www.historymarg.com

Chapter I

Introduction

Dalit movements by and large uphold the ideals of freedom and equality of the oppressed people. This oppression which is often dehumanizing forms the logic of dalit politics. In India the people belonging to lower castes have been engaged in a protracted and tedious struggle against orthodox brahmanical Hinduism. The social and cultural fabric of India reflectes this inequality, marginalization and exploitation of the subaltern sections. Dalit identity is visibly felt in India by the 1920s because it was at that time that the anti-caste and anti-brahmin movements acquired a more popular platform for social protest. Dalit politics in India which made great strides in the latter half of the 20th century presently tries to embrace all oppressed and subjugated people irrespective of caste or religion. Such a reaction had a snow ball effect in the state of Kerala also.

It is the socio-economic misery which the caste/class structures of this country injected into its body politic that gave rise to dalit movements. The dalits who form a marginalized section of our population are struggling to form an identity for themselves. It is this assertion of the dalit identity and consequent attempts to achieve equal status with other citizens which form the focus of enquiry in this thesis. The roots of their struggle for equality and freedom reach as far back in Indian history as caste oppression itself. In modern times, their movements can claim to predate all other social movements.

The gist of dalit articulations, movements and politics, may be explained in terms of its severe critique of caste oppression. It challenges the

www.historymarg.com

dominance of Brahmins and considers Hinduism itself as an oppressive class/caste/patriarchal force. As Gail Omvedt observes, 'the logic of dalit politics comprises its antagonism towards Hinduism as Brahmanic hegemony and that this hegemony had to be overthrown'[1]. Consequently, the inner dynamism of dalit assertion, often revolves round the protests of downtrodden castes against the exploitative social structure and hierarchical social order where the dominant castes wield the social status, economic resource and political power. The plight of dalits, on the contrary, remains always as subjugated, dehumanized and deprived in different spheres of life. As a struggle to claim equal status and human dignity, the resistance against casteism, thus, becomes the crucial crusade and challenging task of dalit society.

Ambedkar, while vehemently attacking caste oppression, upheld a humanist social vision, a broader perspective to address the concerns of the lowest strata of society. He turned to Buddhism, as he understood that a religious tradition is needed to fulfill this noble vision. It is an integral approach envisioned to establish an egalitarian society based on the principles of freedom, equality and human dignity. And it is such a vision which makes the dalit movement an integral part of a wider search for an alternative society. At the same time, it should be remembered that the ideals of this visionary has always laid great emphasis on the political empowerment of downtrodden castes and considered it as the most effective means to solve their varied other deprivations. He envisioned a 'politically active dalit community' fully coordinated and supported by the organizational strength of the masses. It is the task of the dalit organizations of the country to fulfill this dream of Ambedkar in accordance with the pulses of changing times.

Dalits[2] have been called by different names as untouchables, outcastes, avarnas etc as the oppressed and exploited sections of society. Mahatma

www.historymarg.com

Gandhi preferred to call them 'harijans'- the children of God. The term 'scheduled castes' was first used by the British in the Government of India Act, 1935. Prior to that these sections of society were generally known as 'depressed classes'. The present usage of the term dalit goes back to the 19th century, when the Marathi social reformer and revolutionary Mahatma Jyotirao Phule used it to describe the outcastes and untouchables of society[3]. At the same time, it is believed that the term was first coined by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar[4]. But it was during the 1970's, that the followers of the Dalit Panther Movement of Maharashtra gave currency to the usage of this term[5]. As it is now used, it implies a condition of being underprivileged and deprived of basic rights and refers to people who are suppressed on account of their lowly birth. Generally 'dalit' includes those termed in administrative parlance as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). However, in day-to-day usage in political discourse, the term is so far mainly confined to SCs. They are the castes identified by the President of India under article 341 and put under a schedule[6]. The present study also confines itself mainly to these groups.

