

# EMOTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF CASTE SLAVERY: EXPLORING THE MISSIONARY WRITINGS ON KERALA

P. Sanal Mohan

## *Introduction*

Compared to other parts of India, Kerala had a historically evolved form of caste slavery that made the slave caste men, woman and children objects of transaction. Anglican Missionaries belonging to the missionary organizations of the Church Missionary Society and the London Missionary Society, based in the native states of Travancore and Cochin in the nineteenth century wrote extensively on slave caste men, women and children highlighting their sufferings and oppression. Extensively used in the nineteenth and early twentieth century writings, the term slave castes denoted the communities such as the Pulayas, Parayas and Kuravas who were enslaved by the upper castes and exploited as chattel. In the colonial period Kerala was divided into three administrative units viz, the British Malabar, and the native states of Travancore and Cochin. The southern princely state of Travancore had as per 1836 census a slave population of 1,64,864 out of the total population of 1,280,663 (Saradamony, 81). In 1856 the Malabar region had 187,812 slaves out of a total population of 1,602,914 (Logan, 148) while Cochin State had in 1854 more than 50,000 slaves owned by landlords and 6,589 (Day, 65) owned by the government that together constituted one sixth of the total population. In addition to these castes, there were also numerically smaller communities that also would be treated as slave castes. Employed in the wetland paddy fields and dry lands, they provided the necessary labor to the landlords in cultivating their lands in the pre-colonial and colonial times. These landlords, were upper caste Hindus and traditional Syrian Christians. In addition to them, in certain sources we also come across references to Muslims also owning slaves (Major, 190). Apart from these classes of owners, temples and local governments also owned slaves. In

certain cases Churches of traditional Syrian Christians also owned slaves (Kusuman, 40). It was quite common to buy and sell slaves in the open markets and we also come across references to slaves from Kerala entering the Indian Ocean world economy as commodities although we are yet to get detailed historical accounts of such transactions<sup>1</sup>. It is in this larger context that the everyday life of the slave castes came to be observed in the most intimate manner, by the European missionaries who worked in Kerala.

Erasure of emotions enforced by the landlords was one of the major features of caste slavery. For them, the slaves were a property sans emotions. They were not allowed a language to express their emotions. In this paper the focus is on the emotional world of the slave castes in Kerala from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For the latter part of the twentieth century I also analyze some writings of Dalit's that could be referred to as vernacular histories in which the emotional aspects of individual and social life appear as a defining feature. Writing of Dalit vernacular histories became a marked phenomenon in Kerala only in the postcolonial period. For understanding the emotional world of the slaves in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, I use the missionary writings as source materials. Produced extensively in the course of their interaction with the slave castes in Kerala, the missionary writings constitute the single largest archive on the intimate aspects of the lives of the slave castes that are today referred to as Dalits. Constituting a significant treasure trove of colonial knowledge, the missionary writings foreground the intimate aspects of the lives of the slave castes. Unlike the colonial government officials, the missionaries had close contact with the slave castes that offered them privileged access to the world of the slaves enabling a close observation of their everyday lives<sup>2</sup>. Although the missionaries deployed colonial categories and concepts to analyze the social and cultural world of the slave castes that betrayed their colonial otherness, the information that they provided were sometimes the only source for reconstructing the intimate aspects of the lives of the slaves<sup>3</sup>. While reading the missionary writings on slave castes against the grain we are able to situated them in the particular ideological practical context that enabled their production.

In contemporary studies in the historical experiences and meanings of slavery, the emotional aspects of slavery become very significant<sup>4</sup>. Slavery is signified in the separation of kin, violence and destruction it entailed (Patterson, 1982). Needless to say that such an understanding of slavery adds depth to the already accumulated

knowledge in the area of slavery studies that include the economic structure of the plantation economy in the Atlantic world or accumulation of capital that trade in slaves made possible. The emotional problems of slavery were very much embedded within its political economic dimension of labor appropriation and wealth creation<sup>5</sup>. While similar studies are conspicuous by their absence in South Asia, we still have some scholarship in the area of slavery studies. Similarly only recently that scholars have begun to analyze the missionary archives to analyze the historical experiences of the slave castes focusing on the intimate aspects of individual and social life. Enfolded in the narrative of the missionaries, the intimate emotional aspects of the lives of the slave caste men, women and children come to life pronouncing their everyday experience<sup>6</sup>. It is in the study of the everyday life of the slaves that we read about the emotional encounter between the missionaries and the slaves.

