpaid labour has become vital to the local state’s everyday operation. The Kudumbashree Mission’s intention of ‘reaching out to the community through the family’ was thus making women more visible in the public life of the panchayats, but this was also causing

⁹⁸ These authors write that the Kudumbashree “requires women to engage with the local developmental state: this entails particular performances of their participatory citizenship”. Also being politicised by virtue of the existing political climate in Kerala, they feel that Kudumbashree needs to be “investigated in relation to local political cultures.” (Williams et al., 2011, 1267)

some resentment from the women concerned, particularly in those situations when it was obvious to them that their provision of labour was not matched by decision-making power (Williams et al 2011: 1276). In another paper, researchers have also pointed out that “Kudumbashree’s challenge to social and political marginalisation was further blunted because the social skills and relationships needed to undertake group leaders’ roles ‘proficiently’ were not open to all women. Knowing how local government works, how to lobby for a group’s interests, or the seemingly more basic task of effective public speaking are dependent upon forms of tacit knowledge often not possessed by those at the edges of ‘mainstream’ society. As a result, Ezhava women – among the ‘backward castes’, but certainly not the poorest – dominated Kudumbashree leadership” (Williams et al., 2010, 999).

In Perur, both SC and OBC women have been found to be active with the Kudumbashree. Understanding their unpaid labour as a community work - expected of Dalit-Bahujan women within a caste structure – affords some more clarity into how caste operates through these groups for women (as a homogenous category). It is clear that the burden of unpaid panchayat work is off the shoulders of caste-privileged women who are not only expected to *not* do such sacrificing public activities, but who also seem to enjoy quick rewards in the form of public visibility even while their spouses or relatives carry out these roles on their behalf (for instance, Shobha). Kabeer understands community management roles as one of the three roles undertaken by women in low-income households - This is a role they take up ‘often as an extension of their gender-ascribed as wives and mothers’, and involve ‘community management work’. She explains that “faced with inadequate state provision of housing and basic services, they may take on responsibility at the community level to allocate scarce resources in the interests of the survival of their households or to put pressure on local institutions for infrastructural provision” (Kabeer, 1994, 275). Similar role by men in community activities are leadership roles – as was done by the male upper caste politicians in Perur. Within a caste structure, where caste and class overlap, these community-oriented works have fallen on the shoulders of women from marginalized communities.

The element of choice and agency, it can be argued, needs to be considered while coming to such conclusion. Here, it is also useful to contrast the case of Padma’s experience with Sneha’s. Padma, a home-maker, was brought directly into an electoral battle where she had a high probability of winning without any prior involvement in public activism or engagement. Sneha on the other hand, despite actively pursuing public life taking every opportunity that came her

way, now finds herself slowly removed from all the positions she held. She now works as a daily wage labourer. It is also a contrast with the situation of Devan who never pursued a political career, but found himself an elected representative. What this throws up is that there is a seamless transition possible not only for particularly men from privileged castes, but also for women, into the domain of public politics.

It is indeed tempting to view Padma as someone who is denied her full agency, the decisions about her political entry being decided elsewhere by other people. I argue that while this is the case, and indeed, her own agency is secondary in comparison to the full agency exercised by her upper caste male family members, her position in the caste-based status hierarchy is decisive in the kind of choices available to her. The distinction drawn up by Kabeer is helpful in understanding this: “Empowerment cannot be conceptualized simply in terms of choice, but must incorporate an assessment of the values embedded in agency and choice, values which reflect the wider context. It points, in other words, to the need to make a distinction between ‘status’ and ‘autonomy’ as criteria in evaluating agency and choice. ‘Status’ considerations relate to the values of the community, whether these communities are hierarchical or egalitarian, and how they draw attention to the influence of the larger collectivity in ascribing greater value to certain kinds of individual choices over others and hence in giving greater value to those who abide by these choices”(Kabeer, 1999, 457–458) .Had Padma chosen, indeed, to be a willing participant in the co-operative society election, it would be making a choice that was readily available to her. Whether she chose to be, or did not choose to be a candidate was one thing, but it was quite another that such a choice was available to her only because of her privileged social location. This was not offered to any other woman, say Sherly, Sneha or Leena.

In the case of Sneha, we see that aspiration for a public role is unceremoniously thwarted. In fact, none of the women chosen to be CDS representative had a choice to be one – the choice lay only with the President. These women only had the choice to refuse when they were offered that position, not to pick it when they desired. When they did aspire, like Leena had begun to, the choice was not available to her. The point I want to argue is that women from the ‘upper’ caste communities find accessing these positions easier, with support from her own relatives as they seamlessly move between their own personal and political life; more than a personal-political dichotomy, it becomes a question of access decided by one’s social location. It is most certainly a form of agency refracted through paternalist patriarchy.

While all these women I have written about in this chapter are in relatively better-off positions to influence the resource allocation of the panchayat as compared to most other women, I have shown how their relatively-better roles are conditional and contingent upon performing predictable set of actions, decision, and choices. This I argue, is performance of a caste-gender role: each performing the roles suited to their social position. Judith Butler (1999) conceptualises gender as constructed through social rituals supported by institutional power and proposes that gender identities are cultural performances. In *Gender Trouble*, she writes: “Gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts* This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted *social temporality*” (Butler 1999, 179).

Here, following the understanding in the previous chapter that what we have operating in the field site is not just a gender order, but a caste-gender order, I would like to qualify that Butler’s notion of performance of gender is, in the Indian context, performance of caste-gender roles. This may not be presumptuous, as Butler herself has expanded on the understanding of ‘performativity.’ She writes that “Gender performativity does not just characterize what we do, but how discourse and institutional power affect us, constraining and moving us in relation to what we come to call our “own” action. To understand that the names we are called are just as important to performativity as the names we call ourselves, we have to identify the conventions that operate in a broad array of gender-assigning strategies.... Indeed, the embodiment implied by both gender and performance is one that is dependent on institutional structures and broader social worlds. We cannot talk about a body without knowing what supports that body, and what its relation to that support – or lack of support – might be. In this way, the body is less an entity than a living set of relations; the body cannot be fully dissociated from the infrastructural and environmental conditions of its living and acting, which is one sense of the historical character of the body.” (Butler 2015, 64–65)

We can see that discourses and institutional power determined by caste and gender have the ability to dictate the repertoire of choices available for both men and men from various social location. This is why, within the context of a society where caste is a critical organizing principle, it seems meaningful to look at the performance of caste-gender roles. The examples I have highlighted all point to the existence of such roles for men and women. Mahesh’s experience

offers a way to consider this caste-gender role. Mahesh was one of the rare people who had been educated and was willing to work as the SC promoter. Mahesh actively sought out a political mentor, a well-respected Nair man, and his aspiration for respectability ensured that he landed a government job. In return, he performed 'loyalty', expected from a Dalit man to a Nair man, and reported on my visit, however inconsequential it was. His loyalty also extended to denouncing his community, earning him the wrath of his community-members who saw him as 'opportunistic'.

This performance of loyalty in keeping with his caste-gender role certainly helped him. While Mahesh was able to advance from his class position, Sneha from the same community is brought down and shown her place. I want to argue that this 'place' is a function of both caste and gender. Instead of neat gender roles, what I found in my fieldwork are complicated 'caste-gender' expectations. Understanding people positions thus offer a better explanation for the simultaneous working of caste and gender. So there is a disciplining, very sophisticated and very crude at the same time.

This is why it is not surprising that expectations from Mahesh and Balan, as men, are not the same. Neither are expectations from Mahesh and Shobha (or Padma and Balan) as members of the same caste community. Or for that matter, expectations from Padma and Sneha, as women. I have already illustrated in the section above that the experiences leading up to merely being visible in the public spaces, and of working in these spaces are different for different women.

It would appear, looking at the examples I have shown that women 'lower' caste who are rewarded in local public politics are those who overly demonstrate a lack of interest and ambition. However, there is difference in the permissible level of ambition for women from various castes. Women like Shobha are allowed some more space than Sneha, no doubt owing to Shobha's relatively higher caste position. Nevertheless, that Shobha will have to relinquish her public role is a certainty, whereas her husband will be able to continue with his public work due to the access he enjoys to the public space simply because he is a man. It is here that the example of Rajan, a Nair man, who, despite belonging to the lower middle class, has been easily able to command leadership position and active involvement in public life despite not being involved in electoral politics. Rajan, in his younger days, was able to bring about an alternate forum, make it count in electoral politics, and ensure that it is not forgotten by marking it in a public space.

6.3. Conclusion

The following conclusions can be reached from the discussions above:

- 1) Women taking up roles after persuasion seemed more desirable than women choosing to take up public roles on their own initiative. The latter were always struck off before they posed any substantial threat.
- 2) While there appears to be a seamless transition between the personal space and the public spaces for men belonging to locally powerful castes, this journey seems riddled with varying levels of difficulty for men from other castes, and women from all castes.
- 3) Dalit-Bahujan women, are called upon to do public roles in a way that demands, and drains their time, without remuneration or acknowledgment. Institutional mechanisms aid these exploitative community roles of Dalit-Bahujan women. Dalit women are shown their place by not allowing them to pursue their choices. Lower caste women who enjoy support from their spouses and families are acutely aware of the unrewarding nature of their public roles.
- 4) Community roles, previously theorized as the role of women, attain specificity as the role of 'lower' caste women.
- 5) I have showed that in the public arena, these is a performance of caste-gender roles, not just gender roles, or a 'performance' of gender. This proposition will be further explored in the subsequent chapter.
- 6) Mechanisms are deployed to keep women in their place, and to maintain power relations in the community by deflecting the potential held by particular government programs.

Through the experiences, interactions and anecdotes of people, I have attempted to show how the working of the state institutions and public bodies are heavily inflected by personal relations. Indeed, personal circumstances, social location, and lived experiences seem to be at the core of political positioning. This is not an argument for a structural deterministic view negating individual or collective agency. Rather, it is an illustration of how structure holds an amount of explanatory power in not abstract, but in visible, documentable ways. In as much as citizenship encompasses the opportunities for questioning and assertions (as Sneha used them), it can be said to wield a transformative power. Robbing citizenship of its full transformative potential is a function of the social structure. In the end, the attempt in this chapter has been to show how the personal transforms into the political very naturally, un-problematically. And what is transformed is the local caste and ensuing caste-gender power relations.

Therefore, we can see that there is a strong case to be made for the argument that people's personal experiences, particularly defined by their social location, also significantly influences the nature of interactions they have with the state, even when they are individuals wielding some amount of power in the formal governance systems. There appears to be a differentiated access to choices and opportunities -what comprises social citizenship rights. Despite universal guarantees of equal rights, and despite differentiated rights to access several welfare provisions, caste and gender operate in informal ways to offset the formal guarantees.

Chapter 7: Experiencing Caste, Gender and State

In the previous chapter, I posited the existence of caste-gender roles in public spaces, and showed how the personal and political are seamlessly connected by power (or its lack). While the focus of the previous chapter has been on the individual in her/his public roles, and the resulting interaction with the state, in this chapter, I will focus on individuals' personal experiences and how they have been able to use the state guaranteed rights and claim their full status as citizens. This chapter seeks to address the second central research question: "How do people experience the state differently depending on their social location?"

This will be explored through two sub-questions:

- Have educational achievements of the state of Kerala led to dissolution of caste barriers and enabled social mobility for individuals from marginalized groups?
- Have the achievements in the state of Kerala led to breakdown of endogamous caste rules and movement towards a casteless society?

The underlying assumption is that had the remarkable achievements of Kerala, particularly in education and health as evidenced by its high HDI, and its radical communist mobilisations would have led to individuals being able to claim their social citizenship rights. In that sense, we should be able to see the dissolving away of mechanisms that uphold the caste structure: endogamy. This also means that traditional occupations are abandoned and there are no barriers to finding gainful employment for individuals from marginalized social locations.

That is, this chapter is devoted to understanding how caste and gender works differently for, and is experienced differently at different social locations, and whether and what role the state and guarantees of citizenship play in these experiences. Towards this end, I use excerpts from conversations with men and women at various positions of caste-class-religion intersections. Through these, I will aim to give an account that situate individuals in their particular socio-economic situation, with particular focus on a) education and employment, b) relationships within the household – spouse, children, and elderly where applicable, and c) interactions outside the household with their immediate community. The usefulness of such an exercise has been

expressed succinctly by Connell (n.d.)⁹⁹ who writes, “A closer look at gender shows much more complex patterns than simple difference. Gender is also about relationships of desire and power, and must be examined from both sides. In understanding gender inequalities, it is essential to research the more privileged group as well as the less privileged.”

This chapter is divided into three major parts. In the first part, I look at experiences of people across Caste-Class-Religion-Gender intersections – both men and women. The second section is a discussion around the key themes from the examples, linking the empirical fieldwork data to theoretical debates about gender and caste in India, as well as exercise of citizenship. In the third section, I conclude.

7.1. Experiences across intersections

I spoke to men and women belonging to several castes, and religions (I did not meet any transgender or gender-ambiguous people, likely because asserting such an identity in that locality would have resulted in tremendous hostility). Examining each of these communities, while it might be instructive, is beyond the scope of this thesis. In this section, for ease of analysis, as has been laid out in the methodology chapter, I use the governmental categories – Forward Castes (FC), Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Castes, and Minorities. In this section, I will first present narratives of people from forward caste locations followed by those from backward caste groups, the scheduled caste groups and finally the Christian community. This is meant not as an exhaustive portrayal of the diverse life situation of all communities, but as examples to show how caste works across class in the lives of men and women. As such, I will aim to provide as diverse personal situations as possible, across caste, class, and gender – of upper caste and lower caste men and women, including alcoholic men, teetotalers, divorced women, and happily married women. As explained in methodology chapter, the intersectionality matrix used to identify social locations changed during fieldwork. In the end, for meaningful analysis, caste and gender and religion ended up being the most useful categories, and class was considered within caste. Hence, the subject positions examined in this chapter correspond to the ones in the matrix below.

⁹⁹Connell, Raewyn (2001), *Gender, Men, and Masculinities*, UNESCO Encyclopaedia of Life Support Systems, taken from the sample chapter accessed on 03 December 2015 at <http://www.eolss.net/sample-chapters/c11/e1-17-02-01.pdf>

Table 7.1: Subject positions in intersectionality matrix for analysis

Caste- Religion	Gender	
	Woman	Man
FC Hindu		
OBC Hindu		
SC Hindu		
Christian		

Below, I will consider a few individuals from each of these subject positions. I have ensured that as much as possible, diversity across class and marital status is maintained within these subject positions.

7.1.1. Forward Caste Communities in Perur

Communities in Perur that are classified as Forward Caste (FC) include Namboodiri, Nambiar, Brahmin, Pisharody, and Nair castes. Out of the 18 FC members whom I interviewed, I will choose five people – three women and two men, to provide an overview of the community. I outline the experiences of a well-to-do Brahmin woman, two Nair woman, a well-to-do Nambiar man and a middle-class Pisharody man.¹⁰⁰

7.1.1.1. Forward Caste Woman

In this section, I will go through the narratives of Geetha, Beena and Lakshmi. Geetha is a Brahmin woman, someone who came to Perur after her marriage, Beena and Lakshmi are both Nair women belonging to Perur itself. These three women also have very different domestic situations: one is a widow, one has been separated from her husband for decades, and one wishes she had divorced when she could. Financially too, their situations vary.

¹⁰⁰ Please note that apart from the descriptions in this chapter, other well-to-do Nair men and women like Devan, Balan, and Padma have already been introduced in earlier chapters.

Geetha

Geetha (50) is a Brahmin widow who lives in Perur. Born in another village in the same town, she came to Perur after her marriage. Her husband passed away unexpectedly and at the time of fieldwork, she had been widowed for ten years. I met Geetha in the hardware store that she ran. This shop was directly in front of her home, and she was with her younger son in the shop. Below are some excerpts from a conversation with her. Geetha leads a comfortable life. She says,

“My husband was a farmer. Marrying him only improved my life. I did not study much and did not want to live in a city or any such place. So when I married him, I thought that was enough. He owned a lot of land here and we grew many crops. All our food was grown here. Every season, we would have a big harvest ...I was satisfied with what we had... After he died, it was very difficult for me for the first couple of years... But my elder son was already grown up and he took responsibility for all the farm activities. When the younger one became old enough, we opened this hardware store. Now both of us run it together...”

The emotional trauma of widowhood notwithstanding, Geetha seems to have been able to take control of her life and become entrepreneurial, and has new sources of income (for instance, opening the hardware store). Her grown-up sons did not seem to make her recede to the background and hand over control of their property and business to them. She seemed to be capable, independent, and to have a say in all the economic affairs. A general satisfaction with life was evident, and the remoteness of their location, as she also points out, was not a problem for her. This is evident when she says,

“I have no complaints; I am happy with life here. Now that I have to find a bride for my son, I am looking for a girl who is ready to come to this place. This is not a town and we will not have that kind of life here. So I want someone who is willing to adjust with the life here. I do not want my sons to go anywhere. They can run the hardware shop that we have now. There is also the farm to take care of.”

Geetha’s expectations – both for her sons as well as the business seemed reasonable given the social and economic position of the family. With the respect commanded due to the caste position of the family, and the economic resources they had, there was no immediate incentive to move out of the locality, or aspire for a different kind of life. However, there are two other women from Nair caste, who do not seem to enjoy the same favourable circumstances as the

one experienced by Geetha, despite having inherited some property, and being not poor when they started off.