Dalits have been subjected to numerous deprivations in India since time immemorial and have been marginalized in different spheres of life. They have been socially degraded, economically exploited, politically subordinated and educationally deprived by the dominant castes and classes[7]. The long history of relative deprivation, discrimination and exploitation led to the emergence of dalit protest movements in different parts of the country. Dalit masses began to show signs of resistance against the structures of domination that was imposed on them by the casteist stigma of this land. They began to assert their identity, seeking self-esteem and self-image of the community as well as demanding equal opportunities in the social hierarchy. As in other parts

www.historymarg.com

of the country, Kerala also witnessed dalit articulations, protests and struggles in the form of their emerging movements and political consolidations. Thus by relying on the analysis of dalit movements and dalit politics as the two vibrant fields of dalit dynamism of the state, this enquiry attempts to elaborate the condition of dalits in Kerala and the problems of their emancipation.

This study primarily focuses on the role of dalit movements in Kerala in empowering the dalit community which constitutes a marginalized section of the state. As agents of grassroots mobilization, they can play a pivotal role in organising the community. The sustained process of new collective identity formation and conscientization for the demolition of the structure of subordination are central to the process of empowerment. It is only through grassroots mobilization and movements that these groups can carve out the required space to develop their alternative collective identity, critical imagination, and build up the strength for collective intervention[8]. Thus the objectives of dalit movements call for a new orientation in chalking out plans to rediscover the identity and consciousness of dalit masses as well as in formulating for them, vibrant strategies of mobilization and empowerment. At the same time, it is also noticed that the potential of the dalit movements, are not often fully coordinated towards the empowerment of dalits. The caste/class diversities, religious/political differences and even the presence of a plethora of dalit movements themselves have often acted as the barriers for mobilization process among them. Various dalit movements highlight different issues related to the dalits of their own persuasion centred around differing ideologies and perspectives[9].

Along with the dalit social organisations, different political parties including the dalit political organizations are also engaged in the political development of the oppressed castes in Kerala. Though political parties tried to

www.historymarg.com

build inroads into dalit politics particularly in the post-independent period, they often ignored the interests of dalit masses and preferred to count them only as their solid vote banks. Simultaneously dalit articulations were also heralded by various militant organizations of the dalits. Later dalit politics, spearheaded by dalit political parties, also tried earnestly to mobilize dalits. However, their attempts were not getting adequate momentum even among the dalit community itself. Moreover recently there is a growing tendency developing among the dalit masses to distance themselves away from the mainstream political parties which are more concerned about protecting their own interests rather than the well-being of dalits. Hence many dalit intellectuals and activists[10] are nowadays heralding the idea of dalit communitarian politics. The dalits should organize themselves as a political community based on the potential of their political mobilization. While considering the socio-political and economic backwardness of the dalit community, it may appear to be a difficult task to be accomplished within a stipulated period of time. However, the earnest efforts in this direction, from the part of the dalit community as a whole, can gradually strengthen their efforts to emerge as a politically organized group.

Moreover, the emerging concept of the alliances of 'similarly exploited' sections of society is also another attempt which supports and strengthens the organizational endeavours of dalits. This is the result of the collective and conscious efforts on the part of the less privileged sections to mitigate their deprivations, secure justice and demonstrate their strength. The resistance against casteism and other social evils is not a struggle which should be waged by dalits singlehandedly. As Gail Omvedt observes, 'it should spread beyond dalits themselves to involve all the sections of those oppressed by the process of caste exploitation including adivasis, OBC's, peasants,

www.historymarg.com

women and oppressed nationalities. Together with this theme, a synthesis of a new economic and political direction with the cultural challenge must be sought'[11]. It calls for the forging of alliances between different sections and between varied movements of the marginalized.

Hence the dalit masses and their movements in Kerala today stand truly at the crossroads. Dalit identity, articulations and politics have passed through considerable transformations over the years since independence that it is pertinent to take a critical look of its trajectory in order to seek meaningful interventions for the present and future. At the same time, a critical study of the relative role of different dalit organizations in the empowerment process of dalits is important to comprehend its real challenges. Such an enquiry is necessary to bring out a clear picture of the present day dalit social and political organizations functioning in Kerala.

www.historymarg.com

1.1 Objectives

The general objective of this study is to assess the role of the dalit movements in empowering dalits in Kerala. Within this compass, it seeks to explore and analyse the following specificities of the problem.