*Slaves and the Missionaries: Everyday Interaction*

Amazed at the family form of the slave castes, the missionaries thought it important to bring them under Protestant Christian discipline. Christian family was thought of as the institutional framework within which the emotional life of the people who joined the missions would find fulfillment. In fact the family forms prevailing in Kerala among the upper dominant castes such as the Nair was thought of as 'uncivilized' that required immediate reform and transformation to make modern patriarchal family as the norm<sup>7</sup>. One of the central arguments supporting the demand for change in the family form was to provide emotional security to the family as a whole that was not possible in the prevailing matrilineal practices of the Nairs. The colonial bureaucracy, the English educated reformists in the community as well as the missionaries who commented on the native customs were all united in their demand for family reforms. A close analysis of the debates in the area of family reforms in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century would show that the rationale for the reorganization of the family was sought in the emotional economy of society in addition to the economic dimension of it in terms of the inheritance of the family property. While in the case of the Hindu upper castes and some of the lower castes above the slave castes, it was the native states or colonial government that was leading the family reforms. In the case of the slave castes we hardly come across any governmental intervention to reform their family structure or introducing new norms in marriage practices. In the mid nineteenth century the missionaries who worked among the slave castes had noted the

practice of polygamy and polyandry both of which were thought to be against the Christian family norms. It was mandatory for the prospective converts to divorce the wives or husbands whichever the case may be to tread the path of the savior. The missionaries noted the emotional estrangement such a policy had created although they could not resolve it as they insisted on Christian family norm of monogamy. Considering the emotional and affective dimension of the slave castes that came under the missionary instruction, such decisions to part with their wives and husbands must have been really painful<sup>8</sup>. In the reports of the Church Missionary Society missionaries we come across a number of similar cases in the Travancore region of Kerala in which the emotional life of the slave castes became the central issue<sup>9</sup>. In many cases the slave caste men and women had the counter argument that their former Gods blessed their marriages and therefore they thought they could continue to remain in their marital status although it contradicted the Christian norm of monogamy.

While this was a case of the people who joined the Protestant Church that imposed its control on the emotional life of the slave castes, there was the age-old practice of the slave transaction that was the most terrible form of emotional estrangement that the slave castes faced in Kerala. Recalled in a heartrending manner in the oral tradition of the slave castes all over Kerala, the piercing pains of the breakups of families foreground the question of emotion in the idiom of the slave castes even before their interface with the European missionaries (John, 33-34). While there are slave transaction documents that have survived from the early medieval period that refer to the particular transaction in slave caste men, women and children they hardly refer to the emotional aspects of the lives of the people thus separated<sup>10</sup>. In such documents slaves appear just as any other commodity thus transacted that yield a price that has been agreed up on by local landlords or their men. None of these documents ever mention the fact that these were men, women and children with an emotional life. Contrary to this in the missionary writings— letters, reports, diaries—and other correspondences emerge as human beings with emotions, history and expectations of a future<sup>11</sup>. In many cases we read about a possible good life outside the terrible and mortal regime of the upper caste landlords.

The emotionally distraught condition of the slave castes have been recorded by one of the missionaries in a touching manner<sup>12</sup>

... [T]hey draw out a miserable existence and are often left in the old age to beg for their support or to perish with hunger. By few are they

comforted pitied or relieved; none seeks to remove their distress and no man cares for their souls. These are some of the many woes connected with slavery in this land.

One of the central themes of missionary writings on slave castes had been the sufferings and oppressions that they had to undergo. If we consider the entire body of writings that the Protestant missionaries generated on the slave castes in Kerala, one running theme would be the ontological wounds that the latter had to suffer as a collective. The oppressions and sufferings were part of the structural violence that sustained the system of caste slavery. It is also important to mention here various forms of punishments including capital punishment that used to be meted out to slaves. In all this, what appears as significant is the body of the slaves that appear to have achieved the quality to endure any form of violence. Such a slave body goes along with the social spaces they inhabit which had been marked out in a particular manner challenging the norms of 'civilized' existence. However, it is in this social space that the missionaries intervene with their notions of the sacred making that new idea available to slaves. Its significance lies in the fact that it was for the first time that the space of the slave castes was marked as sacred. The continued visit of the missionary or the mission workers to the abode of the Parayas and Pulayas evinced the possibility of transforming them slowly by persuading them to join the slave schools and chapels for learning scriptures and participating in prayers. Introducing them to the new sociality, the new space of the slave school was a dynamic space that facilitated the transformation of slave castes. It was here that the new elements of a different social organization as against the one prevailing in the caste society were communicated to them<sup>13</sup>.