Beena

When I first met her, Beena (64) was washing her clothes in a pond next to her house sometime near noon. She looked frail and older than her years. It was surprising, since washing clothes in ponds, a not-so-uncommon sight a couple of decades earlier, had become uncommon. Ponds fell into a state of disrepair, washing stones were fixed/built with concrete in most houses, and washing machines had steadily gained popularity among those who could afford it. Beena washing there indicated a practice carried over from her younger days as well as a high level of security and comfort with the surroundings, with no fear of being taunted for still sticking to old-fashioned ways. Her home was adjacent to the pond (which might have been one for exclusive use of the family). While she appeared to be poor, and was drawing widow pensions, her home, an ancestral house adjacent to the pond – old and well-kept - spoke of wealth and power. During a later visit to her situation became more clear to me. She explained to me the circumstance in which the state offered her widow pensions, despite her husband being alive.

“When I say I get widow pension, that’s because my husband left me soon after my younger son was born. Left me as in, when he started doing ‘tharikida’¹⁰¹, my mother asked him to leave... See, I was married at 17. And at that time, I was given 35 pavan¹⁰² gold as dowry. In those days, unlike today, 35 pavan is a big thing. My family was so well off, I used to go to school in a car. All that money, my husband squandered. Then he started selling off our expensive brass pots and vessels...

There was a sick Muslim woman who lived near-by. One day she came and said she wanted an ‘uruli’ for her daughter’s wedding.¹⁰³ At that time, my grandmother – my mother’s mother - was alive. She said we do not have any uruli to give away. The Muslim woman

¹⁰¹ ‘Tharikida’ is a colloquial word, hard to translate, but roughly can be approximated to ‘messing around’

¹⁰² ‘Pavan’, similar to bullion, is a unit of measurement used for gold and silver in Kerala. One ‘pavan’ is equivalent to 8 grams, and 35 pavans would be 280 (i.e. 35x8) grams of gold.

¹⁰³ An ‘Uruli’ is big circular brass vessel. Up until the last two decades or so, it was an important and necessary item of a bride’s dowry, along with all the other vessels the bride took with her. The number and size of the ‘uruli’ brought by the bride indicated the family’s affluence.

said, 'your son-in-law promised to give me one.' Then my mother half-jokingly replied, 'if my son-in-law said that, let him give it.'

After a few days, someone who was sweeping the house found many vessels stashed in the attic. Ever since I got pregnant, I had stopped climbing up to the attic, so I had not noticed this. When the Muslim woman came the next time, he gave away a lot of these uruli and other utensils. There were a lot of vessels, weighing scales and all. Only a few of our good stuff remained. This was when my mother got fed up. He would not go for work in the first place, and then had the audacity to give away our stuff. So it was then, right at that moment, that she said that we do not need him any more in the house. She asked him to go. I had had two sons from him already. My second son has not even seen him properly. He was one-and-a-half-years old when the father went away. Then my mother and I raised the kids.

Beena's tough times did not end there. Her elder son, who was more attached to the father left home when he was seventeen. Beena had not seen him since. She believes he is in Mumbai based on a letter he wrote years ago. Her younger son who was forty lived with her, and was an alcoholic. She believed the older son would return one day even though she had no idea where he was: indeed, pestered by the younger son's demand for his share of the property, she planned to partition it and set aside the elder son's share of the property for the day he returned. Beena's grandmother and mother passed away, the mother ten years ago, and when I met her, she lived in the house with the younger son.

Beena, who herself did not have a job, was pestered by constant demands for money by the son. Occasionally loud fights broke out between the mother and son and he would lock her out of the house. She recalled the nights she spent outside on the veranda. The neighbours (one of whom, I will bring into this discussion later) got the police to intervene but the mother was too kind and did not want the son to be 'slapped' or punished by the police, and did not press charges. Additionally, there was also a dilemma: who would be there for Beena if the one son was missing and the other son was in jail? And, if the son was indeed arrested, who would ultimately bear the legal expenses for releasing the son from jail other than Beena herself? This put not just Beena, but also the neighbours in a quandary, and they decided to leave the quarrelling mother-son duo alone.

Beena's support system was her younger sister, her husband, and their now-married-daughter who lived in Delhi. They visited her every year, talked over phone and advised the son, who also

ended up shouting against his aunt, and putting a strain in the relationship. Beena currently lives on an undivided 1.5 acres of land and thinks she might give the son his share while she retained the house and lived there. However, she is also aware that the son will live off his share and come back to her home and demand more and this stops her from dividing the property.

The particularities of the caste and class position is clearly reflected in this experience. Anyone from Kerala would immediately (and quite rightly) be able to, with these details, muster up the image an affluent matrilineal Nair joint family that fell apart over time. Beena lives in the same house her mother and grandmother lived in. Indeed, she remembers better times. As a wealthy land-owning elite, she went to school in a car when she was eight-years-old, an unusual sight in Kerala over half a century ago, when personal vehicles were a luxury only for the elite. As a matrilineal family (as the Nairs are), men seemed to have married into the household and property seemed to have passed down from the grandmother to the mother to the daughters. The women seemed to have been powerful to take life-changing decisions as marriage and separation from a spouse.

The decision by her grandmother that they did not need their son-in-law any longer was not a spontaneous decision; indeed, giving away the *uruli* was the final straw. Beena explained what she meant by calling her husband a *tharikida*: he would not go for work and squander away money. Much elder than Beena, it was a clearly advantageous marriage for him. (Apparently, the marriage was a compromise as Beena's father was a rich Christian man from another district, had fallen in love with Beena's mother, and agreed to marry her and live at Perur. The family seemed to have accepted this and Beena and her siblings were raised as Nair children. Presumably, there might have been some hesitation among other Nairs to marry into this family).

The decisions taken by elder women in Beena's family show a marked difference to those taken by women from women of other backgrounds. Accepting an inter-religious marriage seven decades earlier (in Beena's mother's case) seemed extra-ordinary. Her grandmother who belonged to an earlier generation also seems to have been able to decide to go for separation in Beena's case. Today, Beena says that she regrets not having the support of a husband since she lives practically alone. However, she does not speak of any regret at the time when the decision was taken. Such a decision taken decades back speak of the decision-making power enjoyed by the women in powerful families. Not only that, it speaks of the local power they commanded, to not create a furore, or excommunication. Indeed, Beena's family is related to President

Balan's. That an exception was made for her to allow widow pension despite her not being a widow is telling about the favourable, if sympathetic light in which she is still seen by the local community.

However, women, who are younger than Beena do not appear to cope with separation so well, for instance, Lakshmi, from the same Nair caste but not quite so affluent, seems to have struggled with her marriage.

Lakshmi

Lakshmi (49), another Nair woman, had three grown up daughters. Even though she is separated from her husband (although not divorced), he stays at her house. I had to visit her home thrice before I could finally meet her, as she was busy preparing for her second daughter's upcoming engagement. Even though she appeared stressed on account of these preparations, she spoke to us warmly. Her three-year old grand-daughter who appeared fond of the grandmother stayed with us for most of the conversation, and her husband kept close watch by staying around on one pretext or other: at times pretending he was clearing dry leaves from the compound or that he splitting dry coconut leaf spines (to be used as firewood).

Lakshmi belonged to a Nair family that was connected to local politics (much like Devan in the previous chapter); her mother had contested and won local elections. However, Lakshmi chose to stay out of all that. With her mother passing away, she inherited the house which she continues to live in. While not impoverished, her wealth has diminished as there has been no additional income except that through the land: her husband was an alcoholic, and appeared disturbed and requiring some help. He talked non-stop in the background as if to interrupt our conversation, and would butt in with unrelated things. Lakshmi was embarrassed for his behaviour, steadily ignored him, and shared that she had once filed for divorce. She says,

"We married in 1989. He behaved in an eccentric way at home, would not take care of the family and would get drunk and create a ruckus at home. I finally decided I had enough and went to the court in 2001. I had the children by then. It was for divorce, not to file a case against domestic violence. Then the judge, it was a woman, said that it will be better for me if I stay with him without a divorce because he is a central government employee and I will have the rights to his pension when he retires (or dies). So I will not have to be dependent on others or poor in my old age. That is why I decided like that then. But now I

think it would have given me more peace of mind had I decided to get a divorce... I cannot say it openly but that's how I feel."

Lakshmi also talked of the support she received from her mother when she was alive, and much like Beena, from also her siblings too who did not demand their share of the family property. Although she did not explicitly mention it, I had heard from another woman in the locality that Lakshmi's eldest daughter had also separated from her husband. Lakshmi did not seem to want to talk about this (and I did not lead the conversation into the daughter's personal life) but her determination to stand by her daughter is evident when she says,

"I have never taken any big decisions in life. Usually people in a household decide things according to the norms of the household. I have also done that. We're not likely to have the courage to take any big decisions, are we? But as life goes on, we acquire more courage. Now I can take a firm, stern decision with courage. I know that the decision I am taking now¹⁰⁴ is right and only good will come out of it. So I will go to any lengths to support my daughters and I have now acquired the courage to support them in any decision. This comes from suffering, and going through sorrows. I can tackle anything; I have the self-confidence that I can tackle anything. Many years ago, I was young, now I have more strength and knowledge.

Here she is alluding to her regret of not being bold enough to walk out of her marriage, but also finding the strength to stand by her daughter, apparently realizing that too much compromises are not worth it. With three daughters to raise, in a rigidly controlled patriarchal society, a divorce is often the last option. Several considerations including loss of social status, being a subject of gossip, that of not getting marriage proposals for the daughters from respectable families, not being able to afford a reasonable dowry for three daughters, and having no possibility of a second marriage would have been on Lakshmi's mind. As was the case with Beena, the support of her family helped her take the legal route. Her mother was her support.

This throws some light into the kind of support women from privileged families, particularly those from matrilineal families with landed property were able to offer their daughters to break social taboos, to enable them to lead a relatively less compromised life. The support Lakshmi offers her daughter is also evident. In fact, Lakshmi does not blame herself, or her daughter, and draws comfort from the fact that she played by the rules, stuck to the norms, and what happened

¹⁰⁴ This apparently refers to the daughter's separation, although it had not been explicitly mentioned.

was not within her control. This reveals, as in the case of Beena, the strength derived from the social position of the family, and the relative acceptability of flouting the norms if necessary, precisely because of this. This becomes explicit when Lakshmi says,

When we were going through tough times, I thought of selling the house and land and going somewhere else. There were financial difficulties, and I wanted a change. We are a family that had our own pride, so it is a bit difficult when other people know that we have fallen on hard times. But then I thought that I should not sell the house I am in now, it would not be a wise move. I did consider participating in the thozhilurappu¹⁰⁵ at one point, and sorted out the job card too. But I did not go for the work. To be frank with you, we are not people like that. If we go for the road construction job and all, after three or four days, we just become a 'panikku pona pennu'.¹⁰⁶ Is it not like that? I am speaking frankly. In the society, we have some pride and honour. But if I go with these daily wage labourers, I become a 'panikkari', a 'pennu' like that. I have not reached there yet... The government does not help people like us who are actually struggling, you know. Instead it is all going to those with reservations. I have no problem giving to the poor. But giving it in the name of caste, I do not agree with. Although we have high marks, we are being pushed aside, and I have a problem with that. We cannot say that to them, can we? People with 'just pass' are teaching in schools (sic). They are studying and becoming big people, but those of us who have studied and secured marks, we have to sit at home. So we have to depend on private institutions (for jobs). We need jobs in public government institutions.

This excerpt helps in understanding how personal hardships quickly get transformed into grievances against affirmative action. As has been shown in the earlier chapter, narratives become the truth, even though they may not have any factual basis. In fact, it is revealing to note that what prompts Lakshmi to consider moving out of the locality is her prestige: the 'compromised' pride of the family, a fall from the days of prosperity brought on by her failed marriage. This pride is both a caste and class pride.

¹⁰⁵ *Thozhilurappu* means employment guarantee. It is used in the administrative bodies and by those who avail it to refer to the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA).

¹⁰⁶ Panikku Pona Pennu' translated means a woman who goes for work. Because the word 'pani' (a less dignified word for 'work' than 'joli' which indicates more regularity associated with an office) is used with 'pennu', (a less genteel word for 'woman' than 'sthree'), it immediately indicates the nature of the job: manual labour. A phrase steeped in class relations.

The irony in the situation is that the universal state-funded schemes like the NREGA which works on the principle of self-exclusion is not seen as a reasonable option by Lakshmi. She talks of the workers in *thozhilurappu* in unflattering terms, and wants to set herself apart from the less dignified *panikkari pennungal*. She is not one among them, and all women were not same. This is a stark contrast not just with some women whose choices will be described later on. For many other women, despite not doing manual labour for a long time, it is a fall-back option when circumstances demand it. The self-exclusion in NREGA seems to work equally along caste, gender as well as class lines.

The experiences of Geetha, Beena, and Lakshmi depict the diversity of experiences of women in upper caste communities – due to their class position, primarily, depending to a good extent, on the men in their families – both husbands, and sons – who were expected to be the primary income earners. The landed property that all these women had access to helped them tide over bad times, some more successfully than the others, notwithstanding the absence of husbands, and in cases, of irresponsible sons.

Only in Lakshmi's situation did education appear as an important factor – she educated her daughters and tried to make them independent so as to give them chances of a better job. Crossing endogamous barriers were far and few between, the exception being Beena's mother. In the absence of many other details about this marriage it is hard to say why this alliance was accepted – but shared class status and social position may have been an enabling factor.

It appears that men are central to these narratives – even if through their absence. , I will now talk about some of the 'upper' caste men I interacted with.

7.1.1.2. Men from Hindu forward castes

Most officials and elected representatives I interacted with were men from 'upper' caste communities. I also had the opportunity to talk to several men from dominant Nair communities in the course of field work. However, I will choose to represent here, men from the relatively smaller caste communities in the field (and possibly across Kerala), the Nambiar and the Pisharody castes.

Vinayan

Belonging to the Nambiar caste, Vinayan's family were land-owning elites of Perur. In the caste

hierarchy, Nambiars who are roughly at the same level as Nairs, and below Brahmin communities, command more prestige than Nairs, particularly Nairs of Southern Kerala. Vinayan was an active member of the left party in the area and had official party membership. He owns a pharmacy, the key source of income of the family. Having land assets as well as a stable job, he seemed very comfortably positioned. His home – consisting of his wife, daughter and a son – bore signs of wealth.

I met his wife and was talking to her when Vinayan walked in for lunch. She had only started talking to us after an initial hesitation and mistrust – we were strangers after all. An articulate woman herself, she immediately withdrew and let her husband do the talking. Vinayan was not too pleased to find us talking inside his house, but eventually thawed as I put in a conscious effort to talk about myself and my research and mentioned the names of people I had already met, including his father at their family home. However, there was a level of discomfort throughout the conversation: as an active politician, he was wary. There also seemed to be a discomfort in talking to a woman he was hesitant to have an open conversation with me, partly the caution of a politician, and partly the perception that there cannot be much for a political person like him to talk about?? to a young woman like me.

As I discussed the rationale for choosing Perur as my field site, Vinayan expressed some displeasure about the claims that this was a ward where development schemes were implemented properly due to the initiative of President Balan. He said strategically, “Balan is doing things to the extent of his ability, things that he is interested in”, implying that it was not enough and not responding to the needs of the people. When I asked if he could tell me some of his disagreements, he said, “I do not have to explain these things to you”. This seemed less of an interest in discussing political disagreements, and more of an indication that I was not an equal to discuss public politics with. I persisted, “can you tell me what are the public affairs in which there have been disagreements”. He eased up and said,

“Take for instance, the issue of paving this road with tar. Last time, we were told there would be a meeting, and we waited here for the meeting, but he did not come here and went elsewhere. They will do these things depending on political affiliations. Same with water. We do not have proper water supply. By the end of March,¹⁰⁷ we have to buy water. There

¹⁰⁷ April and May are peak summer months when wells and ponds dry up, after which monsoon begins in June.

are pipe connections but we do not get water in this area. There is water in other areas but it does not reach here. At my father's home (near-by) there is water, but not here."

His wife pitches in, "people often leave their taps open and direct the water to their wells. So water does not reach until here"

Vinayan continues, "Yes, that is there. So we have stopped paying for water."¹⁰⁸ Same with the extension branch of the co-operative society that they started in Perur. They have employed only people supporting their party."

This is a sentiment expressed by many, and indeed, that political parties favour people who support them is not a new thing. In Kerala, these polarizations between the left and the right play down to the most local level, as these excerpts also illustrates.

As has been my experience, conversation with men, particularly from upper caste locations seemed to veer towards the local politics. As we discussed more about the personal aspects, he said that having lived in various parts of India during his childhood (as his father was a military officer), the opportunities in Perur were very limited. He was particularly concerned about the educational prospects for his daughter. He said he did not discriminate between his son and daughter. In the course of the conversation, Vinayan said that getting married was one of the key decisions in his life and he felt it made him happier. (As she heard this, his wife laughed, a little embarrassed and happy). When he said it was a 'love' marriage, I asked if the families objected.

Oh no, that will happen only if it is an inter caste marriage, is that not so? We're from the same caste. We are Nambiars.

So, you mean, had it been an inter-caste marriage, it would have been a problem? It can be a problem. For instance, the son of a Menon¹⁰⁹ here eloped with a Muslim girl. That was a big issue; the Muslim family came here and objected. When it is without the consent of the families, it is a problem. But my brother is married to a Christian woman. They had a simple ceremony; they went to the temple and exchanged garlands. His wife did not convert to a Hindu, though. They are living in the US. So that is not a problem. They

¹⁰⁸ This indicates that they are talking about the participatory world-bank led water management

¹⁰⁹ Menon is the surname of slightly-superior Nairs who are nevertheless below Nambiars.

were in love, and the families also agreed. But in the previous case, he just eloped. So will they not object?

