

MAKING SENSE OF DALIT HISTORY: LOCATING SEEDIAN AS AN ARCHIVE

Rajesh Komath¹ & Sudheesh CP²

Abstract

The paper tried to bring forth the potency of a magazine called SEEDIAN³, published by Dalit intellectuals in the 1970's to articulate Dalit and other marginalized sections of the people. It was to make it public domain of Kerala the particularities and complexities of social problems faced by the Dalit and other depressed communities which was often neglected in the larger narration of issues based on class consciousness. Putting in place the magazine, the paper interrogates subaltern studies collective initiative of writing history from below and a sort of historiography it had followed. It argues that beyond the conventionalities of writing history, Dalit history matters to address the problems of the Dalits in the way it points to the complexities of caste, class and gender hierarchies in our society, for which archives such as SEEDIAN are important to articulate a Dalit social world.

Key Words: Dalit History, Subalternity, Exclusion and Historiography

Introduction

This paper tries to make a sense of writing history from a Dalit perspective. As it is a history it locates *Seedian*, (Socially economically educationally depressed Indian ancient natives), an organization of intellectuals who were mainly from a Marxist (all forms of Marxist positions including that of extreme end) to think about bringing forth Dalit issues to the forefront of Kerala society. As we all can imagine Kerala political sphere was mainly dominated by left ideologies and the word 'Dalit' was not even popular in 1970s. The people of these caste dispositions were identified as 'Harijans' (Children of God) as M.K. Gandhi has called lower (ex) untouchable castes in India. Though the Seedian collectives started their political activity departing from mechanical Marxist interpretation of society, with which problems of the lower castes has been viewed as primarily an economic one. Material transfer of resources through a re-distributive policy of the left could be a way to uplift them to the mainstream society. The base and super-structural dialectic

¹ Associate Professor, School of Social Sciences, MG University, Kottayam, komathrajesh@gmail.com

² MPhil Scholar in History, School of Social Sciences, MG University, Kottayam

³ Seedian is a name of the newspaper under the leadership of Dalit collective in Kerala.

and its relevance in a context of *jati* system has been come under a serious doubt which subsequently led to a consensus that super-structure is not something independent of the base as caste is part of base as creative economic actors and as a hegemonic structure of caste as a system. Thus, it was articulated that the base itself is constitutive of super-structure in the case of mechanism of caste and its genesis⁴. This revelation or realization made these educated intelligentsia to form a platform where all issues of lower castes in various social locations could be addressed. This was how they themselves had come with a broader framework of an organization that touched the life of all lower castes which was later termed as Socially economically educationally depressed Indian ancient natives (*Seedian*). Many of the members of the collective were also aware about the problem in identifying these depressed castes as '*harijans*'.⁵ It was later identified as a derogatory naming of Dalits as if they did not have actual father and mother. It has been read as or equated as 'bastards', as the word 'Harijans' means children of God, not of human beings⁶. Many members of Seedian were also aware about Ambedkar's writings and speeches and his struggles for human rights and for egalitarian society in the north Indian context, including the Mahad satyagraha⁷.

We have seen in history that there were many initiations to make Kerala society an egalitarian one that begins from the colonial period. Colonialism has positively influenced Dalit aspiration for human dignity, equality. Christian Missionary activities, introduction of letters to lower castes through Sunday classes, and many progressive policy initiations of the British as well as former princely states such as abolition slavery, paying cash as wages made untouchable castes a new medium to imagine equality (Sanal Mohan, 2015)⁸. A narrative of modernity of slavery telling a story of *Cherumas*, *Kuravas*, *Parayas*, *Pulayas*, and Thanda Pulayas, all

⁴ Interview with V. Padmanabhan, an active member of Seedian held on August 3, 2017.

⁵ But before Seedian came into being, there was a organizational platform known as 'Harijan Service Society' by the same members who later formed Seedian. During 1970-72 many of the members of the Seedian were also formed a student's organization to address issues of timely reimbursing of stipends by the Government. It is known as Kerala Stipendory Students Association (KSSA). S. Rajappan was the general Secretary of this organization. For more details, see Kopicad, M. Sunny. 2017. *Janathayum, Janathimathyavum, (People and Democracy)*, Vidyarthi Publications, Calicut; Kochu. K.K. 2012. *Kerala Charithravum Samooha Roopeekaranavum, Kerala Basha Institute, Thiruvananthapuram.*

⁶ It also reminds them of Devadasi practices prevalent among depressed castes in north India.

⁷ It was on 20 March 1927 to allow untouchables to use water in a public tank in [Mahad](#), currently in Raigad district, Maharashtra. The day has been considered as social empowerment day in India today.

⁸ Sanal Mohan P. 2015. 'Modernity of Slavery: Struggles against caste inequality in Colonial Kerala', Oxford University Press.

untouchable castes in the nineteenth-century Kerala and the coming of modernity in their life world as of embracing Christianity. The generational experiences, struggles, and memories, Sanal argued that which has shaped these castes collective self, and deeply impacted the emergence of Dalit consciousness in Kerala. Thus, it pushes a debate on colonial modernity by bringing to the fore Dalit experience in Colonial Kerala.

On the other hand, we do have struggles of Ayyankali for accessing public spaces for untouchable castes especially of Pulayas in Travancore. Centring on the historic struggles of Ayyankali as an icon of Dalit assertion, there were attempts to write a history of Dalit assertion for articulating equality and demanding for education for the Pulayas and other lower castes to make their public presence in Kerala society (Chendharasseri, 1979; Cherai Ramdas, 2006; Velayudhan Panikasseri, 2003)⁹ and there is historical documentation on the Dalit assertions in Malabar (Mathew Erthayil, 2016). Unlike well documented colonial modernity of caste, other writings on Ayyankali movements and movements from Malabar has not been documented as a historian's craft. Most of it is biographical in nature with and without substantiation.