The interface with Protestant Christianity had a substantial role in developing new practices that went a long way in defining new sense of community among the slave castes. Based on the everyday religious practices, this new sense of community was expressed in the evening prayers at the slave schools as well as readings of scriptures that used to be held there. Emotionally charged as they are, these prayer meetings and scripture reading sessions used to be decisive in deciding the future activities of the community. Missionaries in charge of such congregations have referred to the intimacy that such meetings could create. For example it has been noted that many people shed tears when they repeated the Lord's Prayer and to the enquiring missionary they replied that they wept because they could not address any one as "Our Father" as the practice of slavery made it impossible for them to have a stable family (Hunt, 200).

Invoking Peter Burke I wish to consider tear as powerful mode of communication that very often could be encountered among Dalit Christians.

The regularity with which the slaves met in the chapel made possible new intimacy, which was based on the new ideas of community, based on common worship the missionaries insisted on. In addition to this, it was possible to bring together people for an entirely new purpose other than working for the landlord. Missionaries have noted the great enthusiasm that the slaves had shown great eagerness to assemble for evening reading and prayer sessions, which they thought was due to the social conviviality that the slave castes had imbibed in spite of their terrible experience of separation through slave trade. This was not something unique to the Protestant missions although the reading sessions were unique to them<sup>14</sup>. It has been noted in the context of some of the Catholic missions that regular participation in Holy Mass was thought of as a way to sustain a feeling of community in the fledgling congregation<sup>15</sup>. However, the uniqueness of the Protestant mission was visible in the fact that it encouraged the lay followers to read the scriptures and understand the meaning of the idea of salvation that was central to the teachings of Christianity<sup>16</sup>. The effect of this was felt in the manner in which people experienced the transforming power of the Gospel. The transforming power of the Gospel touched the lives of the individuals, both men and woman, enabling them agential action. It is in such a context that the social space of the individual also underwent transformation, enabling them to move across spaces unlike the situation before they came into contact with the missionaries.

### *The Emotional World of the Slaves*

In the discourse of the master classes, slaves hardly exist as a people with emotions. In other words it may be said that the slaves were never thought of as a people with intimacy and bonding. In most slave societies 'slave family' used to be a misnomer, as the slaves were never thought of as an independent people capable of leading a stable family life. The masters were interested in the physical reproduction of slaves as it guaranteed reproduction of labor. Du Bois in his *The Souls of Black Folk* refers to the extremely fragile nature of the family relations of the African Americans in the time of slavery that continued to have a debilitating effect on the families even after emancipation. He refers to the manner in which many young blacks 'took up' their wives and their relationship lasting until the master

loses interest in either of them (Du Bois, 87). In such an eventuality they could be separated and sold differently to different masters and the couple would never meet again and quite often they would be forced to seek partners as they reach a new plantation.

Surprisingly in the writings of the missionaries based in the native state of Travancore in Kerala we come across similar examples of husband and wife from the slave castes being forcibly separated by the masters and forcing them subsequently to accept partners chosen by the masters. One of the missionaries, John Hawksworth, based in Travancore reported the manner in which a Syrian Christian landlord family forcibly separated their slave women from their husbands and forced them to accept the men whom the landlord chose for them<sup>17</sup>. The example of forced separation noted in the mid nineteenth century leaves room for us to imagine the practices prevailing as a norm rather than an exception. In another context the same missionary referred to the Pulayas as the lowest among the human race, stunted, black and filthy. He further noted that they bear all the marks of a people kept through centuries in squalor, misery, and degradation, a monument of man's inhumanity to man, a monument of the cruelty of the Hindu religion. Producing a pitiable image of the slave who suffers the structural violence of society make us understand their emotional life. Miseries and squalor that were accumulated over the centuries have made any new imagination of a future almost impossible for them. In fact the conditions of the slaves after abolition of slavery in 1855 in Travancore-Cochin and Malabar in 1843 was not fundamentally different as the transaction in slaves continued particularly in the rural areas<sup>18</sup>.