Vinayan considers himself as a 'progressive-thinking' man. However, the entrapments of caste and religion in his progressiveness is well-illustrated in this case. It is important to note that in Kerala, 'inter-caste' marriage refers to inter-religious marriage as well. The examples he gave to my question about inter-caste marriages are both of inter-religious marriages. This I argue, is not an anomaly. Caste is clearly ingrained in religion, and people instinctively understand it, even if it is not consciously spelt out. The first example cites the caste of the boy, 'Menon'. This detail is more important than the fact that it is a 'Hindu' boy because it immediately clarifies that 'upper caste' honour and pride is involved. The caste of the Muslim family is not mentioned, but given that they also felt their honour and pride had been compromised gives away the fact that they had some social standing. (To propose a counter-factual scenario, had this transgression been committed by a Paraya boy instead of a Menon boy, details about the social standing and suitability of the Muslim family would have been discussed to ascertain the gravity of the crime.) That the boy's family is Menon precludes discussion about the social standing of the girl's because Menon caste pride is implicit and understood. In any case, consent of the family is supreme, and trumps the fact that the marrying parties are in love (or not). Vinayan's marriage by virtue of it not crossing caste boundaries was acceptable. On the other hand, he refers also to his brother's inter-religious marriage to a Christian woman. It was interesting to note that he identified living in the United States as the reason for it not being such a big issue. Although very little is said about it, a lot is implied in the cultural context. It brings to mind the affluent Malayalis who have gone beyond gulf countries to the western world. As opposed to the blue collar workers who largely constitute the gulf migrants, the Malayalis in the western countries are presented as well educated, English speaking people doing white collar jobs. The image drawn up of his brother and wife is not of struggling migrants in the gulf, but well-settled folks, which makes this marriage unobjectionable. There is a strong element of caste-capital conveyed through this small description, as most Malayalis who had access to the English-speaking world abroad carried 'upper' caste capital.

If Vinayan is an upper caste male who has it all going for him, I would like to consider the case of one of the less well-off (but by no means poor) 'upper' caste men in the locality.

Madhavan

Madhavan belongs to the Pisharody caste, classified as a 'forward' caste. The traditional occupation of this caste, who are part of the 'ambalavasi' castes, i.e. castes who serve temples - is to make garlands for deities in temples, and because of this esteemed position, they maintain all rituals of purity. Madhavan and his wife were at home when I met them, but the wife let Madhavan do the talking. Madhavan identifies himself as a middle-class man. Currently, his main source of income is a hollow-bricks factory that his son (who has finished an engineering degree) looks after. Alongside, he also carries out his traditional temple-related job. Although he is comfortably settled, he feels that life dealt him a bad hand. He explains about his circumstances,

When my father retired from his job, I had only finished my pre-degree. I had first class but could not study further as I had to financially contribute towards the family. My elder brother was in Mumbai then, working in the income tax department. I went there in 1982, and worked there for ten years. For some time, I worked at a scientific research centre at Tarapur, doing some training in a processing plant. Then I returned home and went to the Gulf. I got married when I was there. I had been there for five years when both my parents passed away, both within a space of a few days. My wife's parents were also dead: her mother died long back while her father had passed away the same year. She (wife) had a younger brother and sister who were not married, and there was no one else at her place to take care of the family. This was the circumstance when the responsibility for my family as well as her siblings fell on my shoulders. I had to come back to take care of things here. This was the key event.... I would have been eligible very soon for family accommodation in Gulf¹¹⁰ and I could have taken my family and we might have had a different life. But it did not happen.

After all our responsibilities were over, we sold our land and house, bought this land and built our home. I came here through a Namboodiri friend of mine. He asked us to come here to this temple and this area. We tie the garland for the temple here now. The temple itself is not very old, I think it has only been ten years. My father did his religious chores at my native place.

¹¹⁰ A particular income was necessary before migrants were eligible to bring their families.

Now, it has been twenty years since I returned from Gulf...

Madhavan's story bears resemblances to many others' whose experiences will follow, who were forced to work before acquiring education that could get them better-paid, regular, white collar jobs. The critical difference, as has been shown in several other narratives is that he had a fall-back option: land assets, as well as income from the land. He also carries on with his traditional caste occupation like his father and fore-fathers before. This does not put him in the precarious situation that many other men describe in the following sections. He could have had a different life had his parents not passed away too soon and he certainly misses the life he could have had. While this cannot be reversed, it has not affected his quality of life in India. Has not been poor, and he has not been plunged into further poverty where he struggles for basic necessities, or to have savings. He was able to afford good education for his son. Indeed, his financial position and entrepreneurial abilities are evident in him starting a business that needs some capital investment. He is grooming his son, and expects that he will take it over at the appropriate time.

It would appear that even though he did not hold a permanent job at point in life, there was no dire financial hardship. One of the key feature in all these narratives, whether of men or women, is the presence of social capital and access to economic resources, the key to which is landed property, even for the least well-off. Often, a permanent job is seen as the criterion of immediate economic well-being despite the fact that those who are well-off are most often those who had access to resources.

In the case of both these men, finding job itself never seemed to have been a crisis that threatened their existence, and both of them, like the upper caste women above, did not choose occupations beneath their station as upper caste men. Endogamous boundaries were rarely crossed, and even then, these were interreligious marriages where class, and social status of the families corresponded. Hardly ever was marriage between their own and lower caste Hindu community spoken of as unproblematic by any of these individuals. Most of these individuals had direct connections to the local state authorities – either as relatives or as political party workers, and hence, they did not narrate struggles or conflict with the state. Lakshmi's only grouse was the differentiated citizenship rights given to marginalized communities.

Next, I will narrate the experiences of men and women from the OBC communities.

7.1.2. Other Backward Castes in Perur

The Other Backward Castes in the region are the Ezhava, Thandaan, Chon, Ezhuthassan, Ashari, Kollan, Karuvan, Thattan, and Vilakkathala Nair caste. I will choose four individuals – Meenu, Seena, Deepak, and Vineeth. Through their narratives, I will also touch upon the lives of other connected individuals like Meenu’s mother Shanta, or Seena’s late husband..

7.1.2.1. Women from OBC communities in Perur

First, I will talk about Meenu and also her mother Shanta, from a Vilakkathala Nair community. Vilakkathala Nair, a caste group among the several Nair communities, are much lower in rank, as their traditional occupation was that of Barbers to the castes above them (There are other barber castes too, for people in the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy). They are classified as an OBC community.

Meenu

Meenu, a sprightly 24-year-old, had finished her Bachelor degree in Nursing and was looking for a job in Chennai. I met her accidentally in the *anganwadi* when she dropped in to talk to the teacher who used to be her neighbour. We got talking and I walked to her home where I met her mother Shanta. Her mother welcomes me and my field assistant warmly. Meenu had strong opinions and was comfortable expressing these frankly in front of her mother. Discussing openly, issues such as love, marriage, hopes for life etc. – topics taboo from open discussion between parents and children in the cultural context of Kerala (and India more generally) – revealed a shared understanding between the mother and daughter. Meenu expressed her irritation with the conformity that was expected of her as a young woman, and her refusal to give in to it. She says,

“See, there’s no point in my parents objecting if I marry someone I love. To take the traditional route of arranged marriage, means that I will get an alliance brought by my relatives. But I do not want to marry anyone my relatives find. For one, they will be someone or the other that they themselves are related to, and I do not want to marry into any of their families. Second, they will forever keep reminding us that they brought the alliance. I just cannot marry into a family like my mother’s or my father’s. I need someone who will understand and adjust to my desires. I want to work and be independent. There is a

boy that I have found. Mother knows about him. And father knows too, I'm sure, but I have not told him myself and he has not yet acknowledged it".

Her mother Shanta chips in,

"Not one man in our family is well educated. We are vilakkathala nairs. Only some of us have married Nairs, not just vilakkathala nairs. So some of us have married well. "

Meenu continues,

"I want my children to have a good grandfather and grandmother. I do not have it myself. My grandparents have not shown any affection for me at any time... I was the only girl-child born in my generation in my father's family, and they should have doted on me all the more for it. But they do not like me! That's because I studied in an English medium school. They think I should get up at 5:30 in the morning and sweep the front yard. I should not sit and talk with my father. I should not travel sitting on his bike, I should not have sat on this lap as a young girl. I cannot talk to my elder cousin brothers. But I do not distinguish between girls and boys. I have all friends coming home and I go to their homes. My relatives think I do not respect boys and men. I do not stand up when I see them. I do not stand up when my father walks into the room. These are their problems"

As mentioned earlier, it is very unusual in the cultural milieu of Kerala for girls to sit with their parents and comfortably discuss their relationship. This is a rarity in a society where caste endogamy necessitates 'arranged marriages'. Transgression of that norm is met with excommunication and ostracizing from family in most cases, and in its most aggressive form manifests as honour killings. Parents frown upon their children 'being in love', an act that brings shame upon the whole family, and provides fodder for much gossip and social slander. The boy Meenu had found for herself was from a higher caste. A girl choosing a partner for herself reflects poorly on her parents. Crossing caste boundaries calls for reprimand and strict action, not cool acceptance. That they discussed the matter freely with us suggested a lack of fear of the local gossip or social judgments. It could be argued that this was an advantageous match. However, this did not seem to be the case, as Shanta was as critical of Nair caste practices as she was of their own community.

It was also remarkable that Meenu was able to find a rational explanation for finding a partner herself, one that seemed to meet with the approval of her mother as well. In fact, the rationality

of it all was convincing when seen with Shanta's input that there were few men from their caste who were well-educated. Even as educational achievement is one of the key component of the Kerala Model, it has been demonstrated that educational achievements in Kerala show disparities based on caste (Deshpande 2000; Sivanandan 1979). Lower-caste communities have lower levels of education, particularly because of income-earning pressures as following examples will also illustrate.

Meenu rejects one of the important ties that people have, their network of relatives. Acknowledging that she did not have any affection from her relatives while growing up, she desires more meaningful relations. Indeed, the mother and daughter told us about some of their difficult times and hurtful incidents involving relatives. This severance of bonds, it would appear, enables her to take some important decisions in her life, some of which are in fact, radical within her cultural context. I feel it is useful to note that such personal decisions – no doubt enabled by the past decisions of her parents- break deep-rooted caste and patriarchal powers without much ado. Her aspiration, in short, was for 'modernity', understood as that promises social justice, and she saw community as a hindrance rather than as a support for her chances in life.

By way of throwing more light on the support for Meenu's decisions, and the circumstances that could have shaped it, I turn to the experiences of Meenu's mother, Shanta. Two things were striking in her narrative: her thrust on a sort of mental 'development' necessary for all individuals, and her deep sense of right and wrong upon which she based all her decisions and built her life.

Supporting Meenu's decision to find a man for herself, she says,

I can live in any situation, in poverty or wealth. I've learnt how to do it. But I do not want my kids to go through what I have. I want them to live well. It is not about money, never. It's about choosing a partner with vivaram (knowledge), who has 'developed', someone who does not talk unnecessarily, who does not want to meddle in other people's affairs, and can think, 'let others live as they like'.

This idea of 'development' that she has, different from the way the word is used in common parlance (to refer to the global ideology of development and often bringing to people's minds, buildings, roads, internet and other infrastructural changes in a locality), is about development of the individual, to be able to think for him/herself. Here, she does not use the word *buddhi* (intelligence) which quite often is paired with *vivaram* in everyday Malayalam conversation.

People often use the word *buddhi* appreciatively, and is often associated with the Brahmin caste. Here, she chooses *vivaram*. Whereas *Buddhi* is a sharp measure, *vivaram* is broad spread of mental faculties combined with practical knowledge. *Buddhi* could retain the same quality across space and time, but *vivaram* has contextual appropriateness ingrained into the notion. She continues,

I stopped my education by 8th standard (approximate age of 12/13). We had a road-side fruit stall where I worked with my parents. Even then, I was already using all my thinking faculties. Of the five siblings, I am the one who still takes my own independent decisions. The others still consult me with their decisions. I am very capable of taking decisions. And even though I was not educated enough to know the difference, I took the decision to send my kids to an English medium school.

This family has 'developed' so much because of me. It is my intelligence and logic. I am always proud of it. At every stage, I used my own logic. If we use it, it will be right. And I pray.

I have never retrospectively thought that something I did was wrong. Even the toughest decisions were worth it. Marrying my husband was a good decision. Had I chosen anyone else from the 90-odd marriage proposals we got, my kids would not have turned out this way. I do not want relatives like mine. I wanted them to have culture and goodness.

My husband was a drunkard for over twelve years. He squandered a lot of money. Still the one thing about him that I could be proud of was that he would never cheat anyone or take their money. Other than giving away money to others, he would never take their money. He does not want to eat or drink with anyone's money. He may squander 10,000 rupees of his own money, but he will not cheat. Even in his work, he can charge more from people who do not know anything about the work, but he will not do that. He will even go as far as telling his clients that such and such are the ways you could get this work done so that you can save some money. There have been times when children did not have 50 paise¹¹¹ with them to take the bus to school. There was no electricity at home till Meenu finished her twelfth standard.

Shanta seems to have developed a trust in her own logic, and a unique perspective, which even as it values education, sees independent thinking faculties, logic, and capacity for decision-

¹¹¹ 50 paise is roughly equivalent to half-pence. Bus fare for school-going children used to be 50 paise some years back, which is what she refers to.

making as separate from what is taught in schools. She chose a man whom she thought would allow her to bring up her children in a better ‘culture’ than what she was seeing in her relatives. It would appear that whatever she meant by it, she was able to execute it, as Meenu has grown up into a very smart young woman with her own thoughts. The qualities she values are clear; a principled life of honesty, independence, logic, and self-reliance. It is this that she considers ‘development’, indeed a ‘development’ of individual morality. This is why, despite her husband being an alcoholic, she seems to respect the qualities of honesty and integrity that he has. It is hardly surprising that with such standards, there are several circumstances when unprincipled actions of individuals become a burden for this woman and her daughter.

From such an expectation of fellow human beings, also stems the irreverence she has for caste hierarchies. She narrates an experience where her son was treated disrespectfully by a member of the Kudumbashree NHG that she too was a part of. She narrates the incident,

I owed twenty rupees ¹¹²to the group. While we were in the meeting, my son happened to pass by. So this lady called out to him and said, “Your mother owes us twenty rupees. Please run home and bring it”. I got annoyed. So I snapped at this lady and said, “If Devaki of the Big family owes you twenty rupees, will you call her son like this and ask him to bring money?”¹¹³ Do not do this veshamkettu (drama) with me. You may be talking to Pulaya boys that way,” and I know, I should not be talking about other castes like this (she says apologizing for using the word Pulaya), “but do not talk to my son that way. Devaki wears saree worth rupees thousand, and I wear saree worth rupees hundred, but both have the same purpose. Dignity and honour. This is the same for all of us, so do not mess with our honour.” After this incident, I left the Kudumbashree group.

It is here that her idea of modernity surfaces, one that clearly rejects the caste hierarchy that is practised in the locality. She observes that ‘Pulaya’ people are treated disrespectfully by women above them in the hierarchy, but resists herself being treated that way, and is apologetic for using the caste name. The Pulaya family she mentioned seemed to take the disrespectful way of talking to them in their stride, but being a relatively recent entrant, she does not have to play by the caste rules of the locality. This is a direct challenge to caste that she throws up in the locality,

¹¹² Twenty rupees is worth approximately 25 pence.

¹¹³ The Big family she refers to is the same upper caste family that Vinayan belonged to. By implication, a family for whom repaying twenty rupees is not a big deal, and asking for repayment will be seen as an insult due to their status and financial position.

one that should embolden other members of Kudumbashree too to challenge it. Given that she left the group after the incident, it reveals the complicity of these groups in normalizing the embeddedness of caste relations in local democracy.

The choices she makes seem to be attempts to break away from the clutches of caste as the family would have experienced in their own native place. Relocating, severing connections from relatives, investing in children's education, and supporting inter-caste marriages – all of these are coherent strategies to move away from the burden of caste. Their own 'lower' Nair caste status allow some movement into the community of 'upper' Nairs, and this, for an OBC community is an advantageous match. It can be interpreted as a 'road to social mobility and a potent symbolic capture of power' as Osella and Osella (2000) argues in their study of inter-caste marriages of Ezhavas with Nairs in Kerala. However, choices made by the family, including their of local caste practices enable us to understand Meenu's preference to marry someone suitable of her own choice less as a selfish advantageous goal and more as one that embraces the possibilities of modernity. MSS Pandian argues using several examples, pertinently of Kumud Pawde, a Dalit woman whose mastery of Sanskrit was resented by her Head of Department, a 'modern' man wearing Western Clothes. Pawde's anguish at finding herself discriminated against for learning Sanskrit, Pandian argues, is "at once a critique of the modern for its failure as well as an invitation to deliver its promises" (Pandian 2002, 1739). In the case of this family this is not a conformity to upper caste norms, but a resistance to it.

If Meenu and Shanta came across as women who take control of their lives and exercise their agency while re, entirely different is the situation of Seena, another member from OBC community, who does not seem to have felt the need to question her life situation.

Seena

Seena (49) was a widowed home-maker. Born and brought up in Perur, she belonged to the Ezhava community. When we went to her home, she was watching television after having finished her household chores. She had three sons: twins who were 30-years old, and a third son who was 26. The elder twin was a daily wage worker as well as a masseur in ayurvedic style, the second twin was slightly handicapped, and having taken temporary employment in government departments, was currently looking for a job, and the third son had just gone to Sharjah to look for a job. The elder twin was due to get married in a couple of months, and wanted to start his

own massage parlour. While not employed in permanent jobs, they seemed entrepreneurial, and earning just enough to keep daily life going.