1. To study the socio-historical background of the emergence of social reform movements and dalit protest movements in pre-independent Kerala.
2. To analyse an ideology which supports and sympathises with the empowerment of marginalized groups.
3. To make an analysis of the major dalit movements in Kerala during the post-independent period.
4. To assess the nature and extent of mobilization and empowerment of dalits by dalit movements.

www.historymarg.com

5. To discuss the political mobilization of dalits by political parties particularly the dalit political organizations.
6. To assess the impact of empowerment strategies of dalit organizations by making a close examination and survey of their functioning in Kottayam district of Kerala.
7. To find out the real challenges of dalit empowerment process.

1.2 Hypotheses

1. In spite of the varied mobilization and empowerment strategies of the dalit movements in Kerala, dalits have remained a marginalized community.
2. There are inner contradictions in the policies and programmes of different dalit movements in the absence of a coherent ideology and a common platform to mobilize the community as an empowered group.
3. The dalit organizations in Kerala today lack charismatic leaders to inspire and guide the community like Ayyankali, Poikayil Yohannan and Pampady John Joseph who were the great enlightened leaders of downtrodden castes.
4. Political parties have been involved in the emancipation process of dalits especially during the post-independence period. However they have considered them only as vote banks.
5. The political mobilization strategies of dalit political parties are not vibrant in the state. However, recently there are positive signs of dalits getting mobilized among themselves as an emerging political power.
6. Empowerment of dalits in Kerala depends on their capacity for social consolidation and political mobilization. It depends on the ability of the

www.historymarg.com

dalit masses to become an organised group and to use their votes as an instrument of social change as well as sharing power at various levels of government.

1.3 Universe of the Study

Kottayam district of Kerala forms the universe of the study. Kottayam was selected on the basis of certain socio-historical specificities of the region. It may be recalled that Kottayam district belonged to the old princely state of Travancore which had been the breeding place and experimental laboratory of many major struggles of lower castes. The Travancore region had been the nerve centre of the social renaissance under Sree Narayana Guru, the dalit mobilization under Ayyankali, Poikayil Yohannan and Pampady John Joseph as well as the social changes brought about by Christian missionary interventions among downtrodden castes. The famous Vaikom Satyagraha, an epic struggle for the eradication of untouchability, took place in this district. Besides, the major dalit organizations as elaborated in this study, show comparatively a rather vibrant presence in this district. It has also a sizeable percentage of SC population (7.7).[12] So a close examination and objective study of the challenges of dalit empowerment process of this district will provide a better perspective to analyse the dalit emancipation process of the state.

Moreover, as a socio-political study focused on the major dalit movements functioning in the state and their role in empowering dalit masses, those organizations emphasizing socio-political empowerment of their members as its main objective alone have been selected in this study. In fact, majority of members of such category of organizations are included in the SCs

www.historymarg.com

list of the government[13]. Simultaneously the dalit politics of political parties including the dalit political organizations are analysed here.

1.4 Methodology

The methodology adopted for the study is empirical, analytical and historical. Both primary and secondary sources were consulted for completing the work. Primary data was collected mainly through field survey conducted by the researcher among a cross-section of dalit population in Kottayam district.

The selection of a cross-section of the respondents from dalit population posed challenges as an exhaustive list containing their whereabouts was not available. This created a situation in which a sampling frame existed theoretically whereas it was difficult to list the population. Hence it was decided to apply the Quota Sampling Technique whereby a quota of the sample (600) was decided on the basis of a pilot study conducted among (60) respondents. The respondents were then selected in a sequence until the quota was achieved. However, attention was given to make the sample representative by giving adequate weightage to factors like geographical spread, gender, economic position, caste differential etc. The data then was analysed by applying appropriate statistical tools.