A Dalit history of these movements to be written with substantial documentation of the Dalit articulations and collecting archives which are not yet been gathered. This dissertation tries to make an attempt to historicize Dalit issues through an archive called Seedian (it is also an organization) which has mobilized and organized people on a particular issues of caste identity and brought out volumes of their writings on Dalit question as newspapers, reports and documents, events and memory related to Dalit lives in Kerala from 1975 onwards.

While history writing has been a practice of academic enterprises in Indian academia, there has been not much effort to document the agency of Dalits in articulating their demand for social equality. The hitherto existing history was the history of the elite sections of Indian society or history has been written in the perspective of hegemonic powers who controlled Indian social system. It means that who has been controlled both base and superstructure were represented in the history of everything, no matter it is history of Indian independence which is known as nationalist history or colonial history whose perspective was primarily viewing

⁹ Chendharasseri. T.H.P. 1979. Ayyankali, Prabath Book House, Thiruvananthapuram; Cherai Ramdas. 2006. Ayyankalikka Atharathode, Uparodham Books, Ernakulam; Velayudhan Panikasseri. 2003. Ayyankali muthal V.T. Vare, Current Books, Kottayam. Mathew Erthayil. 2016. Malabarile Dalit Prasthanangal, Current Books, Kottayam.

from afar i.e., viewing from west and all objects of history in the east were subject to reform or it is written as a civilizing enterprise of west on the east¹⁰.

Subaltern Turn and Writing History

As a response to elitist or nationalist grand narratives of Indian history, new research collectives were pointed out the importance of writing history from below which is called as Subaltern Studies. Similar to Western view of the natives, elites, local notables and colonial educated people has started representing Indian people irrespective class or caste differences as if taking a normal view that they write history of the people of India. It was mostly flooded with the grand narratives of the elites in Indian struggles against colonial powers as well as reforming India for imagining modern India. It is in this context that Subaltern Studies collectives has articulated new reading on writing history and society of South Asia. They pin pointed the following rationale for Subaltern Studies project. The word 'subaltern' has defined in a broader framework as 'of inferior rank'. It connotes general features of subordination in South Asian society. No matter which is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way. It is, therefore a relative term which is defined only in context. The word 'history and society' serve as a shorthand for all that is involved in the subaltern condition. This condition is called as subalternity which is a condition of inferiority which could be influenced by attitudes, ideologies and belief systems. Briefly, it presupposes a cultural condition forming subalternity. Subaltern condition is a relative term opposite to dominance. Therefore, it is a constitutive term contextualized in a binary relationship--that is domination and subordination.

To open up a new version of history writing, Ramajit Guha has pointed out some aspects of the historiography of Colonial India in general in order to justify a subaltern history of South Asian history and society. This aspect would broaden history writing perspective on the one hand and limit a kind of writing of Dalit histories. I would like point out these and later try to argue for the need of a separate historical treatment of Dalit subjects.

The historiography of Indian nationalism has been dominated by elitism--both colonialist elitism and bourgeois. Though it has been the outcome of British rule, it has been continued even after the transfer of power from British to Indians. But, most of these features have continued which is known as neo-colonialist and neo-nationalist forms of discourse. The continued colonial legacy in imaging

¹⁰ The cultural representations that are the bases of Orientalism, defined as the West's patronizing representations of "The East", Said argues that the societies and peoples who inhabit the places of Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East has been described on the cultural understanding of the West. To see more on this discussion, see Edward W. Said. 1978. Orientalism, Patheon Books, United States.

independent India has mostly benefited to educated elites of India, which in turn resulted these elites to rule the country afterwards. This made a feeling among the poor or ordinary people that indigenous elite like local notables in rural and urban India led the people from subjugation to freedom. Thus, it was always a general consensus among historians that 'the history of Indian nationalism is thus written up as a sort of spiritual biography of the Indian elite'¹¹. This has helped us to understand the ideological character of historiography itself. It also made us to realize that the contribution of the ordinary people in the struggles for independence as nationalists on their own to be accounted or acknowledged in writing history. Then what was left out of this 'un-historical historiography' was the politics of the people. These political articulations were the major struggles of Dr. Ambedkar and others from various parts of the country contrary or in no relation to elitist patterns, which was so known as an autonomous domain because it was neither originated from the elite nor from a preconceived plan of action which was so spontaneous and violent unlike elitist acts of political assertion. But it is doubtful that even these projects, I mean Subaltern Studies project has addressed issues caste and identity until the publication of Subaltern Studies XII¹² Vol, which has addressed the issues of Dalits and Muslims in writing history in these perspectives. Ambedkar was also not been seriously considered in these collectives. The subaltern collective, reviewing all these above-mentioned points of the problems of colonial and elitist nationalist historiography, tries to converge voices of the both and then try to bring forth new vistas of historical scholarship in the domain of subaltern studies. This is one important points of realization to choose for a perspective from below.

Subalternity and Exclusion

Some of the writings which problematized a subaltern history in relation to the social exclusionary dynamics have brought out well in their studies. For instance, Ashok K. Pankaj and Ajit K. Pandey (2014) is a collection of articles weaved together in a volume centred around three major themes in Subaltern Studies such as--Subalternity, exclusion process and social change--in the context of India. Fifteen articles have been given with five sections that are I. Introducing the methodological concerns to locate the domain of subalternity and subsequent process of exclusion in India, II tires to make a dialogue with subaltern studies project. It revisits subaltern studies, peasant history and specifically problematizes Dalit questions. III section reveals the process of subaltern reproduction through idea, knowledge and power. It identifies the failure of mass education which led to the construction of the 'subaltern' in India. IV portrays varied routes of subjugation

¹¹ Ranajit Guha (ed). 1982. Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society, Oxford University Press, Oxford, P. 2.