Their current house was small – with one bedroom, a small living area, and a kitchen. Before the wedding, they were planning to move into a new house that they were building, the money for which came from selling a small plot of land that Seena had inherited from her father. Indeed, Seena did not come from the poorest Ezhava family; her own natal family seemed to have had land assets which, while not substantial, have served them and Seena's generation too. This property had been the economic asset that both Seena and her elder sister used to build their own lives. Except the 10-cents of land that their house stands on, much of Seena's share has been sold to support the family in tough times. Even so, Seena thought of herself as a lower-middle class person. Her husband was not a spendthrift either, neither were her children in her opinion. Their small house with its unpainted doors bore signs of thrift and poverty.

Seena's husband, a daily wage labourer himself, had passed away three years ago, and she seemed to not have recovered from the trauma. His death was sudden, unexpected because he was healthy. It was she, not he, who was the unhealthy one, says Seena. It was a normal day like any other and he had a heart attack as he lay down to sleep at night. Talking about the relationship they had, she paints the picture of a happy life with a caring responsible man.

“My life changed completely when he passed away. Till then, none of us had to go out to get anything for home. Their father was there to do everything. He cared for all of us, and I was like a child here. Even on the last day, he lit fire in the stove¹¹⁴ – I had burnt my hand when hot oil fell over it and it had not healed, he also cooked rice because I could not have steam hitting the wounds. He had gone out and bought a bag of rice because we were to lay the foundation stone for our new house the next day.¹¹⁵ He was very kind, never raised his hand against me like many other men who beat their wives. Neighbours used to say that they have not seen anyone else like him, someone who cared for his wife and children so much...”

¹¹⁴ Lighting fire in a wood-burning stove is seen as a woman's chore in the kitchen.

¹¹⁵ Laying the foundation stone for a new house are accompanied by religious rituals involving offerings of rice, coconut etc.

Seena gets emotional as she speaks. However, her loss has other emotional implications too. She continues,

“See, whatever you say, for us women, it will never be the same as having our husbands. I have my children and they will give me money, but I have to ask them for it even if it is ten rupees, do not I? So I feel I should earn some money of my own. My children will do anything that I ask of them. But is not there a limit to what I can ask? If I had girls, it would be different. We cannot say things to our sons that we can to our daughters. I have three sons who will do anything for me, but somewhere in the back of their minds, they will keep track of it all. Also, there is no saying about the women they might marry. Who knows what will happen? I hope their wives will be good to me.”

This is a different kind of turmoil, of a woman who has no access to economic resources after her husband’s death. Unlike the case of Geetha, who took control of the financial situation after her husband’s death and continues to do so, or unlike Beena who refuses to let her alcoholic son have full control over her property, Seena is not able to find economic independence. This is due in part to two reasons. The first is that her sons were adults who had their own means of income when she was widowed. Apparently, this made the elder twin assume the position of the household head and take decisions on behalf of the family, something that was evident as he found us talking to his mother when he came to pick up something from home. Concerned that she was talking to strangers, he hankered about for some time before deciding that it was alright to leave her with us. The second reason is that little remained of the land owned by Seena, and there was to be no substantial income from the land she owned, used as it was to construct a house.

Despite not being on the precarious edge of from where she might be easily pushed into poverty (she knows her sons will care for her), her narrative exemplified the uncertain terrain that widowed women with no caste-class capital is thrown into. Despite owning the house on her name, she experiences a destitution without her husband: while this might be the lack of experience of someone who has never taken major financial decisions, or the emotional vulnerability of someone who has been always cared for, it was also related to the lack of any hope for independence in the future. Her fragile health situation contributes to this hopelessness. She says,

I cannot go for thoꞏhilurappu (employment guarantee scheme). I would like to go, but I cannot. If I go out in the sun, even for a couple of days, I fall sick. Last time, I had gone to the taluk

*office on three days to get the 'tax-paid receipt'. After that I fell sick, had severe throat pain and could not speak for a few days. That's why I cannot do thozhilurappu work. Sometimes, when I am upset, I tell my children that I **will** go for thozhilurappu. Then they say, 'okay, you get people from your own family to come look after you when you fall sick.'*

In her case, her husband seems to have never abused her economic reliance on him, and this new arrangement after his passing away is when she feels dependent and constrained for economic resources, so much so that she contemplates *thozhilurappu* as her source of income. As much as this excerpt expresses her frustration with lack of income, it also shows why she fears she is becoming a burden on her sons. That *thozhilurappu*, is her first option, and nothing else crosses her mind is an indicator of her caste-class situation (it was not the case for any upper caste woman considered earlier, and Lakshmi drew a distinction between herself and *panikkari pennungal*). While it is not clear what leads Seena to be upset and tell her sons that she **will** go for NREGA work, it is clear that she attaches some importance, even though it might have been expressed in jest, to her sons' refusal to take care of her, were she to fall sick. This is a contrast to the situation when her husband was around and used to care for her. In fact, Shobha, the block panchayat vice-president (discussed in the earlier chapter) also shares the same situation, with her husband being her primary care-giver. This is why she generalized from her experience and say that "*for us women, it will never be the same as having our husbands*". It stems from an understanding of the working of patriarchy; from an ability to empathize with all women she is familiar with who, if widowed, are dependent on their sons, but lose the power that they had when the father was present. While Seena is generalizing for all women, it is to be noted that she is a woman who has spent all her life in the village, and ventures out of the locality only for occasions. (It is very likely that she has never encountered women of other race, colour or culture, even from other parts of Kerala or India). Hence I would consider it pointless to point out the flaws in her observation on those counts. Her generalization is for the contexts and communities that she is familiar with. From this location, she speaks for all the women she has come across, and she understands patriarchal power (as well as the protection it offers in cases like hers) as one that influences all women.

On that note, I would like to examine the situations that men from OBC communities find themselves in.

7.1.2.2. Men from OBC communities

Here, I write about the lives of three young men – two brothers Deepak and Anand, and Vineeth – in Perur. While one is unmarried, the other is married. While Deepak went to ‘gulf’ looking for better prospects, Anand is pursuing his education. Vineeth, on the other hand, grew up in gulf until he was thirteen has returned to Kerala.

Deepak and Anand

While all the other narratives have been presented through the narratives of the people whose experiences were discussed, Deepak’s story is presented through the viewpoint of his mother Anitha and brother Anand. The situation of these brothers and their lives offered a very instructive glimpse into the operation of caste, class and gender forces.

From an Ezhava family, Deepak (32) was the eldest of three siblings, followed by his 26-year-old sister who was married (and stayed elsewhere), and the youngest sibling Anand (23). Anand was a law student, a civil-service aspirant, and a Congress Party supporter who was a co-ordinator of the *yuvajanakshema* (youth welfare) board. There was a photo of Gandhi on the wall and Anand said he was inspired by him. He seemed like a young man claiming the modernity Kerala had to offer – of secular, public spaces with access to good quality higher education, and aspirations for high achievement. Impressed by his on-going preparation for the civil service examination, I asked him how he had found out about these, and the ways to prepare for it. He said that his school teacher had spotted him and four others and motivated them to work hard and prepare for these competitive exams for prestigious jobs. There was nobody in his family who could have guided him – his father and mother had primary school education, and his elder brother Deepak studied only till tenth standard. Anand’s mother Anitha talks about the circumstances that led to her children developing academic interests:

You know, I used to roll beedis to make a living.¹¹⁶ While I did that, I did not want them to run outside home. You see, this house is on the roadside, and there is a canal too close

¹¹⁶ Beedi is an Indian version of cigarette – tobacco rolled in dry tendu leaves. Less expensive and very popular in Kerala, beedis are hand-rolled most often by women, either at their homes or in cottage industries. The pay is fixed for every thousand beedis rolled, and although meagre, this provides a means of income for women who are not able to work as better earning manual-labour.

by.¹¹⁷ *It was difficult for me to manage them. So I brought them slates and pencils and made them sit down and study. They were interested, and it kept them inside the house. This was a good solution. So in whatever way I knew, I made them write and learn.*

Even when they were very young, I used to get my children books to read. With whatever little knowledge I had, I tried to educate them. You know why? We were building this house and everyone told me, 'you are taking these kids near the roadside'. My eldest son was a bundle of mischief. When we moved to this house, people said, 'she will take these kids to that roadside and kill them. That's why she is moving there.' That hurt me and stayed with me. I was determined that no harm should come to them because of my lack of attention and care. But I was also very clear that I did not want to pamper and spoil them. I wanted them to be disciplined. No, it is not like I did not want them to play or anything. The three of them could play together! My eldest son wanted to go out a lot and play. He liked outdoors. But if he got into a fight with other kids, then their grandfather would chide me. He loved these kids a lot. If they fell down while playing and hurt their knees, then he would scold me. So I took extra care that they were out of any harm's way. Their father was not so interested in education. But their grandfather – he was very encouraging and was keen that the kids studied hard.

It is interesting to note that while Anand attributed his educational interest to an inspirational teacher, his mother had an explanation going back to an earlier age that attributed it to their personal and social circumstances as well as her own personal influence. Clearly, an interest in reading and writing had been sparked in the children because of Anitha's situation. Her decision to move house was because her husband's own home had his brothers and father, and she was the only woman who was tending to all the men and her children, some of whom were alcoholic. She refused to live there after the children were born because it was too much work for one woman to do by herself. This has to be seen as a 'strategic choice'¹¹⁸ exercised by her. On the

¹¹⁷ What she means is that she did not want them to get into any accident while playing outside the house. The children could have get hit by the bus as it is a main road and if they are unattended. There was no fence or gate at that time when they were poorer.

¹¹⁸ Strategic gender interests have strategic objectives such as the abolition alleviation of the burden of domestic labour and childcare, the removal of institutionalized forms of discrimination, the attainment of political equality, the establishment of freedom of choice over childbearing, and the adoption of adequate measures against male violence and control over women (Molyneux 1985, 233). Ability to pursue these, and to choose them are important to understanding empowerment according to Kabeer (2005). According to her, "Strategic life choices include where to live, whether and whom to marry,

other hand, getting them to read books was more of a practical solution – to problems arising from her from her exercise of a strategic choice – that she arrived at to solve her immediate household problem. Even though it was a practical solution, it seems to have had more long-term benefits, resulting in better education and prospects for Anand.

However, it did not work out in the same way for Deepak, her first-born, and she talks of his life with some sadness.

My elder son was very bright even though he studies only until tenth standard but. When he was a small boy, once we bought him a book with pictures and words. We were coming back from the town. We were coming back in a bus and all the way until here, he kept asking questions about things in the book. When we got home, he started writing all these down on a slate. He was only three then. Then I felt that he will study well. After that, I started buying educational things whenever I could. We did not have a lot of money to buy stuff for him, being in a lot of debt ourselves. If I were reading a book, he would start reading with me. Also newspapers – if he got even a shred of a newspaper, he would read it. We enrolled him in school when he was four-and-a-half-years old. Then he knew already everything that was being taught in classes. He had learnt it all sitting at home. Soon, I got pregnant with my second child and went to my home for the delivery.¹¹⁹ That was when his education slipped. There was no one to teach him at home. He forgot everything he learnt earlier. I did not have the sense at that time to realize that kids will forget what they learn. He became lazy to go to school. I was really busy with the second child, I also had the household work. Their father was also working. So I could not concentrate on his education. I could teach him only when I got the time. By the time he reached fifth standard, he was clearly on a downward slide. By his seventh standard it was complete.

After his 10th standard exams, he went to stay with his uncles for the holidays. They are construction workers (sic). They said, “Why do not you come with us when we go for work? You can help us instead of simply sitting at home.” He went with them. They paid him some money also for that. And that got to him. He said he does not want to study any

whether to have children, how many children to have, who has custody over children, freedom of movement and association, and so on. These help to frame other choices that may be important for the quality of one’s day-to-day life, but do not constitute its defining parameters”(2005, 14)

¹¹⁹ It is a custom among most communities in Kerala that a woman goes to her natal home for delivery, often after the sixth month of pregnancy, where her mother is expected to care for her, and the family, to bear the expenses.

more. Why would he, he is earning money, is not he? But we cannot blame his decision. We were in tough times then. He had two younger siblings growing up, an ailing grandfather, and the two of us parents and his father was the only earning member. That was also one reason to give up studies. We told him to study some more, but he refused. He wanted to contribute his bit to help with the financial burden. Soon after, his father also became sick. Then we started depending on him completely. He started paying for the education of the other two siblings. He is bearing the whole responsibility for the household with no better prospects for the future. He went to Muscat for two years to try his luck. He is interested in trying new things. But it did not work out for him. He struggled a lot there and came back. It was hard work. It pays, but it's so hard that he'd fall sick. But he is trying to go back again in a better job. I do not want him to go back.

Anyway, he is the one in trouble. He cannot even find a girl to marry him. He is thirty-two now. We've been looking for a bride for him for some time now with no success. The problem is, he has studied only up till his tenth standard. No girls these days want to marry someone who has no education.

It was clear that Anitha blamed herself partly for how her son's life turned out. In fact, she has an immediate comparison point: the youngest sibling Anand. While she recognizes that Deepak had little choice in how things turned out, given they were under financial duress, she is acutely aware that he has been given a raw deal. While both his siblings got better education, mainly due to Deepak's support, Deepak himself has no prospects to look forward to because of his poor educational qualifications. It appeared certain that manual labour will be his occupation for life. She is aware that the difference in educational qualifications and his occupation is going to put a wide gulf between her two sons' lives. Indeed, she elaborated on Deepak's situation when I started asking Anand about his own motivations. It was clear that she was saying it as much for me as for driving it into the younger son's mind that his brother was in no way less intelligent or capable, and sacrificed his future for the family. She says it with a tinge of regret that going to stay with his uncles (her brothers) was the turning point in his life, because they introduced him too quickly to the life of an earning man, making it hard for him to go back to being a full-time student. In fact, this seems similar to the situation described in an early chapter, about another young man from the OBC community, 24-year-old Abhishek, a blacksmith, who was pursuing his education via correspondence as he shared family responsibilities with his mother. Similarly burdened as he had an elder sister who had to be married off, and a younger one whose marriage

too, he will have to conduct, it took tremendous will power to keep the family afloat, save for the marriages, and pursue his education.

Clearly, education as the only way out for this family to escape their class status. However, this seemed not to be the case for men like Madhavan and Devan (described in earlier chapter); their education seemed to have very less of an impact on their ability to maintain a decent quality of life. Even as class seems unsurmountable except through education, caste seems to be able to sustain class differentials. In fact, class mobility alone seems to hold very less promise for inter-generational equality, as Vineeth's story below shows.

Vineeth

Vineeth, a 31-year old man, belonged to an Ashari community. Ashari community are carpenters concerned only with wood work. He lived in the colony (colonies have SC and OBC caste members), had been in the Gulf for seven years before he returned one year back. Presently, he was doing carpentry work. Although he had studied in a good school in town, he dropped out in tenth standard. He explained why.

"I could not complete my tenth standard. My father was in the hospital; his kidneys were failing. Before he fell sick, he was working in the gulf before that and we were financially well off. He went to the Gulf at a very young age. We lived in a much wealthier part of the town then, not in such a remote location. Then father fell sick and had to come back. We had to spend all our money on his treatment. We sold our house for a loss. Today we cannot hope to buy a similar house in such a location. Suddenly, we fell into difficult times. That's when I had to re-enter 'our field'¹²⁰. After my father passed away, I went to the gulf myself. Then I took care of my sister's education till she finished her plus two.¹²¹ Caught up in all that mess, I had to let go of my own education. I used to study in the Seventh Day Adventist School in this town, and before that in the Indian school in Dubai. So you know we were in a good situation. All the others who studied with me, they are in high positions.

Unfortunately, none of our relatives were in a position to help. In fact, my father used to be the one helping them! When we had money, all our relatives were close. When we lost it,

¹²⁰ When Vineeth says 'our field', he means 'carpentry', the traditional occupation. It indicates that the family had, at least temporarily left that work.

¹²¹Plus two, from '10 + 2' refers to Senior secondary school, the two years following senior high school.

everyone went away. There is no point in complaining about it. My mother now goes for thozhilurappu.”

The regret of losing the life he could have had due to circumstances that were not under his control is quite evident in his words. I clearly understood the magnitude of his loss, having myself been educated in a school similar to the Seventh Day Adventist School, and knowing that the training rarely leaves students in bad situations. The Indian School in Dubai too was where many Malayali parents in Dubai sent their children. Having had classmates who were children of Gulf-returned parents who had studied at Indian School, Dubai, I could relate to his educational background. It is understandable when he says that others who studied with him are in ‘high position’: indeed, students from these schools go on to attain professional education, and have a comfortable upper-middle class life. Exceptions are rare, and Vineeth seems to be one of them. He draws up the contrast starkly when he adds that his mother goes for *thozhilurappu*, the last sort of work a young earning adult man would like to see his mother doing. And certainly not a job the mothers of any of his classmates would do. Just like Seena, Vineeth’s mother also seems to have no hesitation to consider it as a potential job when it becomes the only option available. Despite the class mobility Vineeth’s family enjoyed, albeit temporarily, *thozhilurappu* was not considered beneath them by the family in their situation of crisis, quite unlike the sentiment expressed by Lakshmi who did not want to become the same as *panikkari pennungal*. This is where the caste-element of self-selection in NREGA as well as other manual labour becomes evident.