Besides field survey, unstructured personal interviews were also conducted with leaders of various dalit movements, political leaders, leading dalit politicians, activists and academics. Government publications such as Legislative Assembly debates, census reports and concerned Commission reports, memoirs of senior dalit leaders, publications of dalit movements etc formed important source of primary data. Working papers, unpublished Ph.D dissertations, books, journals, periodicals and newspapers constituted the major secondary sources.

www.historymarg.com

1.5 Key Concepts Used in the Study

1.5.1. Empowerment

Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes[14]. In other words, empowerment equips people with capabilities and potentials that enable them to become self-reliant and organized. At the core of the concept of empowerment is the idea of power that is measured in terms of one's capacity to have control over others. In this sense, empowerment is the process of equipping the people with political resources. The exclusion of any section of people from the ambience of political power is the exclusion of them from the benefits of power also. Empowerment is also multi-dimensional in the sense that it occurs within social, political, economic, cultural and other realms.

www.historymarg.com

1.5.2. Social Movements

Social movements are human responses to prevalent conditions of inequality and stratification in any given society. Any movement is an organized effort made by some persons, groups or a community for some specific cause[15]. According to Rao, 'a social movement is an organized attempt on the part of a section of society to bring about either partial or total change in society through collective mobilization based on an ideology[16]. Hence the functioning of all social movements are based on the collective behaviour of a group directed against some existing social problems in order to bring about social changes. The protest movements of dalits should be understood within this general framework and the role of the social movements.

www.historymarg.com

1.5.3 Marginalized Groups

Marginalized groups are those sections of society who are pushed back to the margins of society, where their life-settings remain always threatened. It is a kind of social ostracism where the role of the socially ostracized persons are insignificant or nominal in society. They are the victims of the exploitations of the dominant classes/structures in different spheres of life as social, economic, political, cultural etc. There are different types of marginalized groups as the victims of casteism, gender discriminations, neglected minority groups etc. In the Indian context, the case of caste system where members born into certain castes/classes are accorded an inferior status and thereby faced with the danger of marginalization, deserves special mention[17].

1.5.4. Political Socialization

www.historymarg.com

Political socialization is the process by which an individual becomes acquainted with the political system and which determines his reactions to political phenomena[18] As a learning process, it is aimed at the transmission of political values, norms and behaviour concerning political system from one generation to another. Moreover, political socialization is the process by which political cultures are maintained and changed. Through the performance of this function, individuals are inducted into the political culture and their orientations towards political objects are formed[19]. This is continued throughout the life of a person, acted through different agents as family, educational institutions, religion, peer group, employment situations, mass media, public relations etc. at different periods of the life of a person.

www.historymarg.com

1.5.5. Political Mobilization

Political mobilization is the process by which the politically fragmented or divided sections of society are transformed into an organized group capable of attaining political power. It has been the benevolent face of mobilization that the mobilized groups are recruited for expanded political roles and are equipped for social action and social change. Marginalized groups, as unorganized sections of society, are required to have a high degree of political motivation, ideology, resources and leadership for being mobilized as an organized political entity.

1.5.6. Ideology

Ideology refers to a system of ideas, images and values regarding diverse social situations. Any ideology is an integral system of policy, programme and action that it combines certain ideals with practical programmes of action. According to Joseph Gusfield, ideology consist of a set of ideas which specify discontents, prescribe solutions and justify change[20]. It is the role of ideology to crystallize and intensify discontent which leads to protest action. Considering the role of ideology in relation to the prevailing social institutions, it may be classified into conservative or revolutionary, reactionary or progressive, reformist or radical etc. A vibrant ideology is closely linked with an efficient leadership and a stable organization. Ideology, organization and leadership are interrelated and their perceptions are complementary rather than conflicting[21]. All social movements have an ideological component and the ideology of dalit movements aimed at the emancipation of downtrodden castes, should be analysed within this conceptual background.

www.historymarg.com

1.5.7. Dalit Politics

In the contemporary political scenario of the country, dalit politics can be counted as the best device to strengthen the cause of the downtrodden castes. In the past, they were pushed outside the central political arena and excluded from the power game of acquiring offices of governance. Now they can no longer be ignored and taken for granted[22]. It does not meant that dalit politics is all pervasive now; however, it is emerging as a vibrant force in different parts of India. The guiding ideology of the dalit political organizations of the country is mainly based on Ambedkarism which always opposed casteism and caste-oppression vehemently. Simultaneously it counted political power as the best tool to liberate the downtrodden castes from their varied deprivations and aimed to empower them. As signs of the emerging trend of the dalit politics, it is noticed that the dalits have now begun to articulate their identity, launch struggles on various issues pertaining to them, and participate in electoral politics.