¹² Shail Mayaram, MSS Pandian and Ajay Skaria. 2012. Muslims, Dalits and Fabrications of History, Subaltern Studies XII, Permanent Black, New Delhi.

and spaces of subordination that address the contours of Dalit movements, the politics of inclusion/exclusion and bring forth women in the material process and developmentalism. The last section V addresses the third theme of the volume in detail, i.e., aspects of social and cultural changes that has evolved over the period of time which connects religion and society, caste and class question in rural India, and look at the process of continuity and change placing caste-class nexus on the one hand and gender relation on the other.

The papers adopt a broad definition of subalterns than of the inferior rank in relation to the elites as defined by subaltern studies history project. Here it breaks up binaries of subaltern and the elite or inferior/superior as subjects in social relations. Therefore, the book talk about subalternity, which is a condition of subordinate relations--economic, social, political and cultural--where the subalterns are subjects of social power enjoyed by the privileged. It also noticed carefully the subalterns within subalterns, and subalterns with various levels of subalternity. The former denotes as *differential subalternity* and the later as *multiple subalternity*. For Instance, Dalit woman faces various levels of subalternity as she belongs to a lower caste and her social experiences are not same as that of a non-Dalit woman, though they share similar experiences as woman in a patriarchal Brahman ideology. The volume also captures different tendencies of various social groups in relation to others. Differently positioned social groups aspire differently, for example for subalterns, their primary aspiration is the quest for dignity, self-pride and freedom while the dominant groups are motivated to retain their status, control and power and thus denying the notion of equality, and voice to the subalterns. This makes our society inherently ridden with conflictual social relations. The new political economy of the contemporary society has been analysed and narrated through a dialectical logic with the conceptual backdrop of what is defined as subalternity.

Beyond Historiography

Unlike historian's gaze of subaltern studies that combines archival and ethnographic sources, this is a collection of articles that follows an interdisciplinary gaze. The authors of these articles are from various disciplinary background that range from sociology, political science and economics which enables the domain of subalternity to have a fresh gaze that encompasses political economy, and historical sociology in perspective to delve into the contemporary social change in India. Thus, as Rajeev Bhargava pointed out 'this volume adopts a much needed, integrated approach to the understanding of subalternity, exclusion, and social change in India and instead of treating them as atomistic, unconnected and discrete social facts, explores their dynamic relationships'. 'It inaugurates a distinct approach to historiography, which recognizes the centrality of social processes' opined Yogendra Singh who wrote a foreword to this volume. This is a book that poses a unique question on subalternity or a new project for subaltern

studies that are centred on ‘the process of subaltern reproduction’ instead of exploring narratives of socio-political experience of subalterns done by *Subaltern Studies* in the early 1980’s. Why and how does a society produce and reproduce subalterns? How do subalterns negotiate their social and political emancipation? How do they absorb social and political changes? are these questions that are relevant in historical as well as contemporary contexts.

Like Pierre Bourdieu argued getting educated in a society is also a means to reproducing inequality, the process of education makes a distinction between the educated and uneducated in a society. Similarly, in Indian historical contexts, subalternity has been produced through the maintenance of a rigid social and economic structures, including religious, cultural forms and practices. In the present times, reproduction of subalterns is on the move as I mentioned in the case of Bourdieu’s theory. Education, political power and its practice as ideology are influential as agents of these reproduction of caste structures. This volume makes a scrutiny of the social process of lack of education, control over modern knowledge and its relation with production system and ideology of the ruling class that produces subalternity and subaltern reproduction. The book argues that the subjugation and oppression of subalterns are still persisting in Indian society as a dominant practice. The dominant’s command over knowledge and language, works as a authority over subaltern social groups. Once, it was controlled by Sanskrit literature and later dominance was sustained by its restricted availability of English language. Thus, it led to the marginalization of traditional knowledge and perpetuated subaltern reproduction by controlling knowledge domain¹³.

Dalit Studies and Writing Dalit History

Often social science scholars rise the question of why do we need Dalit history even after volumes of Subaltern Studies that address questions of domination and subordination of people, castes and classes in context? A quote from Mata Prasad’s 2002 autobiography which is given below would partly explain the need of Dalit studies in general.

“These privileged young Indian [studying in England] during English rule [gulami, or slavery] in India had to suffer humiliation [apaman] at every step of their stay in England, unable, for example, to travel by first class even though they had a first-class railway ticket. They could not enter some hotels. They had to listen to the humiliating [apaman-janak] English term “Indian dog”. Such humiliation [apaman]

¹³ Ashok K. Pankaj and Ajit K. Pandey. 2014. Subalternity, Exclusion and Social Change in India, Foundation Books, New Delhi.

enraged them. These elite Indian didn't know that Dalits in India had to suffer the worst kind of humiliation..... Among the foreign returned [Indian] were Gandhi-ji, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Lala Lajpat Rai and others. When these people experienced humiliation and loss of dignity [in England] they then became conscious of the need for independence. MATA PRASAD, *Jhompri se Rajbhavan*

Unlike broad framing of subaltern themes by Subaltern collectives, Dalit studies focuses on Dalit articulations--cultural and political--against caste Hindu discriminatory practices that have humiliated Dalits for centuries. Gopal Guru¹⁴ provides us a theoretical engagement with the diverse and contentious histories of humiliation and dignity present in both Western and Indian contexts. Thus, Dalit studies depart from Subaltern Studies project in an extremely significant way. They use Subaltern as an unqualified sense to mean 'of all inferior condition' which has mostly ignored the world of Dalit peasants and laborers within agrarian society and the exploitative contexts of subjugation by landlords and differences within subaltern social groups to bring forth multiple ways of inferiority. It is in this context that Dalit Studies¹⁵ project claim on the five broad trends to the rise of Dalit studies possible. (1) the political and intellectual controversy in 1990s over implementation of the recommendations of the 1980 Mandal commission report which has expanded reservation to lower castes. (2) the rise of the Dalit activism in southern India. (3) political and electoral intervention by new Dalit political parties. (4). The rise of Dalit feminism in India. (5) and global discussions on caste, race and social exclusion. The emergence of Dalit intellectuals in 1990s made these discussions live in Indian academia and thus Dalit studies continuously challenged structural injustices and hierarchical practices by demanding 'education, employment and special rights.