In harbouring no grudges against his relatives who did not help, he reveals the understanding of someone who has experienced poverty and knows the constraints it imposes on people, especially of relatives to help. The lack of support he narrates is not isolated. Most people from SC and OBC communities recount similar instances, of the precariousness of their economic mobility, of health crises being the tipping point that pushes them back into poverty, and not being able to expect any financial support from the family. Often, those who did not have any assets to sell off and finance the treatment got no good treatment.

In contrast stands the situation of another 56-year-old man from the locality, an Ezhava (OBC) man who was also in gulf, suffered no unexpected health crises, and therefore, was able to educate his children well. Having followed more or less the same early educational trajectory as Vineeth, his son was able to finish his professional education, and his daughter, a good degree

program after which both were employed well. The son, working as a software engineer married a Brahmin woman from his work place. This meant that the woman was excommunicated from her community, and her parents had refused to have anything to do with her. Consequently, she was fully pregnant, and at her husband's home (against the common norm explained earlier) for delivery where her in-laws were taking good care of her.

Narratives of both men and women from the OBC community show the importance of education to these individuals and their families. With the exception of Seena who had little exposure outside her small circle in the locality, all others were vocal about the role of education in social mobility, and those like Vineeth were in fact, disappointed when he could not pursue his studies. Women like Meenu and her mother did not believe in arranged marriages, and were ready to break the norm of arranged marriages – this is not extraordinary. Educated women with prospects for social mobility had better chances of finding suitable partners from the same social class group they were moving in than from within their circle of family and relatives. This aspiration to improve one's opportunities is what the mother too tries to convey through 'development,' and in many ways look like a hypergamous aspiration. On the other hand, for men like Deepak, being less educated affected his life chances and is an obstacle in finding a suitable bride. Educated man from OBC community marrying a Brahmin woman, however, resulted in excommunication of the woman by her family. Hypogamy is still not tolerated. None of these in effect, are surprising in a caste society.

What is interesting is also that Meenu and her mother object when others try to trample upon them, and refuse to accept traditional hierarchies – in that sense, their claim is to the modernity that citizenship offers. Simultaneously, Shanta is careful to warn others that she cannot be trampled under their feet like they do SC communities. This resistance, at once, sets her above the SCs but also shows her own location as below many others. The entrapments of caste and class and the crisis of modern aspirations within an entrenched social system is evident.

Through these narratives, I have tried to show how class mobility is not sustainable for OBC communities across generations unless there is substantial investment in education. As important as going to the 'Gulf' was an attractive and rewarding way of escaping caste-defined occupations, the success of this move is not realized for many. Nevertheless, it held a hope, a possibility that, if all fell in place, could secure better circumstances than the caste-proscribed ones for future generations. If men from OBC communities in Perur were able to take advantage of

opportunities in gulf, this did not seem to be the case with SC communities. The 'state' seemed to have very less role in this mobility. In the next section, I will try to illustrate the situation of scheduled caste communities.

7.1.3. Scheduled Caste Communities in Perur

The scheduled caste communities in Perur include Kanakkan, Paraya, Pulaya and Mulaya, and Mannan. In these narratives, I consider four individuals— two women, Latha and Radha, and two men, Sajith and Mahesh. Radha and Sajith are married, and they will be talked about together. Sajith is Latha's nephew, a fact that came to light much later, since they were estranged.

7.1.3.1. Scheduled Caste women

I met several women from the SC communities during fieldwork. The most assertive of them, Sneha, has already been described in the earlier chapters. Here, I will talk about Latha and Radha. Latha is a Paraya woman, widowed with a daughter and son. Having gone to school only until fourth standard, she has only primary education. Radha on the other hand is a smart woman of nineteen who had just finished her plus two, and wanted to study further. The similarity they shared however was that they both married outside caste, even though it was within the SC community.

Latha

When I met her, Latha (52) was busy organizing her daughter's marriage which was to happen in a few days. She, her sister, and brother-in-law were putting up a stage for the wedding reception in an empty plot of land next to her home.

Latha was taking a break from the work, resting at her home when I started talking to her. She wanted to see the questionnaire, mainly because my presence in the colony had made people wonder if I was sent by the government to re-assess the poverty line, or eligibility for benefits. I was happy to show Latha the questionnaire and she read the questions with some difficulty. Then she told me that she had taught herself to read after fourth standard. I asked her why she could not study further. She replied,

“None of us siblings studied. Mother put me to work in a tailoring shop. It was good for us if we could earn something so we could have podiyarikanji¹²². So our mother had no option. I was nine when I went for work. I was very small.... I used to hold my fingers like this (makes the gesture of a little girl clasping her mother’s finger). I did not even know how to tie my hair. The poverty was such that if we needed clothes, my mother had to borrow it. On the day of thiruvonam, my mother made a ‘komboram’ and put it in front of the houses of the landowners.¹²³ If they left us any food in it, we could eat. Otherwise, we had no food! I have not studied much but I can read. See, I can read (she demonstrates by reading out the questionnaire). I tried to understand all the letters and took the effort so I can read”.

Grinding poverty seems to have been the defining feature of Latha’s childhood. It prevented her from accessing education, as it did for many others that I talked to. Latha was from the paraya community, a community of basket weavers. She married a man from a Mulaya community against the wishes of her family. While both Paraya and Mulaya are Scheduled castes, Mulaya is a step below Paraya in the caste hierarchy, and as is with caste, inter-marriage was not common. As a result, she found herself excommunicated, something that deeply affected her. She says,

I was an orphan always. Since I married someone I liked, they abandoned me just like that. My family abandoned me. No one enquired after me. My parents also died soon after. That is when you become truly alone. My siblings had their own families and engagements, and they did not bother about my life. My husband was a Mulaya. These Parayas – they have more bhrasht than any other caste.¹²⁴ For any small caste transgression, bhrasht is the punishment. So they will not include me in any occasions because I went with mulaya. I had my first child when I was seventeen. No one cared for me. All my life, I lived in dirt. No one cared about me. They would not include me. (Cries). They would not call me for any weddings. My own people excluded me – they would not call me for any functions and feasts. I just lived alone all this time. No one took care of my children or helped me raise them. I was all alone.

¹²² Podiyarikanji is rice gruel made of broken rice, the cheapest quality of rice that many families used to survive on.

¹²³ Thiruvonam is the main day of the regional festival called ‘Onam’ when families have a feast. Komboram is a kind of winnowing pane.

¹²⁴ Bhrasht refers to social boycott/ excommunication imposed by caste rules. That parayas have more rigid caste rules than any other caste has to be read as Latha’s own impression due to abandonment she experienced, and not a strictly comparative perspective.

When I say I lived in dirt, I mean literally that. This house did not even have proper drainage and water would stagnate here. It was not how you see it now. Now, you see this small house and this courtyard neat, plastered with cow dung. I made it all like this. I made the bricks with my own hands, at night, after I returned from work. I kneaded the mud with my bare hands. Everyone here knows this; they have seen it. They know that I have worked like a man – I mixed concrete, I laid the stones... (She starts crying, and her 23-year old son who was listening signals her to not cry).

Latha's husband has been dead for over fifteen years, but while he was alive he did not contribute towards caring for his family. This was why she seemed to attach more importance to the *bhrasht* from the community over the loss of the earning male member. While many women described loss of the spouse as the key life-changing event, Latha recalls her abandonment by her community as the most painful. None of the women earlier had been deprived of the social support system with their marriage or passing away of the spouse. Latha's case was different. The loss of social support even though she continued to live in the same locality made her an 'orphan,' she felt abandoned. Even though she continued to live in the same locality after her marriage, the excommunication from the community and the withdrawal of all support systems was the life-changing event for her.

This seemed to be also why she placed importance on the way she built her life from scratch. To have come out of a life in 'dirt' was her victory, as she proudly showed me the rebuilt house with its newly plastered and painted walls. The house, built on a small plot which she did not have the title deed to, was quite literally her sweat and blood, and symbolically, her triumph over all the adversities that life dealt her.

While class mobility would have alleviated her suffering due to excommunication (as it did in the case of the Brahmin woman mentioned earlier who married an Ezhava man), the lack of any economic resources while the social support mechanisms were snatched away made Latha's life a fight against odds. It did not help that she had an unsupportive husband. Some money for rebuilding her house was obtained from the government, both from the gramapanchayat, and the block panchayat through schemes for SC communities (mentioned in the earlier chapter). She is aware that she was able to secure this money only because of her loyalty, not to a particular political party, but to President Balan. She says that she would go for any rally and demonstration that Balan asked her to. This showed a continuing power relations of domination and obligation

where those who displayed loyalty would be rewarded. This is not to say Latha did not resist; indeed, Latha's whole life was a story of resistance and survival.

A situation very similar to what happened with Latha over two decades ago repeated itself more recently, a mere six months before fieldwork. I detail below the experience of this couple Radha and Sajith.

Radha and Sajith

Sajith's mother was one of the women I planned on interviewing – she was a widow from the Paraya community whose husband had committed suicide because of debt. When I went to see her, I found that it was a make-shift home of tarpaulin and tin roof and walls made of woven coconut fronds. No one was home. My field assistant and I were about to return when we saw a big rat snake slither into the house. Common in Kerala, rat snakes are non-venomous. However, we alerted the neighbours and told them to warn the family about the snake inside their home. We visited the house the next day. While Sajith's mother was not home, I met Sajith (24) and his wife Radha (19). The neighbours had told them about us seeing the snake, and they were wondering who we were anyway.

We had an informal chat and the couple enjoyed talking to us. Although he should have gone to work, Sajith had taken a day off. He was a welder, and working without protective glasses, his eyes were inflamed and watery. Radha, who otherwise might have been working alongside her mother-in-law in their ongoing house construction (which was why they were living in a makeshift house) was also home, doing some household chores and giving Sajith company. Their old dilapidated house was being rebuilt with government funds for SCs, and the family could not afford to rent out a place. This was why they had chosen to build a makeshift house next to their old house, on the land of another neighbour, a widow who did not object to the family living on her property.

Radha and Sajith had eloped to get married. Radha explained their situation:

Both of us are Hindus but from different castes. My family filed a case against us staying together. We both belong to SC communities. I am from the Mannan caste¹²⁵, while he is

¹²⁵ Mannan is a caste of washer-men, and is a scheduled caste. Mannan however, is slightly higher than Paraya in the caste hierarchy.

from the Paraya caste. We married in a temple. My parents did not attend the function, but my uncles did. My family had promised that they will not file a case against us getting married, but in the end, they actually went ahead and filed a case; the charge was that he kidnapped me. We were called to the police station and we sorted out the issue because I said that I had consented to go with him.

They have not accepted our marriage. So I do not go to my home anymore. I do not think they will let me in even if I go there. My father is okay; my mother is the one who has the problem.

What was the mother's objection, I ask.

She has a problem with his (Sajith's) caste. We have been in love with each other for the last eight years. My mother said that we should wait for another three more years. I have a younger sister. Mother felt that my marriage to a lower-caste man would ruin her chances of a good alliance. So she wants to marry off my sister first, and then arrange our wedding. And she did not even say this before our wedding. She said this after we got married.

Sajith interjects,

What is this nonsense about the younger sister marrying? She is only fourteen now! How do we know when she is going to marry?

Radha continues,

All these years, I did not buy a mobile phone. I did not want to get beaten up for buying one.¹²⁶ I bought one finally and that very month, I had to leave home. I called him and asked him to come and pick me up from home."

Sajith: It was very early in the morning, about 4:00 a.m., when Radha called me. She said, "I am coming with you. Please pick me up from home." I asked her only one thing, "Should I walk to your home, or on my motorbike?" She said, "Bring your bike." I knew then and there that the situation had turned bad at her place,¹²⁷ and we had to take a decision and

¹²⁶ A mobile phone in the hands of women – young or old – is seen as a corrupting influence. In the previous chapter, I have shown that 'women led astray by mobile phones' are finds mentioned in public spaces.

¹²⁷ That, is a bike is needed for a quick exit.

act. It was raining heavily then. It was a real scene. I called some of my friends before I went to her home... Anyway, the long and short of it is that we got married quickly before we planned it.

It is all too common to find delaying tactics by parents before they turn to expressing their disapproval in harsher, often violent ways. In this case, bringing up the younger sister's future was one such tactic which was meant to manipulate Radha emotionally. Radha's family had made more economic stability than Sajith's – her mother worked in a medical laboratory, and her father, a daily wage labourer. Sajith, on the other hand, had to support his widowed mother and sixteen-year-old younger brother. However, there were no vast differences in their social situations and many would not see it as a mismatch.

As the youngsters were determined to marry, there was little use in complaining to the police. This is where it appears that the complaint and severing of ties with Radha was less for claiming their daughter back, and more for reclaiming family honour. Filing the case, and refusing to attend the wedding (even as her uncles attended it) certainly involved the hurt that the daughter disobeyed them, but also had an element of performance of appropriate actions since the caste and gender norms had been breached. Indeed, not filing a case when your daughter elopes makes you complicit in the elopement, shows that you have failed in your parental duties, and shows that you have little honour to safeguard. These performances were part of maintaining the caste-gender codes that define honour in a stratified society.

Under these circumstances, elopement was the only course of action open to Sajith and Radha too. Unsurprisingly, the mobile phone device played the villain, the discovery of which subjected Radha to questioning and heated emotional arguments. This expedited the predictable course of events, which even otherwise, would have played out in much the same manner. Presently, Radha finds herself isolated from her family, as her mother has explicitly instructed her father not to assist them. Poverty amplified this withdrawal of social support, as it happened in the case of Latha.

That there is no gross mismatch between Radha and Sajith is evident in Sajith's words. He adds,

All my friends know about me and Radha. In fact, all the people in this panchayat know about our 'affair'. So they used to watch out for her, and if they saw her somewhere, they would let me know where, so that I could go meet her. People know me. I am active with the 'party'. None of them will say that I have behaved badly, in an irresponsible way, or will disapprove

*of our relationship. So they supported me for the wedding. Not one person in this area will say we did something wrong. No one, except her mother. When she heard that waiting for Radha's younger daughter was the condition to allow our marriage, my mother remarked when she heard this, 'You should not have to wait for tooth to grow out of your nose to get married.'*¹²⁸

Sajith's confidence to face the opposition from Radha's parents clearly arose from the support he enjoyed locally. When he mentions the 'party', he refers to the left party. The support of the 'party' in such matters can be critical, as it is known to draw a strict line of approval (or disapproval) with regards to such 'moral' matters (including upholding caste, religious, and gender norms). Therefore, by telling me that the 'party' supported him, he is adding extra credence to the fact that there was no inappropriateness in their match, that their relationship 'crossed no limits'. It has to be noted that Sajith earlier mentions calling his friends for help before going to Radha's house to pick her up after things boiled over. Clearly, his family support was not adequate in this scenario, commanding little power as they did. The reality of crossing caste borders, even the least complicated ones where the castes are not too far apart in the hierarchy prove a formidable challenge, and only those with adequate support, like Sajith, for whom active political life gave many friends, find it possible to cross these barriers.

While political involvement gave Sajith the strength to accomplish the challenge of crossing caste boundaries, this was not the case with Mahesh whose situation I will consider next.

7.1.3.2. Scheduled Caste Men

The experiences of one man from the SC community Sajith, has already been narrated. Below, I will write about Mahesh who has already been introduced in previous chapters.

Mahesh

Mahesh (28), a permanent government employee, the ex-SC promoter and an active member of the Congress party has been introduced in the previous chapter. Mahesh lives with his mother in the SC colony in Kunnumpuram. His parents are estranged and he puts the blame squarely on his father who, while he had a good job in a government office, was an alcoholic. He also had a younger brother who succumbed to blood cancer few some years back.

¹²⁸ This is a local saying. Tooth is supposed to grow out of someone's nose when they become very old!

As someone who wanted to break the bonds of caste, Mahesh was ambivalent about marriage itself. Torn between wanting to do the right thing in a caste-ordered society (that is, practice endogamy) so that his political future is not compromised, and wanting to escape the clutches of caste, he explains his dilemma.

I am not interested in a 'love marriage'. But I am not interested in an 'arranged marriage' either. For instance, suppose that I bring with me to my home, the daughter you (and here he builds a hypothetical scenario and addresses my field assistant) lovingly brought up till she was twenty or so. When I do that, you and your husband will have to bow your head in shame in front of the whole society. That is something I cannot imagine doing to someone's parents. A love marriage is okay if my partner's parents are okay with it. I do not want to give them a bad name. Also, I believe that all of us are equal human beings. There are a lot of people who do not think that way. There are people who inject venomous thoughts into the mind of even young children. I mean, things like community and religion. This is becoming a mental illness. There are people who would ask, "What is your caste?" to which I would reply, "I belong to the human caste. And of that, I am a member of the male category." That is a reply they do not like. This is the biggest problem when you say you are a Hindu. If you say you are a Christian, then they do not probe further. Same if you are a Muslim. But if you say you are a Hindu, the automatic question is, 'What is your caste?'

Also, when it comes to arranged marriage, there are so many unnecessary rituals involved. There is no doing away with it. It cannot be just about me and my beliefs. I have my mother, our community people, my mother's relatives. Also, my father's relatives. I have working relations with them even though I am estranged from my father. All these relatives will have their opinions. There are all these unnecessary rituals like 'bringing the bride home', 'taking her to her home', the exchange of sweets etc. Then people enquire about the amount of dowry, 'how much did she bring?', 'what did they give?', etc. I am not interested in any of these things.