1.6 Review of Literature

Covering different facets and periods of dalit movements and dalit politics as well as elaborating different dimensions of empowerment of marginalized groups, there are many important studies by scholars. However such studies are few in the context of Kerala. Some of the important works worth reviewing in the specific context of the study are detailed here.

One of the important analytical accounts of the dalit movements in colonial period is Gail Omvedt's *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution*: *Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (1994). This work traces the history of dalit movement from its very beginning in the nineteenth century to the demise of Dr. Ambedkar in 1956. In the pre-independent period, anti-caste movements had emerged in most parts of the country with the dalit

www.historymarg.com

movement as its important component. Focused on different states as Andhra, Maharashtra, Mysore etc, the book analyses the ideology as well as the organization of the movement and its interaction with the freedom struggle and labourers. The study also makes a critical analysis of Ambedkarism, the dominant ideology of the dalit movements in the country.

Elaborating on dalit movements in general and analyzing the role of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and other leaders in empowerment of dalits, there are certain significant works to be detailed as Eleanor Zelliot's *From Untouchables to Dalit: Essays on Ambedkar Movement* (1992); Rosalind O'hanlon's *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in 19th Century Western India* (1985); Owen M. Lynch's *The Politics of Untouchability: Social Mobility and Social Change in a City of India* (1974); Lata Murugkar's *Dalit Panther's Movement in Maharashtra: A Sociological Appraisal* (1991); Mark Juergensmeyer's *Religion as Social Vision: The Movement against Untouchability in 20th Century Punjab* (1982) etc. Zelliot's scholarly treatise on Ambedkar movement examines the plan of this great leader to bring the untouchables from a state of 'dehumanization' and 'slavery' into one of equality through the use of modern methods based on education and the exercise of legal and political rights. Rosalind O'hanlon's work focuses on the charisma of Jyotirao Phule in the low caste protest struggles and attempts to study the structure of religious, political and colonial power in 19th century western India. Lynch, in his study of Jatavs (Chamars) of Agra city, shows how they neglected sanskritization and caste system, and opted for political participation and parliamentary democracy for their socio-economic mobility. The work of Murugkar is an anlysis of the Dalit Panther's movement, which had become vibrant in Maharashtra during the period 1972-79, as a spontaneous reaction to the deteriorating socio-political conditions of

www.historymarg.com

dalits during this period. This movement initiated by a few angry and audacious dalit youths is closely linked with the dalit literature movement and it is impossible to think of one without the other. Juergensmeyer's work deals with the Adi-Dharma movement against untouchability in 20th century Punjab. It argues that the untouchables constituted a 'quam', a distinct religious community like Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs and their 'quam' existed in India from time immemorial.

Coming to the studies on subaltern movements in the context of Kerala and other states, there are a few noted studies as detailed here. The work of M.S.A Rao *Social Movement and Social Transformation-A Study of Two Backward Classes Movement in India* (1979) deals with the Ezhava movement in Kerala and All India Yadava Movement. It shows that these two movements have brought about social transformation representing middle level structural change between reform on one hand and revolution on the other. The work gives a brief sketch of the different stages of dalit movements in Kerala. This study delineates the nature of dalit struggle which strives to assert equality of opportunity and social justice for the lower castes.

Joseph Mathew's *Ideology, Protest and Social Mobility*: *Case Study of Mahars and Pulayas* (1986) is a comparative study of the two vibrant dalit communities of the country as the Mahars of Maharashtra and Pulayas of Kerala, based on an analysis of their styles of ideology, protest and social mobility. The study provides an analysis of the social mobility among them by exploring the three sources of change-social reform, state action and protest, substantiated with empirical facts.

Swapna H. Samel's *Dalit Movement in South India, 1857-1950* (2004) is a historical study of the movements for subaltern sections during the colonial

www.historymarg.com

period in Andra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. One of the important characteristics of this work is that it deals with the socio-economic, political and cultural background of the emergence of such movements and their influence on the upliftment of marginalized groups. Along with the analysis of the uprisings of dalits, a detailed account of the emergence of organizations of backward communities is also elaborated in the work.