Seedian as an Archive

This paper tries to situate Seedian, a Dalit intellectual collective and their interventions in the field of Dalit lives in Kerala though their writings and statement of political positions laid down in the weekly called Seedians. The was Dalits identify as 'Dalits' today, these intellectuals' circles and the so called 'harijans' were called themselves as 'Seedians' in 1970's but later the influence of Bahujan political initiatives and spread of Ambedkar messages has given a new light to Dalit activists in Kerala. But it is to be remembered that Seedian is not just an

¹⁴ Gopal Guru (ed). 2009. Humiliation: Claims and Context, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

¹⁵ Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana. 2016. Dalit Studies, Permanent Black, New Delhi.

organizational mechanism it was identified as a group of people who were socially economically educationally depressed Indian ancient natives.

Considering Seedian publications as an archive, the study tries to locate a history of Dalit struggles in 70's in Kerala through. Seedian was the first serious initiative in Kerala as a print to bring forth a Dalit discourse. The first print published in 1975 April 30. E.M. Koshi was the editor of this weekly. Seedian was the symbol of the consciousness of actual existence. The acronym which is an abbreviation formed from the initial letters of the word Socially Economically Educationally Depressed Indian Ancient Natives. Seedian formed by the combined efforts of the educated Dalits in Kerala. These people represent different social and religious origins by birth. But it completely negates religious presence and their priority was the the realization of Seedian. The term Seedian has its own relevance because it had reflected upon a common nature of deprived demography and it gave light to the social, cultural and economic peculiarities of this group.¹⁶ This realization has been influenced the Dalits to engage with Dr. Ambedkar and Ayyankali's political assertions in forefront to articulate Dalit issues. Thus, it became influential among Dalit intellectuals in 80's. Left politics came to accept that caste is beyond class and class politics have its own limitation while addressing caste-based exclusions. But at the same time, they were reluctant to deviate from their conventional party line that all problems of the people are economic in nature solving of these would stop the exploitation of one group on others. Seedian has identified these articulation of left politics and thus they managed to publish this magazine for at least 10 years since 1975. Though Seedian as an organization is alive its political activities and interventions through the print is not functional.

It is interesting to note here that in its first volume there is an article based on an interview with EMS Namboothiripad, the first Marxist Chief Minister of Kerala. Seedian criticize limitations of class based left politics and how it has failed to represent the Dalit issues. A gist of interview is giving below. (EMS was interviewed by Sasi Kottatala, Karthikappalli and an analysis over the reply is stated here).

Today the Harijan communities of Kerala had begun to form different unions. It had witnessed the religious demonstrations conducted by KPMS at Thiruvananthapuram which constituted a large role. Harijan joined union of Kerala for the first time gathered its population to conduct a march before the secretariat which is notable. Seedian service society is a much-acknowledged component. Kerala Harijan Stipendory Federation (KHSF) claims to be operating in 14 districts of the state through the participation of students. They have separate youth organization. Among the KHSF employees the Harijan Employees Association

¹⁶ Seedian, Vol. 1, 1975, April 30, P:1-8.

started functioning in recent times. The Harijans started publishing a journal titled 'Jaladhara' in Thiruvananthapuram.

The leftist parties in India especially Communist (Marxist) party members, which constituted majority of Harijans who had active participation started getting detached from it. Can this a version be connected with the formation of the above-mentioned organizations? Can Harijans be counted as an organization like SNDP, NSS or Muslim League? Are these groups a threat to the Communist Party? What stand should the Communist party take to the empower of these organizations?

A) 'Harijans' are a class of people who were subjugated for centuries. As a consequence of continuous oppression, they are forced to face several social, cultural demarcation in the society. Their social status remains the same without any change. Under the capitalist social system growing from first century and strengthening from more than 25 years, the backwardness and suffering of them are finding slight relief. The monitory abuse along with social exploitation which runs today, a rebellion against feudalism and capitalist atrocities to get eradicated, the assault given by the police needs to be survived. Both in economic and political fields the violence faced by Harijans not only limits in them. The poor peasants who belong to various other castes too face the same situation of exclusion. They along with Harijans and peasant class fall victims to economic exploitation as well as physical torture from the police. Different agricultural workers trade unions have come to forefront by uniting people belonging to different castes. These groups are provided with the help from the various leftist parties including Communist Marxist Parties. But as mentioned before peasant class is victimized in both political as well as in economic fields. Along with continuing oppression and torture in social, cultural areas Harijan's face backwardness, and exclusion. Peasant class as a group constitute members from various religious of caste backgrounds which spreads to economic-political sectors through mass strikes, union activities can they improve themselves from the backward, downtrodden situations in social-cultural areas. This hadn't reached them till now. They are in the belief of contesting protests over social, cultural backwardness of issues through the formation of new organizations which will help them improve their status. The ruling congress party makes it a point to break these agricultural workers, trade unions and to make these Harijans as a follower to sort out their slogans. It is true that the mission is going success. The Congress party tries to include the Harijan communities in their various trade unions and mass protests including the forming of the agricultural

workers trade unions. As members of mass organizations, they were successful in exhibiting even a small influence on various mass protests conducted. This is what the writer points out that the trend remains a backdrop of their community organizations. It can't be said that today Harijans were withdrawing from the leftist parties, on the other hand they unite with the various political parties, trade unions, mass organizations in growing number with a sense of class consciousness. The immediate need to get ridded of the social, downtrodden conditions which remained for centuries, to get solved at the very moment the various exploitation in economic-political fields that lacked the consciousness to protest; these two main reasons led a sect of Harijans towards mass organizations the government tries to use these two weapons to crush both the mass organizations and leftist parties. In this situation, the below mentioning components had to be considered by the leftist parties to sustain.