Mahesh speaks like a politician. By posing the hypothetical question to my field assistant, he attempts to make the scenario personal. This is not surprising, given he spends much of his time with the politically powerful Congress party members, this seems to have made him a smooth talker. His government job was secured with the help of the political connection; the relationships with socially powerful, mainly Nair men, fostered through politics have made him aspire for a better quality of life. However, for all the seemingly radical anti-caste feelings that

he harbours, he seems to believe in the ‘shame’ of a ‘love’ marriage, notions which are firmly rooted in a casteist patriarchal structure that has endogamy as its cornerstone. From the conversation with him, it was clear that he wished to live free of his caste, and would shed it, were that possible. When he contemplates the scenario of a love marriage it is clear that he is talking of an inter-caste love marriage, where he is marrying an ‘upper’ caste woman, not one where he is falling in love with someone of his own community. This is why he worries that he will not be seen as an equal human being by the family of the bride. Also in addressing my field assistant, he has already hypothesized an inter-caste union, as she visibly wears signs of her upper caste status.

The first thing Mahesh wanted to do when he became financially stable was to move out of the ‘colony’. His ‘lower’ caste identity appears to be something he wants to get rid of, he struggles to deal with it. This is why he speaks of the particular burden being a Hindu creates, as against being a Christian or a Muslim while he talks of marriage. He says later that “the biggest problem in the colony is that there is no culture.” Here he understands culture in ways defined by the upper-caste discourses. Similar is his claim that he has a lot of friends, but all outside the colony. The reason he gives for this is that they are all alcoholics, and he does not like to associate with such people. In his reasoning, there is a strong desire to use the rationale available in public discourses to disown his community. If friendships from the colony as well as political affiliation was a source of strength that gave Sajith the confidence to break rules of endogamy, it is indeed his political association with people outside his caste that fills Mahesh with the desire to abandon his caste and also an endogamous marriage. The former connection seemed to have empowered Sajith, but in Mahesh’s case, it puts him into a quandary. This could indeed be due to the difference in the level of politics that both are engaged in: Sajith is a party worker at the lowest level, Mahesh has his eyes set higher.

It is clear that Mahesh does not take any feminist position against marriage or religion. He does not give any reason for disliking the rituals and customs associated with marriage apart from that it involves his relatives taking control of the functions. He does not claim any secular credentials for himself, nor does he denounce overt religiosity. Indeed, when I talked to him earlier over the phone, he was observing the forty-one-day ritual of purity in preparation of visiting the ‘Sabarimala’ temple (where women cannot enter). At this time, he refused to meet me or have any interactions with me, something that struck me as odd until it was brought to my attention that he would abstain from talking to young women as much as possible during this time. His

search, then, was for ways to escape his caste, and it is as part of this way that he identified religion as a problem. This dilemma faces only those who experience the brunt of caste acutely on their being.

Mahesh's experience was instructive in illustrating how there were no easy option available to shed caste, or to break endogamy. Breaking endogamy, in all instances I have shown involve facing social boycott in one form or the other, from one side of the family or other. The few who do manage to cross endogamous barriers with approval of families seem to have equivalent caste status or educational achievements.

The excerpts – both with Sajith and Radha, and with Latha demonstrate the pervasiveness of caste over class as a determinant of identity and subjectivity, clearly illustrating the failure of similar class or occupation status to be an equalizer. Both Latha and Radha's marriages were hypogamous. Hence, even though they are separated by three decades, their experience is similar: of excommunication from their community, particularly their family. It is also similar to the experience of the Brahmin woman who married the OBC man. The only bridge (when men and women were of different castes) as all previous examples have shown, is when the marriages are endogamous even though across religions, (or hypergamous) as in the case of Vinayan's brother.). Even in the case of Mahesh, it is his hypogamous aspiration – that leaves him disappointed and frustrated.

Within SC community members, higher education and jobs commensurate with it are not very common. Most individuals I spoke to were involved in wage labour with low pay. It was rare to find individuals like Mahesh who held regular salaried jobs. While the individuals had moved away from traditional occupations – for instance as farm hands, or basket weaving – the nature of their jobs remained the same. These were skills that did not take regular schooling, involving intensive manual labour, and with no other future prospects like promotion.

In the next section, I will write about Christians, the minority community in Perur

7.1.4. Minority Christian Community in Perur: Men and Women

In Perur, the minority communities include Christians and one Muslim family. The list of households made available to me by a ward functionary showed that all Christians in the area

were categorised as forward caste.¹²⁹ Therefore, I will stick to the governmental classification, while also trying to show the differences within the Christian community even within Perur.

7.1.4.1. Women from Christian Community in Perur

In the previous chapters, public roles of two Christian women – Leena and Sherly has been discussed. In this chapter, I will give some details of her personal circumstances. I will also talk about another woman, Sara from an upper class location.

Sara

One of the first interviews I had was with a woman from an upper class Christian family. The female head of the household, Sara, 35 years old, was at home in the forenoon when I visited. The husband was away managing their farm and other business and her two boys were at school.

Sara was very busy – she had a lot of work to do, not just doing household chores, but also making wedding bouquets for a business that her sister ran. Additionally, the husband’s family owned a large amount of land inherited over generations and there were poultry and the land that needed her attention. While Sara’s was presently a nuclear family comprising herself, her husband and their two children, that was not always the case. Until recently, they lived in a joint family system with her parents-in-law, who continue to live not too far away. In fact, their relatives live in houses next to each other. Sara explained the decision to move to a new house,

“I had a hard time adjusting to this place. I grew up near the town, and my family was more forward-thinking. The first few years of marriage was very hard. This is, in contrast, a silent place where we have to work hard every day – there are the cattle and the poultry and the vegetable garden, and the coconut groves to take care of, and all the other household work that I have to do. When I got married, we lived with the in-laws and all those years, I have worked hard like no other person has. We have to get up very early in the morning to milk the cow. It’s not just me, but his (the husband’s) father and mother too who are working hard. When the old people are working so much, how can a young person like me

¹²⁹ This does not automatically mean all Christians are ‘upper’ or ‘forward caste’. Several factions of Christians exist in Kerala – including some who claim descent from Brahmins, and other ‘upper’ castes. Many of them do not prefer to intermarry. Members of SC communities who converted to Christianity continued to be discriminated, and the coastal community of Latin Catholics in Kerala are classified as OBC.

not do the hard work? The life of a Christian woman in these parts is hard. Other women are not so strictly controlled, but Christians are different. Their husbands do not like them going out. My husband does not even talk much at home. Also, if a woman as much as goes out to the nearest shop or boards a bus, people will enquire about it, not to her, but to her husband about where she had been going. Most families around me are our relatives. It was very suffocating for me, and I could not adjust with this kind of life, having grown up closer to the town. My house was at a locality bustling with people, vehicles, and activity in general. I somehow convinced my husband to build our own house and move out. I wanted to be able to breathe, and I could not do it there....”

Sara’s example clearly illustrated the challenge women face in conforming to expectations in a rural setting. The social control that she felt subjected to is suffocating for a woman like her, a feeling expressed by panchayat vice-president Shobha (in the previous chapter) when she talks of moving to Perur from the town she was born in. If Shobha faced gender and caste barriers, Sara’s relatively privileged position (her husband and their family was socially well-respected, and held high offices in local bodies and the church) makes her more perceptive to gender-based controls. Her move can also be seen as a strategic choice that many women – like Anita (Deepak and Anand’s mother) or Shanta (Meenu’s mother) demanded and exercised.

It seemed like she had a lot more to say when her fourteen-year old son came back from school. As soon as he came in, there was a perceptible difference in her replies. She said aloud, it appeared, to his benefit, so that he learnt the right lessons,

Now I have started to see the goodness of this life, even though there is much suffering too.... There is good unpolluted air away from the city, we grow the food we eat and that’s healthy, we do not depend on allopathy medicines as far as possible, choosing Ayurveda instead, we built a new home, and there is a lot of respect for our family in these parts. I see these as positive things and it’s okay to have this exchange for the ‘company’ I would have earlier liked to have ... So I try to pass on these good values to my children.”

Very soon, Sara’s husband too got home, after which Sara was impatient to have us leave. Her tone, demeanour, and comfort level changed visibly in his presence. The husband, on his part, like many others, was suspicious to find strangers, and was no less keen to have us leave.

I would like to juxtapose her experience with that of Leena who speaks of herself and family life.

Leena

Leena presented a cheerful positive outlook in our talks and meetings. However, talking to her as part of the interview revealed a different) side. She lived with her husband and two sons, twenty-three and twenty-five respectively. All the men were daily wage workers, but the younger son was also pursuing a diploma course. In addition to being a home-maker, and an ASHA, Kudumbashree and NREGA worker, she reared cows, goats, hens and a dog at home.

However, she seemed to regret many of her choices.

“I wish I had gone for a job instead of looking after cows and goats,” she says. “I would have been better off now. My husband did not want me to step outside home. He used to say that if I go out I will not have my head standing on my neck. So these days, I do not ask him permission. Instead, if I inform him later after doing something, he will be okay. When I told him that I want to go for the ASHA workers’ training, he questioned me. I intentionally garbled it all up, and said, ‘There is this training, have you not seen the people who come for chlorination and all? I am training for that kind of work.’ Then he retorts, ‘Come with me when I go for work, and you can get the work that will give you enough money’. Do you see what he meant? He says go for the ‘other’ job, and I can make money”.

There is no doubt that the husband is suggesting sex work. As she recounts the incident, her eyes are moist and her voice breaks. Indeed, within the cultural milieu where the husband-wife relationship has been elevated to the realm of the sacred, this is the ultimate shaming of the woman in a relationship, felt acutely because the husband is the one suggesting it. It degrades the value of women’s work, it questions her self-respect, and also has an exceptional disciplining role, all of which was felt by Leena. Despite this, Leena is shown to strategize to keep working. Garbling and muddling up thoughts was a way she had devised to avoid giving straightforward answers to her husband, one that I found her using very often in her public roles too.

She continues,

“He was like this from the beginning. It was like this at his home too. He would never talk to his family members. He would go for work, come back, read mangalam¹³⁰ magazine, go

¹³⁰ ‘Mangalam’ is a famous weekly, way before the hey days of the television and soaps, which had serialized novels, and used to be a big source of entertainment for mainly women readers, but also a lot

up to the top of the house and lie down. In the early days, I used to tell him, 'what is this, talk to everyone, and throw this mangalam away'. I was pregnant then. He would not even look at the kids when we had them. He would go at 6:30 in the morning and come back at 8:30 in the evening. My sons are also not attached to their father. There is no conversation or communication between them. Even though I desired for a girl child, I am glad we do not have a girl. What if this house was like this and we had a girl growing up here? Appachan¹³¹ will not give me two sons without a reason. We both love girl children. But we were not given girls. So I think Appachan knows exactly why."

While both these women – Sara and Leena – were devout Christians, unhappy in their family lives, lived very close to each other's homes, and attended the same church, they were only vaguely aware of each other's existence and had never talked to each other. The social gulf between them was vast enough for a circumstance that threw them together would not be impossible. It was unthinkable that Sara would confide in Leena about her unhappiness. (The differences between them, despite them going to the same church and identifying as Syrian Christians, seemed to be more than class: Sara belonged to a land-owning, traditionally wealthy family and Leena belonged to a family where all members were struggling in occupations with daily wages. This difference is perceived also as a status divide, not as a simple class difference. However, in the absence of a more in-depth research into the operation of caste among Christians in the region, I will not venture into categorically calling this caste.) The class difference and disparity in social positions of Saras and Leena situation were evident through their words. When Sara talks of married women who are controlled by neighbours and relatives who report their activities to the husband, she is talking of women like herself and excluding women like Leena who break strategically, these methods of social surveillance. For Sara, going out in public freely is taboo, one she is unwilling to break for fear of loss of domestic security and respectability whereas Leena breaks it coolly once she realizes that her husband is neither connected enough to find out about her public roles, nor able to control it in any way. The power wielded by Sara's husband in the locality made it more likely that the slightest transgression from her familial role will reach him and entail strong repercussions, whereas in Leena's case, the very lack of caste and class power at familial quarters allowed her to widen her area of work and build

of men. Together with another weekly called 'Manorama', it made a formidable combination of what was popularly and disparagingly called 'Ma-' weeklies.

¹³¹ She uses the word 'Appachan', a colloquial word for 'Father' but one that also brims with love and devotion, and when used as she does, interchangeably for God, reveals herself to be a firm believer of the Christian faith.

a rich social network that includes those in positions of power. However, this is not without a trade-off. For one, she bears a lot of burden, managing a very high work load. Second, she is given her role, precisely because the ward councillor knows that she cannot outgrow him, indeed has no resource to draw from, and poses no threat to his power. This is an interesting trade-off where both parties benefit: while Leena gets much more freedom, peace of mind, and a feeling of being a useful person, the President is able to have a loyal, honest, reliant and compliant woman to take charge of the Kudumbasree and health care work – two key areas of work. This has already been mentioned in the previous chapter. However, it is pertinent to contrast Leena's role vis-à-vis other women who are, in the social structure, more favourably placed than Leena.

Both these women feared speaking in front of their husbands, and Sara became visibly agitated when her son and husband joined us. Leena's situation was not very different from Sara's before she became active in the local programmes. As Leena put it, she was told that she would not find her head on her neck if she dared to step out. But despite this threat, women like Leena, or another Christian woman Reeja, or indeed Sherly whom I used to frequently meet had no problems navigating their domestic sphere along with their public activities. Sometimes, freedom is exercised with the approval of the families, and sometimes without, but they did it nevertheless and the social repercussions did not seem to trouble them much. However, these freedoms were asserted with much personal cost and suffering. The sheer effort – the physical labour and the intellectual effort –involved in juggling the family and the public space without complaints was beyond belief. Leena nevertheless seemed to welcome the possibility to move beyond the suffocating place that her home was, and to find a meaning for her existence. This is why she says that she wishes she had already followed her heart instead of tending to the cows and goats and hens. In fact, she admits that she doesn't care if she had to leave it all, and walk out. The biggest relief she finds in her public role, she says is that she gets to meet people and have conversations, something that she doesn't get to have at home. While Leena has found a way out, Sara seems to have reconciled with her situation, which is why she says that there is some goodness too in the kind of life they lead.

Having given a brief description of the situation of some Christian women, I now focus on the lives of some Christian men.

7.1.4.2. Men from the Christian Community in Perur

Here, I will talk about two men – a well-to-do man Daniel, and another man Paul who has a very tough life.

Daniel

Both Daniel, and his wife Fiji were at home when I met them. The conversation started off with Fiji (35) who was a home-maker. The couple has been married for fifteen years, when she was in the final year of her Bachelors in economics. She added that she wasn't interested in further studies and liked being a home-maker. The husband, Daniel, was also an educated man. He did his post-graduation and ran a tuition class in Mathematics for students in the locality. They had three children – two girls in ninth and eighth standard respectively and a son in first standard. Very soon, Daniel heard us talking and came to the living room. He insisted on being a part of the conversation, even though his wife was enjoying talking to us and vice-versa. This immediately silenced the wife, and even though she continued to listen to what was asked and said, the interview turned out to be one with him rather than with his wife. The conversation turned more formal with Daniel's presence. This was partly due to the fact that I was a young woman asking these questions, as I had noticed at Vinayan's place too.

This domestic power-relation was similar to the power-relation and performance of gender roles that we observed in many other households too (for instance, Sara above, or Vinayan, or Madhavan, or Lakshmi, and many others, except the young couple Radha and Sajith). Economically well-off, the family owns substantial land assets in the locality, and much like Sara's husband, commands leadership in church activities.

Daniel was keen to show himself as a good Christian. He says,

“Our most important decision was that we decided to spend time and money for the poor. This was a personal decision that we arrived at through prayer. So I decided to be active with the Vincent de Paul society that provides charity to the poor. We donate regularly to charity. I am on the director board and we select beneficiaries for financial assistance – for education, for building house etc. We have to be sensitive to our fellow humans.”

Daniel was speaking on behalf of his wife too that the decision to be involved in charity was the most important one in their lives. While this might be true for him personally, I was told by

another neighbour in the locality that all his claims of generosity were not true. In fact, his uncle's widow who lived next door was in grinding poverty. When I met this lady, I realized that she was a lower caste woman from another district, which was why the husband's family had thoroughly ignored her and did not want to keep any social relations with her and her adult daughters. It is here that breaking endogamy, particularly by marrying a 'lower' caste person surfaced as a problem among Christians. In the case of Vinayan's brother discussed earlier, apparently the lack of mismatch in caste-class position was what enabled an 'arranged' marriage approved by both families. Additionally, it would appear that even charity was directed to those who conformed to the social roles expected from their caste, class and gender position.

Paul

The last person who will be considered in this chapter is Paul (44). He was a pappadom-maker by occupation.¹³² I met him near an area where there are a couple of other Christian families engaged in the same occupation – pappadom-making. He led a semi-nomadic life, going around to various areas to sell pappadom, and returning home only after a few days. So it was not easy to find him very often in Perur. He was building a new house, which he said was the first time that he was going to have a permanent roof over his head. His family – wife and daughters stayed there even though the house was only a structure of bricks and concrete, and the plumbing, wiring, plastering, and tile works had yet to be done. Whatever work had been done, he told us, was with the assistance of the government schemes. He says,

I have settled in this place only after my marriage. We have been doing this job of making and selling pappadoms for generations now, for over a hundred years. My parents said that my grandfather was from Sri Lanka. We've had a nomadic life, we keep roaming around, making and selling pappadoms. So we never settled down anywhere. For a short while during my childhood, my father ran a hotel, and that was the only time we stayed somewhere for some period of time. I was the youngest of eight siblings. My father owned no property. So you can imagine that nothing was handed down to us. My wife's family is here, hardly a mile away. So she can go there very often and there is a sense of belongingness family. That's why I decided to settle down here.