While analyzing the background and resurgence of lower castes in Kerala, the following works are worthy of study. *Emergence of a Slave Caste: Pulayas of Kerala* (1980) by K. Saradamoni analyses the emergence of Pulayas, the largest slave caste of the state, from the dark days to the present and examines to what extent social and economic justice have been achieved. The study also conducts a detailed analysis of the socio-political reforms and economic changes that took place during the period. It argues that though these changes have brought about improvements, to some extent, in the conditions of deprived sections, the gap between them and the upper sections has widened over the years. Thus it is the objective of the planning-policy of the country to reduce this gap and create an equal social order.

Sanal Mohan's *Imagining Equality: Modernity and Social Transformation of Lower Castes in Colonial Kerala* (2005) tries to problematize the colonial transformation of the lower castes in Kerala. This book elaborates in detail the gradual transition of the lower castes from the status of slaves towards the wage labourer in the late nineteenth century in the context of the decisive missionary influence provided by protestant missionaries. The history of one of the important socio-religious movements of lower castes-Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (PRDS)-is analysed in the study and it shows how imaginings of equality became their central concern as well as how it kept alive the social memory of slavery. It contends that certain

www.historymarg.com

social experiences of the past, however terrible they might appear, could be turned upside down to develop an emancipatory discourse in a very different context.

Affirmative Action and Social Change, Social Mobility of Dalits (2001) by J. Prabhash is a study of the impact and consequences of reservation on the scheduled castes in Kerala. After analyzing the dalit mobilization process in pre-independent Travancore and the constitutional mandate and scheme of reservation, the work examines in detail the extent of educational, occupational, economic and political mobility of scheduled castes as well as the social mobility dimension and their role perception, substantiated with empirical facts. The study holds the view that the emancipation of dalits lies in their capacity for social consolidation and political mobilization.

Caste Politicization and Social Mobility in Kerala after Independence (2002) by Jacob Mathew explores how caste solidarity and politicization promote social mobility of castes and communities. The process of politicization and the acquisition of 'political capital' by different castes and communities in Kerala are varied. The solidarity of the caste or community would facilitate the politicization process and ultimately promote the social mobility of the community. The study particularly focuses on the Ezhava community. Compared to Nair, Christian and Muslim communities, the Ezhavas are lagging behind in politicization and social mobility, though the pre-requisites for such transition are present among them. Thus the work enquires into the community solidarity, politicization and social mobility among Ezhava community.

Another noted work, *The Decline of Nayar Dominance-Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908* (1976) by Robin Jeffery traces the decline

www.historymarg.com

of matrilineal system of family in Travancore from the middle of 19th century under the impact of cash economy, English education, improved communications and interpretation of traditional laws. This is a scholarly work on the social history of Kerala for the aforesaid period and explains the relationship between social and political movements which led to the decline of the dominance of the Nairs in the social and political life of Kerala. As such this work elaborates the social and political history of a fascinating period of rapid social change.

Regarding the theme of empowerment of marginalized groups, a few noteworthy works are reviewed here such as *Social Development and the Empowerment of Marginalized Groups: Perspectives and Strategies* (2001) edited by Debal.K. Singha Roy; *Empowerment of the Weaker Sections in India: Interface of the Civil Society Organizations and Professional Social Work Institutions* (2006) edited by R.B.S Verma, H.S Verma and Rajkumar Singh; and *'Empowerment'* (1999) by Andre Beteille. The work of Debal. K. Singha Roy is a compilation of scholarly papers to put into focus some of the crucial issues and perspectives relating to social development and empowerment and present an organized body of knowledge on the theme. The book edited by R.B.S. Verma et.al., organized in three sections, provides an authoritative treatment on the concept of empowerment and its relationship with the profession of social work; characteristics, concerns and contributions of the civil society organizations; and the commitment and response from the government and civil society organizations for empowerment of weaker sections. Besides, Beteille's work is a scholarly treatise on the idea of empowerment and examines the background and context as well as diverse meanings of this idea including a detailed study on the concept of power. The study also analyses the different methods or ways of acquiring empowerment:

www.historymarg.com

through the expansion of civil, political and social rights of citizenship; by means of class struggle and caste war; and the secure Indian way of seeking empowerment by providing, as extensively as possible, quotas on the basis of community, caste and gender.