- Including agricultural workers union, mass organizations attempted strikes of protests to be strengthened and needs to grow up in the present times. They need to attract more and more Harijans and people belonging to various other castes of religions towards it.
- These mass organizations needs to make it their task to solve the social as well as the humiliation face by Harijans (also of other minority communities), they have to be in forefront to voice against the cruelties injected by both the Congress government and the bourgeois class.
- Leftist parties need to proceed with the Harijans regarding their strikes or protest over their educational and job options, which is recognized by the law of the country. They need to be supported over religion-caste conflicts which is recurring. These parties have to stand with them to solve the problem without any bias.
- Leftist parties need to co-operate with the parties or organizations formed by the Harijans and participating in the protest organized by them. Harijans have to prevented from falling victims to the government; political parties such as congress which is a puppet of the bourgeoisie feudal class. The party need to protest against such bloody tricks played on Harijans.¹⁷

Seedian made some crucial views on this interview. Seedian criticize the ineffectiveness of class based politics to represent real issues of caste oppression. Government believes that the reform action was enough to solve the Dalit issues but its not sufficient enough. Social, economical and political revolutions have to happen for this and most of Dalit intellectuals were aware of it. But Communist

¹⁷ SEEDIAN volume 1, 1975 April 30, Page 3,4

party never made such brave attempts yet. Dominant castes were influenced the ideologies of Communist party. This realization weakened the believe of Dalits in Communist party and started withdrawing from it. What we intend to suggest here in this study is that Seedian as an archive will unearth the hidden transcript of Dalit assertion and demand to social equality and political freedom in those point of time to write a Dalit history.

Sources and Methods

This paper covers a period of five years of Seedian (1975-79). Almost 29 volumes of Seedian were taken as an archive to write a history on Dalit assertions in Kerala. Reading these archives as a text that has depicted a story of Dalit struggles, it has made an attempt to understand the social and political context of the emergence and nature of Dalit politics in Kerala. Interviews were done with the Seedian members to understand how Seedian was made possible and what were the internal political differences even among them to carry out Seedian as a serious platform for articulating Dalit politics. The study has also relied on many secondary sources, reports, newspapers including Dalit Studies done by various scholars in Subaltern Collective as well as outside of it.

Seedian: A Literature of Revolt and Dalit Discourse

This part of the paper delineates varied issues that has been addressed in Seedian to make aware about Dalit life world in India and particularly in Kerala. Therefore, it brings forth issues and events with respect Dalits in Kerala. Listing out of these issues to be subjected to interpretation taking Kerala political history in context.

Seedian list out issues such as poverty-stricken regions like Banswada in Rajasthan and Panchmahal in Gujarat were stinging and the consumption of adulterate corn (food) lead to the death of many innocent Adivasis. This incident clearly speaks of the pathetic situation of these people. What could they substitute in the place of food, even though they knew how good that food was? In a report given by the newspaper titled patriot says that in Kalapani, a district in Sampalpur, a father sold his own son for just 15 rupees due to intense starvation. What could be the most valuable commodity to sell in such state of utter poverty? India can be proud, as its majority of population constitute people who crave for peace of democracy.

Appealing slogans and practice of untouchability

‘Garibi Hattao’ sounds nice to ears, we can pray for the success of such a mission. This slogan is gaining momentum through all possible means but the Prime Minister itself says that there is no magic trick to eradicate poverty. According to the 5th plan, based on 72-73 price value almost 31per cent people’s perpetual consumption will increase in 4 rupees in the next 4 years (from 25 to 29), by 1984

it is expected to increase by 35 rupees. Considering this situation, it is clear that there will be no immediate change even after ten years? Then our slogan 'Garibi Hattao' will be as important as before, that may be the motive behind the construction of this slogan.

On Harijans welfare, Seedian writes that the government even developed new departments for the welfare of harijans. A big salute to the government which discovered that reducing the price of alcohol it can save the one who are in the verge of destruction, due to alcohol consumption.¹⁸ and on the land issue, it has stated that Harijans land are forcefully snatched from them likewise the auto rickshaw provided for them for a livelihood by the Harijan development corporation. On a vehicle stealing issue it has also reported that the journalist has vanished as a journalist reported over an incident in Palakkad District. The stealing happened by putting a rent of rupees 15-18 on a daily base. The owners demands that a rent of rupees 13 are to be paid to the bank per day and if these auto rickshaws are run by Harijans, they won't be able to pay not even that so, the owners find a better option by giving it others who could pay them the amount. As reported by the auto rickshaw driver, when they pass by the Brahmin settled areas, they would stop the vehicle, when they know that the rickshaw was provided by the Harijan development corporation. They left the vehicle go without entering on it. They say that they earn around 25 out of which 13 rupees was to go to the bank, the rest of the amount goes for their lunch, petrol and on other minor needs. By meeting these expenses, they have to return home empty handed.

It has taken on the working of the industries. Seedian commented on the liberal policy of public monitory organizations. The big industries grew up prosperously with the help of Public Monitory Organizations on 26th March of 1972 and almost, 491.73 crores were given as loans for the development of industries but almost 271.04 crore were snatched by 20 wealthy enterprisers. The multi-national companies control industries developed with the help of public monitory organizations. But the reality is that these organizations have no control over these industries. Due to liberal loan policies such as interest rates by the government, these companies are drastically developing ahead. While considering the growth of these industries, it is better understood that their growing capital investments for forming new industrial families. During the time period 1963-64, and from 1970-71, there was a huge increase in the capital investments of about 20 multi-industrial families from 1739.93 crores to an amount of 3311.49 cores. From this we can find the gross income attained by these companies (enterprises).