¹³² A person who makes Pappadoms, a fried food item made of rice dough that is eaten with meals.

Paul is one of those people who possesses skills to do the traditional occupation passed down generations. There are other Pappadom-makers in the area, but they seem to have been able to establish a regular supply with shop-owners who sell these. In Paul's case, that does not seem to be the case and he sells pappadoms on his own. Conversation with him reveals that he finds it difficult to even make the transition from a nomadic life to a settled life because he has absolutely no resources to fall back on. Having been educated only till the fourth standard, there are not many other jobs that he can do other than manual jobs. His wife also works as a daily wage labourer.

Their abject situation, lacking even the resources to settle down in one place, and to have a sense of belonging anywhere is reflected in his words. This is why Paul explains his decision to settle down in his wife's locality. Although this is unusual as most often (except in matrilineal families), since married women move to the places where the husbands live (which is the case with all Christian families mentioned earlier), it is certainly a more practical decision for Paul. There was no family that his decision would bring shame on. Indeed, honour and shame – whether it is in marriage, or in following social codes, applied to those interested in continuance of hierarchical power. Paul's situation was in marked contrast to that of Daniel, or Sara's husband.

The description of the situation of men and women from the Christian community in Perur show vast differences. This is likely due to the working of caste within this community at the local level. Most of the poor Christians, like the Hindu SC and OBC community members are involved in occupations that hold no future prospects. Only a handful of landowning families are able to afford education and see it as a necessary accomplishment. While some Christians were active in the public sphere through their roles in various associations, most others like Paul or Leena did not assert or claim their rights as citizens. Most of their struggles were invested in overcoming their own situation of abject deprivation.

In the following section, I will collate some of the key ideas that emerge from this chapter.

7.2. Discussion

One of the things the previous section illustrates is the nature of the patriarchal society within which women – of all communities – make negotiations. Both caste, class and gender work together to produce outcomes that are context-specific, but nevertheless predictable.

I have shown how in material terms, caste capital (and the accompanying economic capital that it guarantees) transmits across generations and results in significantly improved conditions even when there are no alternate sources of income. This is evident in the case of the upper caste families. Critically, it aids in accumulating capital in the form of education even when an intervening generation did not have gainful employment. On the contrary, with SC and OBC communities, economic mobility was generally not sustainable. Educational achievements were the only resource which had inter-generational effect. Charles Tilly (1998) has proposed a framework of 'durable inequalities' to understand inequalities that last from one social interaction to the next, and persist over whole careers, lifetimes, and organizational histories. These correspond to categorical inequalities such as black/white, male/female, citizen/foreigner etc. (Even so, he acknowledges that available explanations are not sufficient to understand the interaction among various forms of categorical inequality). Mosse (2010) argues for such an approach to poverty in India that is relational, that views poverty as a result of historically developed economic and political relations. This approach might offer an entry point into understanding the outcomes in a hierarchically ordered caste society.

Caste capital appears to be critical in enabling women to assert themselves and access legal services – indeed, only 'forward' caste members seem able to access courts, or reject their partners. None of the women in abusive relationships – whether from SC or OBC communities seemed to be able to walk out of their marriages – lack of their own resources to stay independently, or support from the family also are critical factors. Connell says that it could be that 'the lack of alternate housing is one of the reasons women may stay in, or return to, a violent marriage' (RW Connell, 1987:11). While this seems true, lack of alternate housing is directly related to lack of economic mobility caste capital.

State interventions - Kudumbashree groups or Jagrata Samitis or any other state programs (like the employment guarantee schemes) - were not geared, even in minimal ways, to address the questions of providing security or means of income that could provide independence to women who experienced domestic violence. The excerpts show that domestic violence was pervasive in all communities, and patriarchal controls are exerted in one way or the other – women withdrawing from public spaces, or men silencing, them, as well as gendered distribution of household chores – were gender norms that operated in almost all households. However, the public discourses, as I have shown in the previous chapter, did not acknowledge the experience of women and men at various intersections.. s

Caste rules, particularly endogamy continues to be the key principle that operates in the society. The idea of endogamy seems to have been expanded to accommodate transgressions across community differences, particularly hypergamy. With social mobility, rare hypogamous marriages are also visible. However, hypogamous marriages with no social mobility for the partners are ones that are met with the most severe consequences – there are no support systems of the family, or community, or services that can be accessed with economic mobility.

It is relevant that concepts of honour and shame associated with occupations still linger. Upward class mobility does not make MGNREGS work dishonourable for a woman from OBC community, but even when they experience downward class movement, MGNREGS work is dishonourable for a Nair woman. Hence, the low representation of these communities in MGNREGS work. Thus, there are institutional arrangements that produce performance of gender within households and outside. These performances of caste and gender roles enables to explain the smooth access for upper caste men and women to public roles – be it Padma, or Lakshmi's grandmother, or Devan, or Balan. It also explains why none of these upper caste women continue in their positions of power even though the men do. Upper caste women like Geetha, Lakshmi or Beena are empowered to rebuild a life with or without their husbands whereas the same cannot be said of women from other 'lower' caste locations. 'Lower' caste women's labour is used up for community services – including keeping records, doing unpaid community-oriented jobs, organize meetings, etc., in ways that conform to their caste and gender identities. These women leaders can be cut to size, and assumed to take subservient roles like that of serving tea in public functions whereas upper caste women in public roles do not do such chores in public. They women know that reluctance to perform these subservient chores, or even aspiring for powerful posts can result in being cut down to size, as Sneha, Leena, or Shobha realizes. In the personal spaces too, women – whatever caste they belong to – learn to maintain silence, or speak up only when it is their turn. Actions to the contrary were seen only in matrilineal households.

Also this chapter shows that there is no fixed set of roles that can be called masculine and another that can be called feminine. The images of the male breadwinner against the female home-maker, as Moser (1989) has already argued, does not hold up to scrutiny in these examples, as I have argued in chapter 4 too. There are women in upper caste families who take control of resources,

and docile women who perform these roles. There are also women in OBC families who strategize for their own and their children's good – often refusing to toe the line like Meenu's mother Shanta or Deepak's mother Anitha. Women and men in upper caste families shun manual labour, but those in lower caste families do not see these as beneath them – class mobility does not seem to affect this. If Shanta saw honour and dignity as being the same for all women, Padma viewed becoming a *panikkari pennu* as a loss of honour. That is, in a caste-ordered society, performances – in public or private- take the form of caste-gender roles. While these are not clearly-set and well defined performances that remain static over time, they are understood by the actors, are context-specific ones that adapt to the changing circumstances and do not challenge the social relations of domination and oppression.

7.3. Conclusion

The key ideas explored in this chapter were whether achievements of Kerala led to dissolution of caste barriers and enabled social mobility for individuals from marginalized groups, and whether the achievements had led to breakdown of endogamous caste rules and movement towards a casteless society. From the sections above the following findings emerge:

- b) Caste inequalities continue to operate through the differential access to educational and occupational opportunities, hence restricting social and spatial mobility.
- c) Class mobility, if any, does not automatically lead to equality – as this is not immediately translated into resources that are passed down through generations. Educational mobility seems key to maintaining class mobility. Caste inequality is a durable inequality that is hard to surmount. Those at the top of the caste hierarchy on the other hand, lead comfortable lives even without significant educational or career achievements.
- d) There is very less constructive role played by state-supported agencies in off-setting gender based disadvantages, remaining as they do, mired in discourses legitimised in public spaces and literature. Efforts of lower caste people for honour and dignity are not matched by attempts by the state to actualise their citizenship rights.
- e) There is no uniform definition of femininity or masculinity. For instance, lower caste women's assertions of dignity and honour seem different from the honour articulated by upper caste women. Therefore, what can be identified are caste and gender roles that are prescribed within the caste-gender order, which allow perpetuation of caste through.
- f) Endogamy, and as a result, caste, is not static, but is reconfiguring itself, in response to social changes. Therefore, while marriages across religions, even if they were dominant

castes, would have been unthinkable, there is a growing acceptability for inter-religious marriages among individuals of comparable social status. On the other hand, even with class mobility, hypogamy continues to be unacceptable.

In the end, what these life stories of individuals across social locations show is that experiences of people across intersections are vastly diverse, beyond the capture of a homogenised understanding of either class, caste, or gender. However, structural inequalities offer a way to help understand the context-specific nature of people's experiences. In the previous chapter, I showed how people's interactions with the state is shaped by their social location. In this chapter, I continue to answer the second central research question and show that despite equal access to state provisions like education, it cannot be accessed equally by all – and issues of access have a bearing on caste and gender positions. The social changes in Kerala, by not significantly reconfiguring endogamous rules, did not provide the social environment to create more egalitarian society where social citizenship rights could be exercised by all equally.

Here, it is helpful to clarify what kind of egalitarianism was pursued by the marginalized in their engagements with the state, so that it can be compared with their personal experiences. In his book *Nationalism without a Nation*, Aloysius sums up the expectations that framed the struggles of the marginalized with the state (colonial and post-colonial):

The political awakening of the lower caste groups of the Indian subcontinent under the colonial rules was premised by an implicit (often also made explicit in the sayings and writings of the prominent leaders) vision of a new nation, of a new form of congruence between culture and power, and a new way of relating the self with the other. This vision itself was deconstructed above, into three component parts, actualization of the concept of citizenship, mass literacy as the basis of new civic life, and social and spatial mobility as a new principle of social life. This three-pronged struggle, the aspirants hoped, would lead to transformed interpersonal relationships suffused with fellow-feeling and grounded in egalitarianism, a relations engendering a commonality of purpose in public life as the core of the nation (Aloysius 1997, 83).

As this chapter shows, the three component parts of the vision that the marginalized nurtured - actualisation of citizenship, a new civic life stemming from mass literacy, and social and spatial mobility – all remain far-fetched aspirations.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The central question this thesis asked was what the processes were through which citizenship is differentially experienced by people at different social locations. To answer this, I examined how social inequalities shape state functioning, and how people experience the state differentially depending on their social location. I chose to study this in one ward of a local council in the South Indian state of Kerala. As a state that has its remarkable development trajectory attributed to radical leftist political action and reforms, this choice enabled me to explore how class-based politics addresses structural inequalities in the Indian society. To that effect, this thesis also shows the limits of class-based political action, especially in situations where class is not the primary axis along which inequality is experienced.

8.1. Findings

Some key findings emerge from the previous chapters.

Examination of development pursued in the ward showed that caste is manifest in the geography of the ward. Segregated spaces called ‘colonies’ are ways through which the marginalized who were often displaced for development projects, were included into the Kerala story of reforms. This ‘subordinated inclusion’ is not just spatial but also infrastructural, as Chapter 4 illustrated. This inclusion offered limited opportunities to surmount caste, class or gender locations and indeed, were contingent upon the inhabitants of these spaces performing their caste and gender roles. This continues, even in spite of participatory spaces created through democratic decentralization. These invited spaces do not offer opportunities to ‘participate’ meaningfully in democratic planning, mired as they are in local power relations. While these spaces created through democratic decentralisation met their procedural requirements, they had no relevance for the practice of citizenship. In this chapter, I also flag how these spaces misrepresent facts to create an anti-reservation sentiment that run contrary to the spirit of the Indian constitution, and the citizenship rights of the marginalized. I argue that by reducing welfare to charity, and portraying those who avail it as undeserving, what is at stake is social citizenship rights. That is, differentiated citizenship rights, even when they are not being used by those entitled to it, is invoked to deny social citizenship rights to its intended recipients.

In chapter 5, through examining discourses in state-sponsored public spaces, I have shown that caste and gender-related discourses in the panchayat are fashioned from the experiences and world views of upper caste individuals. Several strategies, including marking public spaces with

memories of upper caste individuals, idealizing upper caste norms, criminalizing lower caste spaces and men and invisibilizing lower caste women while insisting on their participation, work in tandem to create these discourses. As a result, spaces to empower women offer a cocktail of moral discourses fashioned from experiences of upper caste women and perceptions of upper caste men. The narratives legitimised in these spaces conflate caste with the official government categorization of Scheduled Castes (SC), and welfare schemes with ‘reservation’. These dangerous discourses find reflection in academic understandings of caste-gender intersection too – through ideas of hyper-masculinized Dalit men and Dalit women who are victims of Dalit patriarchy. In that sense, there is a caste-gender order to the public space. Raewyn Connell speaks of a gender order; in the Indian context, this assumes the nature of a caste-gender order. Framed by hegemonic upper caste patriarchal values, it creates the cultural discourse that sets the discursive limits within which gender roles are performed. Along with these public discourses, hidden transcripts also exist, and often surface spontaneously through counter-publics that hold the state to account. What this chapter clearly shows is that structural social inequalities find expression not only in material living conditions, but are also in the public discourses. That they go uncontested reveal the powerlessness of the communities against whom these discourses are deployed. This once again points to the lack of realization of social citizenship rights, an inability to participate in the public discourses as equal citizens bearing rights.

In chapter 6, I reinforce the findings of previous chapters. By presenting the narratives of local functionaries of the state, I am able to show how there is a seamlessness between personal and political spaces for upper caste men. For others, there are varying levels of difficulties and different terms of inclusion. The Dalit-Bahujan woman can hope to aspire for inclusion only as docile, subordinate subjects. On the other hand, their unpaid, unrecognized labour is utilised for state functioning. That is, in India, community roles attain specificity as roles of lower caste women. This reinforces the suggestion that caste-gender roles are performed in public spaces. I show how access to several elected posts are available only to the elite, or those favoured by the elite.. Despite universal guarantees of equal rights, and despite differentiated rights to access several welfare provisions, caste and gender operate in informal ways to offset the formal guarantees, and determine who can access which spaces in what capacity.

In Chapter 7, I shed light on how people experience the state differentially depending on their caste, gender, religious, and class identities. . Several experiences of men and women show that class mobility is not sustainable unless accompanied by accruing other forms of capital –

particularly education. Even ideas of dignity and honour are caste- and gender-coded. The promise that citizenship holds to the marginalized – an egalitarianism that accompanies modernity – has not been realized. Just as all spaces are not accessible to all as shown in the previous chapter, all provisions too cannot be accessed by all citizens despite entitlements through differentiated citizenship rights. Most lower caste members, while not engaged in traditional caste ordained occupations, are still in low-paying, manual labour intensive occupations. So occupational mobility has not been substantial. Endogamy too is maintained, and reconfigured: intercaste marriages, especially hypogamous ones are still not accepted, and invite stern sanctions. That is, the social changes in Kerala did not abolish caste, but these are changing the rules of endogamy, reconfiguring caste. This is not to be seen as radical, but as a natural adaptation of any system of power to continue.

8.2. Conclusions

These findings help in arriving at the following conclusions that have relevance for understanding the nature of the state in Kerala in particular, and in India too.

Firstly, the oft-made claims that Kerala's development has ushered it into a post-caste era does not stand up to scrutiny. The left critique of 'development,' while relevant, is not sufficient to understand the development processes and experiences in contexts where class alone is not the axis of inequality. Studying these processes in Kerala, where political activism – left-led as well as Congress-led – has percolated to the most local level, and the left-of-centre reforms that have been actively pursued illustrate that deep-rooted social structures have not been dislodged. Indeed, these have been accommodated within Kerala's development model, as evidenced through the previous chapters.

Secondly, the disempowering discourses advanced by the state in state-created participatory bodies have to be seen as an infringement of citizenship rights. As I have shown in chapter 2, the provision of affirmative actions is a mechanism to confer group-differentiated citizenship rights, taking cognisance of the structural nature of caste in India. In addition to the anxieties that have been expressed by dominant communities against these provisions, the state itself is seen to be advancing anti-reservation sentiments. Through these actions, through the discourses facilitated by the state, and through the seamless merging of personal and political spaces for upper caste men, it can be seen that the nature of the state is upper caste patriarchal.

Thirdly, even as the overarching nature of the state is structured by upper caste patriarchy, its specific nature is dependent on the local configuration of power: caste is local in its lived experience. The caste-gender order and the roles of men and women in this order offer a way to understand the nature of the state. In doing so, they also highlight the need for a reconsideration of formulations such as ‘Dalit Patriarchy’. If patriarchy within castes is understood as rising from institutionalised endogamy, and if it is contingent on the desire to protect property and perpetuate the hegemony of the upper castes, then there existed no material conditions for Dalit patriarchy to emerge: neither power, nor land or any other property. Untouchable slave communities, until the implementation of the abolition of slavery, were denied a full family experience too. In addition, terms like ‘Dalit patriarchy’, by making Dalit communities monolithic, preclude an understanding of caste as a structure of graded inequality, even within Dalit communities. As the state assumes the character of the local caste relations, it tends to interact with people differently depending on their caste and gender. Expectations of heterosexual conformity is ingrained within these caste-gender roles. The total absence of individuals who openly embrace any other sexual or gender identity in the field site is a testament to the heterosexual norms ingrained within the upper caste patriarchal caste-gender order.

Local caste is manifest in the functioning of the local state, and people’s experiences continue to be defined by their social location. However, caste is not static: it is being reconfigured through modifications in the rules of endogamy.

That such a situation might arise where the social component of citizenship rights might be pushed back by structural inequalities in India was something that Indians were alerted to as the Constitution of India came into effect. On the 25th of November, 1949, Dr B R Ambedkar, in his last constituent assembly address (before the adoption of the Indian Constitution on 26th November 1949) said:

“On the 26th of January 1950¹³³, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life?