The following works present a detailed analysis of the multifarious struggles of dalits in the country and their transformation from an indigent, unorganized section of society into an emerging non-negligible factor in the socio-political arena. *At Cross-Roads: Dalit Movement Today* (1994) edited by Sandeep Pendse is a collection of papers written by scholars and activists on the complex question of the dalit movement and politics in the contemporary society and country today.

Another noteworthy work is *Dalit Identity and Politics: Cultural Subordination and the Dalit Challenge vol.2* (2001) edited by Ghanshyam Shah. Bringing together scholars and activists, the present volume examines many facets of on-going dalit struggles to improve their position. It traces the history of various dalit struggles and highlights the significance of these movements in the different regions of India, both separately and taken together.

S.M. Michael's *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values* (1999) is a collection of scholarly papers which explores the social, economic, political and cultural content of the dalit articulation and its relevance for the nation, both today and in the future. The essays of the book are elaborated in 4 sections dealing with the issue of the origins and development of untouchability; how dalits have confronted Brahmanic Hinduism; a critique of the sensibility which equates Indian tradition with Hinduism and locates within the Aryan heritage the essence of Indian civilization; and the economic dimension in the context of the impact of new economic reforms on dalits.

www.historymarg.com

Dalits and the State (2002) edited by Ghanshyam Shah, examines an important question concerning dalits in India after the long years of independence: the changes that have taken place in the socio-economic status of dalits and the role the state has played in the process. This volume examines the various aspects of this concern in different themes as Dr. Ambedkar's concept of social justice and the role of the state, economic and educational status of dalits, the nature and extent of untouchability in rural and urban areas, condition of scavengers, atrocities against the dalits and reservation.

The review of literature shows that so far no serious and relevant study has come out in the direction of this study as analyzing empowerment of dalits and the role of dalit movements in Kerala. Hence the present study assumes significance.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

As an academic enquiry, the study has following limitations. Firstly, this study is geographically limited to a particular district and region in the context of a larger and broader canvas in which the dalit organizations are operating. Secondly, the empirical data of this enquiry has been based on field survey research. Though a reasonable number of samples were selected, it has been a limitation to consider their responses as the opinion of the people at large. Thirdly, non-availability of adequate literature and official records on the subject have been a constraint in conducting the study. Due to many reasons including financial difficulties, all organizations do not publish or maintain necessary literature and records regarding their functioning regularly. In fact, the memoirs shared by the senior dalit leaders and interviews with the office-bearers of the organizations helped to overcome this limitation to a great extent. Fourthly, an exhaustive study of the entire dalit organizations of the state is a difficult task, as there are several dalit organizations, belonging to

www.historymarg.com

different categories functioning in the state. According to the nature and dimensions of this study, it is confined mainly to those dalit social and political organizations which are emphasizing the socio-political empowerment of its members. Lastly, no serious previous research has been so far conducted in the concerned area of study. As such the tasks of this study have been laborious as well as challenging.

1.8 Plan of work

The whole thesis is divided into eight chapters. The introductory chapter gives a birds' eye-view of the subject including the basic features of the study. Chapter II deals with the theoretical framework on empowerment of marginalized groups. Chapter III analyses the socio-political background of the emergence of social reform movements and dalit protest movements in pre-independent Kerala. A detailed study of the major dalit social and political organizations functioning in the state and their mobilization and empowerment strategies are the subject matter of two subsequent chapters namely chapters IV and V. Chapters VI and VII, which form the core of the study, trace the perception of the respondents regarding the actual mobilization and empowerment of dalit masses attained through different dalit organizations. The concluding chapter summarizes the major findings of the study and goes on to argue that the question of empowerment of dalits depends on their capacity to strengthen themselves as an organized group through social consolidation and simultaneously to share political power at various levels of government by rallying the dalit masses as a potent vote bank through political mobilisation.