The ethnographic research that I have conducted among Dalit Christians in several villages in the Kottayam district of Kerala in 2012-2014 proves beyond any doubt the prevalence of slave transaction as late as the first decade of the twentieth century. While this information tells us a great deal about the practice of slavery even after its abolition in 1855, we have got fragmentary narratives of the people thus separated reflecting on their lives. However, it is possible to speculate on this question following the leads provided by the missionaries. For example in the case of those who joined the protestant missions since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the idea of a Christian family was taking shape. The missionaries were extremely clear about the need for educating the slave caste children, both boys and girls, inculcating in them Christian values so that the "future becomes theirs"<sup>19</sup>. It was also observed that the generation of their parents has been turned into clods through the practice of slavery that has

destroyed their mind and body. What comes out quite clearly here is the private life of the slaves. One possible speculation here is to imagine a private life to slaves who were under the control of the landlords who had developed an elaborate system of surveillance that was so hegemonic that it appeared as natural and given. Therefore little wonder in the fact that on several occasions they who joined the missionary Church were physically assaulted by their relatives as much as by the landlords. In one extreme case we read about the forced burial of a child of parents who had joined the missionary Church by the deceased baby's uncle who was insistent upon, according to the missionary in charge of the station, a 'heathen burial'<sup>20</sup>. The emotionally charged narrative of the ailing child gives way to an ethnographic account of the burial of the 'heathen' Pulayas.

These observations are important, as the missionaries were concerned about the future of the slave castes, and saving their body and mind. Although the document that I quote here is from the first decade of the twentieth century, in fact we come across the missionary concern with the mind and body of the slave castes way back in the mid nineteenth century itself when they began to interact with the slave castes. While the missionary sources are eloquent about the mind and body of the slaves, we hardly come across Malayalam sources that show any exemplary concern with the slaves. Most sources in Malayalam refer to the slave castes as living like animals that foreclose any possibility of understanding their social world from an alternative perspective that privileges the mind and body of slaves. In the oral tradition of the slave castes they emerge as people with emotions and intimate personal relationships in spite of the structural violence that the upper castes were able to unleash on them. Impending danger of separation of parents and children becomes a major theme in the oral tradition of some of the slave castes<sup>21</sup>.

The intimacy of family life was one of the central issues addressed by the missionaries right from the mid nineteenth century<sup>22</sup>. While narrating the polygamous and polyandrous practices of slave castes, the missionaries expressed their repugnance towards such practices in the strongest possible terms. In many cases the missionaries were also aware of the intimate relations between a husband and his wives and the former's commitment to the latter even as the missionaries insisted on monogamy. In order to overcome the problems raised by the pre-Christian practices it was felt that they should adopt the sacrament of marriage, which would make marriage a permanent and irrevocable relationship<sup>23</sup>.



Although interpreted within the framework of patriarchy, the notion of Christian family was important in the context of the slave castes that were gradually coming out of the long shadows cast by slavery. Some missionaries have observed that it was difficult to see a powerful father figure emerging in the slave caste families that joined the mission. What could have made such a situation of the absence of a masculine father figure even as the missionaries wanted the slave castes to acquire manliness? In the prevailing context of upper caste domination, the superior authority of the upper castes emasculated the entire community of slaves. Therefore, it was felt necessary to infuse the slave caste males with manliness so that they evolve as powerful fathers and husbands. In fact the need for manliness to be inculcated among the slave caste men was a challenge that the missionaries felt as extremely significant as it was the desideratum for a stable family.

The narratives of 'conversion' are replete with examples of blessings of the marriages of those who are baptized. This, according to the missionary was to bless the marriage according to the principles of Christian sacraments that would make it permanent unlike what they felt as customary marriage practice that was the norm in their pre-Christian past. Ushering in a new temporality, it was an invitation to a different historical and social time when slaves were made part of a new regime of records. I argue this on the basis of the ethnographic researches conducted among Dalit Christian communities in Kerala that with baptism the slave caste entered in to a different historical time marked out and decisive. In the vernacular histories of the Dalit Christian communities, the chronological sequences have been fixed by following the dates of baptism entered in the Church records. While I refer to this specific example of historical time it does not mean that the people were not aware of historical time before their encounter with the missionaries. The argument proposed is that with the missionaries and the generation of new culture of records many people could trace their families 'origin' to this particular moment. Some of the family histories of Dalit Christians that I have come across in the course of my ethnographic fieldwork used the Church records effectively to make their narratives chronological and factual<sup>24</sup>. We could probably speculate on a different, modern notion of history, family and community getting purchase among the slave castes.