¹³³ 26th January 1950 is when the Constitution came into force, what is celebrated as Republic Day in India.

If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up.”¹³⁴

From this study, it would appear that these words of caution were not misplaced. Indeed, social citizenship rights, as Marshall points out, is the pinnacle of citizenship gains. As I pointed out at the beginning of this thesis, citizenship is essentially a modern concept. The existence of the citizen “presupposes a certain decline in the dominance of hierarchical social structures and the emergence of egalitarian horizontal relationships between persons defined in universalistic terms... Citizenship is also bound up with ‘formal rational law which is different to the ascriptive character of legal subjects’” (Turner 2014, 17–18).

In India too, the demand for equal citizenship – and thereby, to homogenize power and accessibility to power structures – was the foundation of all civil rights movements of the lower castes in India, argues Aloysius (1997, 151). This study shows that despite constitutional equality, ascriptive identities still determine, to a large extent, not just social interactions, but also the nature of the state, its interactions with people, and the experiences of people themselves. Indeed, what is troubling, as Aloysius alerted, is the ‘underlying contradiction between the formal and the substantial in post-colonial India’ (1997, 228).

The findings in this thesis are supported by previous research. Guru (2005), in exploring how the liberal spirit of constitutional provisions has been translated into a sense of citizenship for Dalits, outlines a situation where Dalits, while being guaranteed equal citizenship status in the Indian Constitution, were denied the same in civil society, a situation he defines as ‘citizenship in exile’. Much more recently, Waghmore (2013) writes that while the possibilities of citizenship for ‘untouchables’ were non-existent in pre-colonial India, ‘Dalit citizenship claims in colonial and postcolonial times point to the challenge of making civility possible in India’ (Waghmore 2013, 203). He adds that even though the Indian Constitution recognized the violent and exclusionary nature of caste, “neither the state, nor non-caste collectives have been the locus of transforming caste and instilling civility amongst caste-privileged citizens” (ibid, 201). What is

¹³⁴ Constituent Assembly Debates of India, Volume IX, available at <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/debates/vol11p11.htm>

surprising however, is the way communist mobilisations too acted like a non-caste collective and did not challenge the working of caste.

In the end, what is evident is that social citizenship rights are a long distance from being realized, even in a state like Kerala in India where radical changes are supposed to have taken place, where Human Development Index is the highest. It would appear that political and civil rights are easier to realize than social rights. Differentiated citizenship rights are meant to help the excluded populations attain the universal citizenship guarantees available to the rest of the population. However, these very provisions are used as an argument against social citizenship rights of the excluded people, by conflating all caste-specific welfare measures to ‘reservations’ and then casting reservations as taking away opportunities of the deserving meritorious. If Fraser and Gordon (1994) argued that in the United States, civil citizenship is pitted against social citizenship, in India, differentiated citizenship is pitted against social citizenship.

8.3. Contributions

I started out by laying out the various conceptual understandings of citizenship in chapter 1 and using the Marshallian notion of political, civil and social rights as the three core components of citizenship. My focus was on the realization of the most difficult of them all, social rights. This study raises some critical questions about the way citizenship experience should be viewed. Arguably, in the globalised era that we live in, competing conceptualisations of citizenship, for instance, of cosmopolitan citizenship, cultural citizenship, or transnational citizenship vie for attention. However, for talking about rights in nations that emerged recently, for instance, countries like India which have been freed from colonization, and where citizens’ rights are still contested territory, the Marshallian ideas of citizenship which posits social citizenship rights as an indispensable component is imperative. In that sense, this study is an examination of the empirical realities in a modern nation-state against the touchstone of Marshallian citizenship ideals, particularly social citizenship. Through the finding that social citizenship rights are not realized, I hope I have roused the curiosity of other researchers and political theorists – under what political/democratic conditions can social citizenship rights be realized for the excluded? This question is relevant not only in India, but in any context where people experience structural inequality – and not just of caste.

Those working in India probably realize the gravity of this question: millions of people – several SC, ST, OBC and other minority communities are excluded from the framework of the nation-

state in the country. What are the possibilities that they have for experiencing full citizenship rights?

The debates around differentiated citizenship rights have not always been related to social citizenship rights. Through this thesis, I have shown that achievements in one can lead to achievements in another. On the other hand, thwarting one can lead to thwarting the other too, as it is happening in the field site. In that sense, this thesis offers a way to conceptualize differentiated citizenship rights - not necessarily in the way that it addresses cultural difference, but in the more substantive way of addressing structural inequalities – as directly contributing to realization of social citizenship rights.

That this examination is set in India, and particularly Kerala, only makes it more relevant for not just political theorists but also for development practitioners. If development in Kerala is indeed a pointer for equitable, redistributive development (Mannathukkaren, 2011), then by implication, we should have seen some movement towards recognizing the importance of differentiated citizenship rights, and a thrust on expanding the social citizenship rights. The findings in this thesis show that the pursuit of social equality has been compromised because of the elephant in the room: caste. Caste-based inequalities, left unaddressed by the class-based mobilisations have a significant role in the operation of the state, and the enjoyment of citizenship rights. . Therefore, this study highlights a need to reconsider what development, democracy, and indeed citizenship means for not just the 33 million people in Kerala, but also for the over 1.2 billion people in India. Since this study shows that left-led reforms themselves entrenched social inequalities, it is hoped that this study will lead to discussions about whether left-led mobilisations and policies could alone be the ‘alternative’ to mainstream development models.

Another important contribution is to the theoretical examination of caste and gender in India – this thesis argues for a break from current mainstream theorizations of caste-gender intersections in India which is often understood as enquiry into the condition of the Dalit communities, particularly Dalit women. This work points to a need to understand caste as graded inequality, and gender subordination, intrinsic to its perpetuation. Only by arriving at a more nuanced account of caste-gender relations in India, is it possible to counter simplistic narratives that address the marginalized sections, whether it is through ahistoric ideas such as Dalit patriarchy.

(where Dalit is used as an equivalent for SC by most writers) exist gradations¹³⁵, as examples in the previous chapter show.

This thesis also has two important methodological contributions. First, it is an attempt to work towards a methodology for empirical studies at the intersections that accounts for intra-categorical complexity, something that has not been given serious attention to. It offers a starting point to consider how to account for categorical complexities, where there are more than hierarchical binaries. Caste is graded inequality, and it requires moving beyond a binary understanding of Dalit and Upper Caste.

Second, as a researcher who undertook fieldwork that also led to several personal dilemmas, I asked in the methodology chapter: *How was a person from a marginalized community in a vertically stratified society supposed to do ethnography in the same community?* It is hoped that some of the dilemmas of being an ‘insider’ in the field site, and the crisis of positionality that I experienced will lead to further reflexivity, from myself as also from other researchers, and we can work towards building an epistemology that recognizes not just the elite but excluded people from all social locations as legitimate contributors to knowledge-building. In that sense, the reflection on methodology is a shout-out to the several women from non-elite backgrounds who do not belong either to the forward caste or the scheduled caste communities to position ourselves honestly, and work towards more liberatory epistemologies.

Some of the implications of this study for policy are obvious: it identifies the state drawing from unpaid/under-paid Dalit-Bahujan women’s labour for its daily working. While a more immediate response would be to increase payments for their work, the long-term response should be to ensure that government schemes that depend on women’s groups for their implementation account for all the hours of work, particularly secretarial and organizational work that they have to do. An urgent intervention also is called for to prevent state bodies from advancing anti-reservation sentiment that directly challenges constitutional provisions and citizen’s entitlements. On a long-term, as this clearly signals the nature of the state, legal safeguards as well as educational/awareness sessions for elected leaders might be advisable to ensure that spaces created through public money are not used to advance such anti-democratic rhetoric.

¹³⁵ In Chapter 10 of *Thoughts on Linguistic States*, Ambedkar (1955) writes: The caste system is marked not merely by inequality but is affected by the system of graded inequality. All castes are not on a par. They are one above the other. There is a kind of ascending scale of hatred and a descending scale of contempt.

This work also signals the limitations of accepted development goals – such as women’s participation in state programs, decentralization and people’s participation in democratic spaces, formation of women’s self-help groups and microfinance initiatives etc. While these programs are not failures, and do result in some positive changes, they do not challenge power in significant ways. More thought needs to be put in to address a democratic imperative: how do we ensure equal citizenship in practice for all citizens of a country?

However, the most critical implication of this study is to urge democratic-minded individuals to work towards protecting constitutional safeguards and marching towards a more egalitarian modernity.

8.4. Limitations

There are certain theoretical strands that this study does not address or develop. For instance, how do we reconcile Butler’s ideas on performativity with Connell’s idea of gender as relational, and the structural nature of caste-gender roles? Some amount of reflection has gone into theorizing about the caste-gender roles, and relating it to a structural understanding of caste, as well as the idea that gender is relational. While I argue that these roles are performed, I have stopped short of addressing the performative aspects of bodies. This, at the moment stems as much from a reluctance to talk about gendered bodies (even though Butler (1999, 173) herself clarifies that gendered bodies have no ontological status), as from the lack of theoretical clarity on the compatibility of hereditary caste and performed gender. The other strand of scholarship it does not engage with is the tussles between the Marxist and subaltern/postcolonial studies. Although, this thesis has often referred to works that fall within these strands of theorization, it does not critically engage with these important research areas. Researchers are now focusing on studies that build on the engagement between Marxism and Subaltern/Postcolonial studies (See Sinha and Varma, 2015). It is hoped that publications from this work, while engaging with this limitation in the future, will also be able to build on these theoretical strands.

Secondly, due to time constraints, this work is confined to the state at its most local-level working, and examines the discourses legitimised there. However, it does not examine the state works outside the local level, and how these discourses that are reproduced locally are constructed in the larger public sphere. Capturing these processes would have contributed tremendously in a more holistic understanding of citizenship experience.

One last limitation is that this work does not address some other divides in the Indian society – for instance, that of religion, and region. Arguably, rising communalism in India too demand attention, and examining how religious identities affect citizenship practice is an important area of research. The other limitation is that indigenous groups, and several other caste communities within Kerala are not represented in this study. While it is not possible to find a perfect field site with all communities proportionately represented, this highlights the need to have studies in various regions with different community compositions – not just within Kerala, but also within India.

8.5. Directions for future study

This study is a novel attempt to understand how people experience their citizenship. In that sense, it offers possibilities – both theoretically and methodologically – to work towards a new way of empirically approaching citizenship experience. It is possible that political activism in other parts of Kerala and India could lead to other kinds of citizenship experience. It would be interesting to see what outcomes these produce in the practice of citizenship.

It might also be interesting to compare the citizenship experience in Kerala to other Indian states that perform similarly, or vastly differently, on the Human Development Index. This might offer new ways of conceptualising development alternatives.

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8) Have you ever had to go to the following places? Why? If necessary, do you prefer to go there, and why/why not?

	Have / have not gone	Reason for visit	Would/ would not prefer to go	Why/ Why not?
1. Police station 2. Court 3. Grama Sabha 4. Panchayat office				

9) Membership of organisations

- a. Self-help groups
- b. Caste/religion-based organisations
- c. Political organisations

10) Have you ever made any life-changing decisions? If so, what are they?

- a. Did you take that decision independently?
- b. In doing so, did you have to rebel against social customs?

11) Have you ever wished for a social order different from the one you are presently living in? Please elaborate. What would your role be in that alternate social order?

12) Your most preferred economic model? A society in which

- a. people were free to earn as much as they were able to
- b. people were free to earn as much as they were able to, but with an upper limit to earnings
- c. people were free to earn to the extent of their ability, but with a minimum floor to earnings
- d. people were free to earn to the extent of their ability, but with government assistance for the poor
- e. everyone earned the same amount
- f. people earn according to they need

13) Considering that you are an Indian citizen, what does citizenship mean to you? What do you expect from this citizenship?

Appendix 2

Matters to be discussed at Scheduled Caste (SC) Gramasabhas of Oridam Gramapanchayath

1. Basic amenities

- a. Whether any land is owned, and if so, whether title deed for this land is in possession of the owner. If living in a joint family, whether land is available for other members of the family to build houses.
- b. State of house currently occupied, year in which support was obtained for construction of this house and whether house maintenance is required.
- c. Whether house has a toilet at present
- d. Whether provision for waste disposal is available
- e. Fuel used for cooking
- f. Whether house has been electrified
- g. Whether provision for drinking water exists
- h. Whether ration card, Aadhar card and bank account are currently held (Names of those who do not are to be noted. Complaints are to be noted)

2. Health matters

- a. Whether there is anyone without health insurance
- b. Which institutions are approached for treatment of illnesses
- c. Whether anyone has been affected by deadly diseases
- d. Whether any form of support for treatment has been received.

3. Education

- a. Whether any school-going children in the family
- b. Difficulties faced in obtaining education
- c. Whether anyone in the family pursuing higher education
- d. Information regarding circumstances and aids for education
- e. Whether facilities for additional coaching are available.

4. Employment opportunities
 - a. Details of those presently in employment
 - b. Details of those presently unemployed
 - c. Improvement of employment opportunities.
 - d. Details of those who require skills training
 - e. Details of those who require facilities for self-employment
 - f. Details of those seeking employment abroad
 - g. Details of those who require coaching for army recruitment.

5. Social issues
 - a. Caste discrimination
 - b. Difficulties faced by women
 - c. Violence against children
 - d. Other forms of violence

Appendix 3

Scheme for the comprehensive development of Scheduled Caste (SC) youth

In Oridam gramapanchayat, 13.3% of the total population is made up of families from Scheduled Caste (SC) communities. The panchayat has 22 Scheduled Caste colonies. In addition, there are also families that reside outside these colonies.

Basic amenities

1. Construction work for the purposes of tarring and paving of roads in all the colonies has been completed.
2. The panchayat was able to electrify all the colonies and to provide electricity connections to 99% of the houses in these colonies. Provision of electricity connections to the remaining 28 houses will be completed this year.
3. Schemes for provision of drinking water to the largest colonies have been fully implemented. In addition, schemes for providing drinking water to six other colonies, worth 55 lakhs, are currently being implemented. These will be completed by January.
4. Cultural centres were constructed in colonies where space was available for doing so.

House construction

Altogether, 150 SC families of the panchayat had submitted applications for construction of houses. Of these, 120 applications were sanctioned and 30 applications remain to be sanctioned.

Renovation of houses

Applications for the renovation of 100 houses were received, and 50 of these were approved. Funds have been set aside for renovation of the 50 houses that remain.

Revival of those without land/houses

Applications for land allocation were received from 50 families. Of these, 20 were approved. Ten families will be allotted Ashraya flats that are being constructed by the District Panchayat. The rest of the families require financial support.

When it comes to provision of basic amenities, the SC department of Oridam gramapanchayat has made great progress. However, as the SC youth felt that interventions in their social and

financial matters were very important, the panchayat decided during 2014-15 and 2015-16 to formulate a scheme for the comprehensive development of SC youth, in order to resolve such matters.

Basic Problems Identified by the Gramapanchayat among the SC youth.

1. Most youngsters study only until the *SSLC*, or *Plus Two* at most. They don't try to go for higher education, or to find skilled areas of employment or training.
2. Only 25% of SC boys pursue education beyond *Plus Two*
3. Girls fare better than boys in studies
4. Less than 1% of SC people in the panchayat are employed in government jobs.
5. Only 0.5% SC men are employed abroad.
6. Majority of youngsters educated below *SSLC* are those who don't stick to any jobs.
7. Less than 1% of youngsters set up their own business.
8. Among the youth, a considerable percentage of young men regularly use addictive substances.
9. This substance addiction leads them to socially exploit in many ways (*sic*).
10. Although they earn high wages daily, the lack of thrift and reckless spending leads many to indebtedness, and borrowing at high interest rates, making life very difficult.
11. Many young women are forced to take up jobs to sustain their families.
12. The proportion of youngsters who think differently from their traditional ways have now risen to about 50% (*sic*).

What we aim for through this scheme

1. To raise the social and financial status of SC youth of the panchayat within a period of 2 years.
2. To form clusters of 25 families each in all SC colonies and other locations where SC families reside
3. To start a resource centre in the panchayat for SC youth
4. Activities to raise awareness
 - a. Raising awareness against intoxicants
 - b. Programs on financial literacy

5. Providing training on modernising the employment scenario and subsidised loans to those employed in traditional jobs.
6. Creating a labour bank for SC youth
7. Providing training and financial support for starting SC group ventures.
8. Providing training and special recruitment for those seeking employment abroad, and financial support for those travelling abroad
9. Training for army recruitment, through financial support from the SC department
10. Providing special assistance and aids for those undertaking professional courses
11. Creating a special coaching centre for SC students
12. Providing training on and basic facilities for starting cottage industries
13. Modern training facilities for personal development
14. Creating clusters of cottage industries that enable young SC women to work at home
15. Special coaching for competitive exams to government posts
16. Provide land for farming to farmers, either on sale or on lease, and training in modern farming techniques
17. Provide incentives to individuals involved in art, culture or sports
18. Bringing together schemes executed with the support of Central and State governments, various agencies, panchayats at all three tiers, cooperative societies and financial institutions, for achieving the above-stated objectives.

Highlighted above are some of the topics which will be used to initiate discussions during the seminar that is being held as part of the scheme for comprehensive development of SC youth. After extensive discussions and receiving input from experts, a comprehensive program has to be prepared and completed in a timely manner. We therefore welcome everyone participating in the seminar to be part of these discussions.

Scheduled Caste Development group
Oridam Gramapanchayat