www.historymarg.com

Notes and References

1. Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1996, p.87.
2. The term 'dalit' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'dal' which means to crack, open, split etc. It is used to denote the untouchable castes as the broken victims of the casteist social order. The word 'dalit' is also a marathi term: its literary meaning is 'those who have been broken, ground down by those above them in a deliberate and active way'. (For details see, Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchables to Dalit: Essays on Ambedkar Movement,* Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1992, p.267.
3. Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchables to Dalit: Essays on Ambedkar Movement,* Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1992, p.271
4. Lata Murugkar, *Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra,* Popular Prakasham Press, Bombay, 1991, p.6.
5. Barbara R. Joshi (ed.), 'Dalit Panther's Manifesto' in *Untouchables: Voice of the Dalit Liberation Movement,* Select Book Service Syndicate, New Delhi 1986, pp.141-147.
6. Ghanshyam Shah (ed.), *Dalit Identity and Politics: Cultural Subordination and the Dalit Challenge,* Vol.2, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2001, pp.17-18.
7. P.G. Jogdand, 'Dalit Movement, Patterns and Consequences' in Sandeep Pendse (ed.), *At Cross-Roads: Dalit Movement Today*, Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Bombay, 1994, p.51.
8. Debal. K. Singha Roy (ed.), *Social Development and the Empowerment of Marginalised Groups: Perspectives and Strategies*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2001, p.17.
9. Sandeep Pendse (ed.), *At Cross-Roads: Dalit Movement Today,* Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Bombay, 1994, p.ii.

www.historymarg.com

10. Among them, K.K. Kochu, K.M. Salimkumar, K. Ambujakshan and Sunny M. Kapikkad are some of the important advocates of dalit communitarian politics of the state.

11. Gail Omvedt, *op.cit*., p.87.

12. In this context, it should be recalled that the percentage of SC population in Kerala, compared to the total population of the state is 9.8. (For details see, *Census of India 2001, series 33,* Kerala, Controller of Publications, Delhi, 2005, p. Ixvi.).

13. According to the decrees of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order of 1950 (amended 1956 and 1990) of the President of India, the Government recognizes and adds to the list of SCs, only those SCs who profess Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist religions. Hence, dalit Christians are not recognized as SCs. (For details see, L. Stanislaus, *The Liberative Mission of the Church Among Dalit Christians,* Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPCK), Delhi, 1999, p.XXVII).

    Among the two categories of dalit organisations as explained in this study, all members of the first category called the caste based organisations like Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha (KPMS), Sidhnar Service Society (SSS), and Kerala Sambavar Society (KSS) are included in the SCs list; while the second category known as the general dalit organisations like Kerala Dalit Panthers (KDP), Indian Dalit Federation (IDF) and Dalit Aikya Samithy (DAS) includes dalits belonging to SCs list as well as converts to other religions, especially dalit Christians.

14. Anil.S. Navale and Mona Sharma, 'Empowerment: Concept, Evolution and Strategies' in R.B.S Verma, H.S. Verma, and Raj Kumar Singh (eds.), *Empowerment of the Weaker Sections in India: Interface of the Civil Society Organizations and Professional Social Work Institutions*, Serials Publications, New Delhi, 2006, p.64.

www.historymarg.com

15. P.G. Jogdand, *op.cit*., p.52.

16. M.S.A. Rao, *Social Movements in India*, Vol. 1, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1978, p.2.

17. For details see, David Ray Cox, 'Marginalization and the Role of Social Development: The Significance of Globalization, the State and Social Movements' in Debal. K. Singha Roy (ed.), *op.cit.,* p.31-34.

18. Michael Rush and Philip Althoff, *An Introduction to Political Sociology*, Nelson, London, 1971, pp.13-14.

19. Gabriel A. Almond and G.B. Powell, Jr., *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach*, Little Brown, Bosten, 1966, p.64.

20. Jospeh Gusfield, 'Study of Social Movements' in *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences,* Vol. 14, The Macmillan Co. and the Free Press, 1968, p.444.

www.historymarg.com

21. Jospeh Mathew, *Ideology, Protest and Social Mobility: Case Study of Mahars and Pulayas*, Inter-India Publications, New Delhi 1986, p.3.

22. Ghanshyam Shah *op.cit.,* p.17