¹⁸ Seedian, Volume :1,1975 April 30, P.5

These reports state that Seedian was also so concerned about the distributive justice and the role of government in creating concentration of wealth in few hands. It also brought out questions concerning historical injustices inflicted upon Dalits. It is titled as 'Rights and Wrongs of Past'. It was stated thus: The government promises to give three acres of land in the area where there were no transportation facilities. Shri. John Joseph said to give people who belonged to his caste the cultivatable forest land at low rate of rent. The point is made clear that the Christian missionaries who claimed to stand with these subjugated people shouldn't be promoted by giving them the land which they promise to hand over. They strictly reject this practice. In the case of Mysore, the seats reserved for the scheduled castes are not given to them by telling them that no seats are available for them. He said that such claims should be completely avoided. Considering the necessity of education, the below mentioned needs were presented before the Sabha. (1) To provide grants from the government to build schools, (2) To grant scholarship for college students, (3) To allow two central boarding schools.

In the speech given on 8th March 1929 Shri. John Joseph added some new necessary needs. For the students under reserved categories studying in colleges and in technical schools were to grant full fee concession. On each taluk, five scholarships of 7 rupees to be allowed. He has also argued for granting scholarship of rupees 15 on every division. The small kids from Harijan community to be provided with slates, books, cloths and mid-day meals¹⁹.

Here is a letter to the editor of the Seedian which lay significance of how far it is spread among people. The letter says that after going through columns of the second edition of Seedian, it impossible to not to appreciate. K Ramachandran MSc Palakkad²⁰ writes: Seedian is the result of the effort put upon by the people who belonged to the people of the minority communities. It is a credit for these people who work for their social commitment with revolutionary spirit that makes Seedian lively. Seedian completely fills the gap of the obscene of such a publication in the past. Harijan social cultural poet's committee can be proud of this publication. But a sorrowful mention can't be avoided. Almost every organization or group formed for the welfare of Harijans or organized by them had only a short life. Let's hope that Seedian won't prove to be like that. The various topics and conclusions made were very delightful. But printing errors creates a mess.

Seedian opens up some of the issues of national character, for instance in Bandhayi, a region in Madhya Pradesh two girls were forced to shelter under an orphanage. This incident was reported by media. From the clutches of four flesh thirsty men, a girl named Falguni was escaped with the help of some policemen. An 18-year-old girl named Baby who belonged to Nagpur also escaped from the

¹⁹ Seedian, Volume: 1, 1975 April 30, p. 6

²⁰ Seedian, Volume: 3, 1975 May 14, p. 2

ones who tried to sell her for just two thousand rupees. The district of Jhansi in Utter Pradesh is now famous for its violence against women. Rape cases of kidnapping of women are a common practice in this region. But the concerned authority is not ready to accept these facts. It is not a new thing for the Thakurs or Brahmins of Bandhalkand who buy and sell women. The authorities argues that the people of UP is a state matter and how can an outsider get in to this issue? The police also share the same attitude.

It was also reported that by the end of march the Deputy Inspector General informed the press that over the last 9 months around 145 women were kidnapped. According to a case study around 1500 girls are sold and brought by the Brahmins and Thakurs in Bandha district, due to these missing women, the proportion of men is high in this part of India. The proportion between men of women was 5:3. In last two years around 200 Harijan girls were kidnapped from different labour camps. The girls who arrived to Bandhi for work fall prey to these sex rackets. Due to this, there is a fall in the number of girls arriving for work. Lots of girls were kidnapped from labour camps. Ex-finance minister of Utter Pradesh says that only very brilliant and efficient officers can solve the case to bring these culprits before the law. In 1974 from Bandhi, 14 girls were kidnapped; Police Superintendent reported that 5 had returned.

The Incidence of a Brahmin Executive

On 27th April 1975 an interview was held at Palakkad rotary club by atheist organizations which discussed on a topic--Atheism and trade organizations. When the discussion was progressing, a Brahmin stood up saying "just two words". The people there gave him the permission. This person highlighted the importance of Hindu religion with proud. All dispersed after the meeting. All India Atheist Organizations Vice President Shri. Kasturi, and K.U Edamarukku were present on the stage. The Brahmin entered on the stage once more to clear his doubts from Kasthuri. Seedian's Palakkad reporter also went with him. The man introduces himself as a 'Brahmin', Shri. Kasthuri asked about his profession. His reply was that he is an executive officer (Panchayath). Kasthuri responded to him by saying that "you can't be a Brahmin, a Brahmin is not destined to any other profession". He was putting forward a remedy for the varna system based on the profession done by the people, the varna system based on the profession done by the people. The reporter of the Seedian approached the Brahmin who smelt something wrong and asked him on 'what is Hinduism'? The Brahmins responds was that in reality Hindu religion can't be explained. It can be concluded that there is end of beginning for this religion. But the reporter said that there is no such religion. But Brahmin replied "yes, there is no religion like that". By the facial expression of the Brahmin, it is clear that he needed an explanation to this statement. In the ancient times the nomads developed the idea of worship due to the fear of natural calamities. This

practice remained throughout the world. There is no beginning and ending as well as no particular organizer. By hearing these instances, the Brahmin left the floor without uttering a word.²¹

The Story of an Untouchable

Seedian was attempting to introduce life sketch of Dr. Ambedkar to realize the Dalit's social world in India. It is reported with a quote of Ambedkar: "I tell you that I shall not deter from my pious duty, and betray the just and legitimate interests of my people even if you hang me on the nearest lamp-post in the street". Further, Ambedkar claims or dreams were also narrated. He said, after the British rule, there should be an end to the so-called Hindu Varna system. There should be a proportional representation of people from all class in the legislature otherwise the situations of Harijans remain the same even after getting independence. These are the people are victims of the age-old practices. The representation of Harijans in legislature was need put forward by Dr.B.R. Ambedkar before the round table conference to both the British government to the Indian National Congress. Gandhi defended this need by telling directly that a separate representation of Harijans would lead to the complete destruction of Hindu religion which would be viewed as a suicide. Gandhi went on a hunger strike and said to proceed his death unless Ambedkar withdraw his suggestion. Gandhi who was at that time in Yawwada jail started his hunger strike, his strike was a success. To save Gandhi from death Ambedkar had to compromise with his need. This was an important essence of 1932 which is known as Puna Pact over the secluded people of India. Many times, Ambedkar had to be in face to face with Gandhi, Congress and to the government. All times failure was the result. It was because he represented a group of people who were not organized as a community. During that it was very difficult to oppose the bourgeois-feudal elite class of the government controlled by the Congress. Ambedkar showed the spirit to oppose them.