I wish to consider here in a little more detailed manner the transformation that the emotional world of the slave castes that had joined the mission had undergone. The missionaries proposed the

idea of the extremely interesting state of the minds of the people who were learning with them<sup>25</sup>. It was for the first time that there was any reference to the minds of the slave castes as against the dominant conception prevailing in the traditional caste society that they were never capable of expressing their mind. Thought to be only capable of providing physical labor, the slave castes were quite often referred to in comparison with the draught animals. In absolute contrast to this thinking in the native society, learning with the missionaries offered the slaves chances to express their ideas in relation to whatever was taught to them. We in fact read in the writings of the missionaries how they thought about the slaves. According to the missionaries God almighty has created them bestowing them with inalienable rights as human beings, which was denied to them under the prevailing system of slavery<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, they have to know their creator and worship him. Enslavement prevented the slaves from realizing their human essence. Although couched in the language of missionary enlightenment and rationality, these ideas offered new possibilities for slaves to emerge as human beings<sup>27</sup>. It is in this context that we encounter the slaves as people with emotions, affect and intimate feelings. In many cases where the slaves suffered physical violence due to the cruel punishments inflicted up on them by the landlords, the missionaries who intervened compared their sufferings with that of the sufferings of “the holy Apostles for the sake of Christ” or in certain cases it was compared with that of the sufferings of Christ himself (Baker Jr., 57-61). In fact in most narratives of violence we come across the invocation of the image of the suffering Christ and imbuing the sufferings of slaves with new meanings. Capable of producing a different vision of themselves to the slaves, these new ideas provided the slaves a new framework to think of themselves as a community united in emotions. This situation is very well captured in the words of a native missionary:

...Their minds, so long lying fallow, are found to be rich soil for sowing the seeds of Christian truth but its very fertility helps weeds to grow abundantly with the seeds. Their simplicity of character makes them apt to receive our teaching with readings and their warmth of temper makes them zealous for the cause they embrace but the same qualities render them liable to be easily led away into error and to take offence at trifles so that much tact and practical wisdom with a great deal of patience and forbearance are required to in managing them.

While the fear expressed above was more in relation to the elderly generation of slave castes, the missionaries had a different take on the children. In a way they were claiming the childhood of

the slave castes, as the children would be available readily for the civilizational project. Scholars in the area of mission history and anthropology have noted the significance attached to the education of the children, especially the girl children by the missionaries. The CMS Missionaries in Travancore felt that they needed to train girl children properly as they will have to be future wives of the mission workers and responsible future mothers on whom would hinge the mores of a Christian family. This was part of the larger missionary ideology of “to save the girls for brighter and better future.”<sup>28</sup>

Towards this end of educating girl children boarding schools were started in Tiruvalla and the famous missionary, Ms. Baker ran her historic school for girls. The everyday life in the school of Ms. Baker was a matter of pride for the missionaries and one visiting missionary sketched the everyday life in the school showing different activities in which the girl children were engaged. While there was this emphasis on the education of girl children as a matter salvaging future generations, that could not have achieved without due emphasis on the education of boys. It is in this context that boarding school for boys established where they would be kept away from the “evil environment and influence” of their homes. It is quite easy to observe here the language of dominance in which the social and familial background of the slave caste children is referred to. However in a matter of a generation the missionaries could register appreciable development in the literacy levels of the slave caste Christians, although this literacy was avowedly meant for reading scriptures even as we know that literacy could have multiple functions. Reflecting on missionary investment in the future of children we find a new notion of childhood coming into being in colonial Kerala through their efforts. It assumes further significance when considered in the context of the slave caste children who would have been working for the landlords even as they are young without any wages in the late nineteenth century when the CMS missionaries had introduced elementary education. Even in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century most Dalit children irrespective of their religious background would be working for the landlord even before they became ten years old. However, in many places slave caste parents could send their children at least up to class two as the slave schools usually had only up to class two.