On 14 April 1891, in a village of Ratnagiri district in Maharashtra Bhimrao Ambedkar was born. He was born in to a poor Harijan family as the 14th child of his peasants. He had gone through all difficulties of being a Harijan. He grew-up witnessing all brutalities and debasement injected upon Harijans in both public and private spaces. The boy studied with a strong determination. He craved for good social status. But the truth is that after having a reputed position as the principal of a college he had to face discrimination based on caste. "He believed that by getting educated they cannot liberate themselves, they also need organize themselves in a group". From this realization, he began his travel. That activism, that roar entered in to the big mansions which held tradition as dear. His mouth was unable to shut after facing many physical tortures. He was not successful in accomplishing all his

²¹ Seedian, Volume:3, 1975 May 14, p.6

goals. In the light of the light gained by him, his people (Harijans) are in the tendency of forgetting for their own needs. In our country it is very common to see the involvement of Harijans with political parties which makes them their prey. The minority people are blessed with debt which is a gift from the political parties. This issue is pointed out by Shri.Pushana²².

There were issues that brought out the questions of landlessness among Dalits. It was stated that: from the government land are allotted to the Harijans who have no land of their own. But these allotted lands are sold to high caste people, this is a common practice in Kottayam. In Mundakayam Panchayat of Kanjirappalli taluk under the leadership of C.K.Kittan who is a recognized member of minority community league had confiscated the paddy fields of that area. It is against government orders these things happened. Their aim was to get order in the name of Harijans, later the case will end in court. When the land can't be given to Harijans, the court will accuse government and by foul playing they can get the land. The Seedian's of the area had demanded to hand over the confiscated land to the right persons.

On SC/ST Commissions: Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes Commissions are appointed in accordance to Indian Constitutional system. Only Indian President has the right to appoint the Commission. The main task of these commissions is to look in to the welfare of SC/STs and in their upliftment. The Commission had lot of executive rights and privileges. In Bogmail village from the complaints received, a group was sent to study the matter. The suggestion given by the commission was rejected by the District Collector itself. From the peon to collector ignores these poor people.²³

On a title named as 'Darkness filled Trivandrum' Seedian reports that Government cosmopolitan hostel is in a pathetic condition. The outside world knows very little about the situations of cosmopolitan hostels. The three-stored building which is constructed on the left side of Trivandrum-Kavadiyar Road is by the government. Cosmopolitan hostel allotted for boys. The building is in the verge of destruction with its walls cracking and the walls are not painted for years. On the other side is the toilets which are fowl smelling. These toilets are never cleaned due to scarcity of water. The students have to be in big ques even during their exam time to have their ablutions done. The situations of the common mess hall is no better. Reports says that the student's union has conducted many strikes and protests, even hunger strikes for the betterment of the hostel.²⁴

Bhagavat Geeta and Caste Atrocity

²² Seedian, Volume:3, 1975 May 14, p.8

²³ Seedian, Volume:4, 1975 June 4, p.9

²⁴ Seedian, Volume:4, 1975 June 4, p.10

The newspaper titled 'patriot' had reported a news some days before which was very interesting and funny. In a village named Somasar in the district Surendra Nagar in Gujarat, the savarna people made a pledge over Sreemath Bhagavat Geetha. The pledge was that the Harijans who drew water from the public wells will not be allowed to work in the field, they won't be supplied with milk. The savarna also took water from that same well. The Harijans have no other options but to draw water from that well during rainy season. It was because during rainy seasons their wells get submerged and they cannot collect water from that well. By knowing all realities, the savarnas beat these people severely and strictly rejected their needs. Due to frequent quarrels the State Ministry asked the police superintendent to inquire over the matter and submitted a report. The point was clear that they have no other option except to use the public wells during rainy season. The savarnas killed a snake and put it on the well to block the Harijans from getting drinking water. From public stores and private stores grocery items were not given. From this another fight lightened up on both sides.²⁵

The Quagmire Centres

Attapadi is an extensive mountain area comprising around 250 sq. Km 2 coverage in the district of Palakkad. Attapadi became a symbol of un-cordial, week-kneed and nothingness in a state which was considered as the temple of democracy, a paradise of cultured people. In Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the forest officers, police, forest thieves joined together to plunder, but the fact is hidden by them from the government of the people. Police and Forest Department officials used the Harijans of Attapadi for their help. The cutting of huge sandal trees from the forest with the knowledge of Forest Department officials and police for the multi-national business people happened on one side, on the other side the poor innocent people are physically attacked, put in jails and beaten in the name of plundering forest. These are a very common trend in Attapadi.²⁶

Fight against caste-religion biases

Harijan Social-Cultural Development Organizations in Kottayam district and its convener Shri.P.M. Kalasan declared to break the chains of religion, political sub-religion's organizations to free the Harijans from centuries of experience of subjugation. They are subjected in socio-political, and economic sectors. He was talking in a meeting conducted by Kerala Harijan Mahasabha at Erumely. A majority of Harijan organizations look only for their survival rather than solving the problem of Harijans. These groups had sold (a large population who are split on the bases of religion, caste) to religious organizations and political parties, this tendency is developing. Some had planned to drag the Harijan community to their

²⁵ Seedian, Volume:4,1975 June 4, p. 11

²⁶ Seedian, Volume:5,1975 June 11, p.3

political organizations as elections are coming, Shri.Kalasan warned the people. The Harijan socio-cultural development board's manifesto against any demarcation based on religion and caste of the under privileged people. There no Hindu, Christian, Pulayar, Parayar, only the idea of 'SEEDIAN' is important.²⁷

1500 rupees for a SEEDIAN's head

The Bihar government announced to reward rupees 1500 for capturing a Harijan leader named Virdha Mushhar. The case against him is that he had collected all landless Harijans to form a group. The Harijans of India is a group which leads their life in utter poverty. Even in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Kashmir the situation of Harijans is the same. But Bihar have some specialties. The Harijan of Bihar compared to other areas have political consciousness, the 'Jharkhand's Movement' a political organization is a proof to this. Even though Jharkhand movement was able to organize the different under privileged, people broke due to the arrival of Severna representatives introduced by the ruling Congress Party. Today Harijan's needn't face any organization but a change had occurred.²⁸

An African Village in Kottayam

I, who am experienced one, had reported a complaint to the Ettumanoor village office two weeks before. The officer asked to come with proofs over my job, caste, income, land owned etc. the officer asked to submit a copy of caste certificate which was received earlier. When the documents were presented before the office he asked to come after two days, then he said to come any another day. Usually, the village officers act in a way of remembrance to the old feudal set up which regard the Harijans as untouchable. This is the situation of the poor Harijans in that area. Harijan women are mistreated. The Income Certificate generated from the office shows double their actual income, they comprise of daily wages. The certificates are generated very slowly. When the certificate is received the time allotted will end. Due to the above-mentioned reasons the officer needs to be changed.²⁹

The First Spark against Feudalism

An important strike during the reign of Shreemulam Thirunnal was the Pulayar uprising which is one among the minority community. The Pulayar uprising spread to Neyyattinkara Taluk and to neighbouring regions. Pulayar rebellion was a serious uprising during that time as reported by T.K. Velupillai in 'Travancore State Manuel' (Vol 2 page 107). Pulayar uprising is an historic incident which was a head ache for the ruling class during the period 1885 to 1924. On 1910 under the

²⁷ SEEDIAN, Volume:5,1975June 11, p.1

²⁸ SEEDIAN, Volume:4,1975June 11, p.3

²⁹ Seedian, Volume: 6,1975June 27, p.7

leadership of the warrior like Ayyankali at Neyyattinkara Taluk gave a new dimension to the Harijans movements in Kerala. The strike which consumed everything in its fire spread beyond borders from Neyyattinkara to Balarama Puram, Kazhakuttam, Kanniyapuram, Chengannur, Nedumangadu, regions of Travancore presidency³⁰

Summary and Conclusion

We have collected Seedian's old issues as magazines and interviewed some of the persons directly involved in producing Seedian as a magazine with extremely important editorials that addressed Dalit issues in those points of time in history. Seedian as an archive, it has immense potency to travel through a particular time in history that produces a kind of history which we call here as Dalit History. It has brought issues that range from personal, organizational, institutional and events and memories of lower castes to articulate their right to education, admission to schools and colleges, and narrated the stories of atrocities inflicted upon them. The Seedian as a source of information (archive) record in place a unique voices of Dalit groups in Kerala when Kerala's public sphere was filled with Marxist ideologies and many of the Dalit castes were attached to class politics. Seedian was a Dalit voice which has questioned the mechanical Marxist interpretation of their issues in a significant way. Seedian was tearing the superior face of high caste people and unmasking their false superiority. In this sense, we have made a tiny attempt to paint those efforts of unmasking superiority and narrating Dalit suffering and politics through Seedian which is a one of the important sources to write about Dalit assertions in 1970s in Kerala. It was painting a picture of social hierarchy that some are 'low' and others are 'high' in society. However, this study could have been used many other sources along with Seedian to come with a thick description of Dalit lives. This could be probed further using multiple sources of Dalit literature also.

References

Primary sources

Personal interview

V. Padmanaban, SEEDIAN, Thiruvananthapuram, interviewed on 03/08/2017.

Seedian Papers from 1975 April 30 to 1979 August 08, 29 Volumes.

English Books

Ashok K. Pankaj and Ajit K. Pandey. 2014. *Subalternity, Exclusion and Social Change in India*, Foundation Books, New Delhi.

³⁰ Seedian, Volume: 8,1975 September 3, p.4

Edward W. Said. 1978. *Orientalism*, Patheon Books, United States.

Gopal Guru (ed). 2009. *Humiliation: Claims and Context*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu. 2011. *No Alphabet in Sight: New Dalit Writing from South India: Dossier I: Tamil and Malayalam*, Penguin Books, New Delhi.

Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana. 2016. *Dalit Studies*, Permanent Black, New Delhi.

Ranjit Guha (ed). 1982. *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, P. 2.

Sanal Mohan P. 2015. 'Modernity of Slavery: Struggles against caste inequality in Colonial Kerala', Oxford University Press.

Shail Mayaram, MSS Pandian and Ajay Skaria. 2012. *Muslims, Dalits and Fabrications of History*, Subaltern Studies XII, Permanent Black, New Delhi.

Malayalam Books

Chendharasseri. T.H.P. 1979. *Ayyankali*, Prabath Book House, Thiruvananthapuram.

Cherai Ramdas. 2006. *Ayyankalikka Atharathode*, Uparodham Books, Ernakulam.

Kapicad, M. Sunny. 2017. *Janathayum, Janathimathyavum, (People and Democracy)*, Vidhyarthi Publications, Calicut.

Kochu. K.K. 2012. *Kerala Charithravum Samooha Roopeekaranavum*, Kerala Basha Institute, Thiruvananthapuram.

Mathew Eerthayil. 2016. *Malabarile Dalit Prasthanangal*, Current Books, Kottayam.

Velayudhan Panikasseri. 2003. *Ayyankali muthal V.T. Vare*, Current Books, Kottayam.