In one of the missionary reformist text published in 1928 we read the amazing story of a Pulaya girl, Aroogi who undergoes tremendous emotional transformation as she was enrolled in a missionary boarding school. In course of time, as the story progresses,

she over comes the alleged debilitating habits she had acquired by virtue of her being from the slave castes and starts scaling up in the transformative project of the missionaries ( W B. 1928). She becomes the most accomplished student of the boarding who becomes a model to every one as she excels in the morning prayers and in her case, extempore prayers. She prays for every inmate of the boarding, their teachers, and parents and for those who send money for them from abroad for their wellbeing and up keep. In the mission boarding school the slave caste children learn modern habits. This is the moment of modernity for them, which in many ways several thousands of slave castes have undergone. What I wish to argue here is that this resulted in tremendous transformation in their emotions also. In fact this transformation resulted in the substantial changes in their everyday social conduct, their habits, language and their being in the world. It was through such a process that they could evolve as modern individuals. Having stated the transformation through the civilizing mission I wish to focus on everyday aspects of structural violence to which the slave castes were subjected.

*Everyday life of Slaves: Violence and Survival*

Like any historical slave society, slaves in the pre-colonial Kerala society were also under the disciplinary regime of the masters. The everyday life of the slave castes was marked by violence let loose by the landlords. Such violence had obvious bearing on their emotional life. It may be noted that in many parts of Kerala violence against Dalits (as the former slave castes are referred to today) continued in a substantial manner even in the 1960's. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the upper caste landlords used instruments of violence to maintain their control over the society and in particularly on the slave castes who tilled their land. Living on the outer dykes of the paddy fields and on the fringes of the farmlands of the landlords, the slave castes had to depend on them for all most everything in life as they did not have access to resources for survival.

I wish to give here a few examples of violence that defined the life of slaves as well as the masters. I am referring here to the human sacrifice practiced in the wetland tracts of the Travancore region of Kerala where the victims used to be from the slave castes. There are innumerable cases where the spirit of the sacrificial victim returning to haunt the landlord and his family forcing him to worship the malevolent spirit as god. In several cases the landlords forced the slaves under their command to worship such spirits. In most cases

it was slave caste men who would be sacrificed as it take place in the context of the work such as rebuilding the bunds of the paddy fields breached in the floods. Usually in such arduous work in the wetland only men would be employed. Yet, we come across cases in the early nineteenth century in which three young girls from the slave caste (Pulayas) were sacrificed in a similar situation of breach of the outer bund of the paddy field, not very far from today's Kottayam town in Kerala<sup>29</sup>. In most cases the landlords out of the fear of the malevolent spirits of the murdered slaves would consecrate their spirits and worship them. There is in fact lot of emotions involved in it as noted by the missionary. In one such case the Pulaya slaves who worshiped such a murdered slave carried his image to the mission compound and explained the whole story to the missionary. In another case the murdered Pulaya slave, Palan used to be worshipped by the Nair landlord family and of late it has become a popular cult drawing on a large number of people across caste divide, which is naively referred to as an example of the religious and social harmony forgetting the fact that the apotheosis of Palan Pulayan hides the inhuman violence perpetrated on him by the landlords whom here serve by taking his life<sup>30</sup>.

In the course of our fieldwork we came across an interesting case of a family of Dalit Christians belonging to Salvation Army Church who narrated to us the horrible story of one of their forefathers who became a sacrificial victim. Yohannan Ayya, the Pastor, who narrated the event, told us how a Nair landlord in their village sacrificed his great grandfather's brother, which is not very far from the famous temple town of Vaikom<sup>31</sup>. Even after the family became Christian they have kept alive the memory of their ancestor who was sacrificed by the landlord. For them today, revisiting the cruelties of the past is more like conjuring the images of the past, the image of the sacrificial victim who demands, a peaceful after life. This circumstance is almost similar to the situation captured in the moving sentence of Michel-Rolph Trouillot in his path-breaking book, *Silencing the Past*. According to him, "slavery here is a ghost, both the past and the living presence; and the problem of historical representation is how to represent the ghost" (Trouillot, 146). In fact in the literary representation of the slave castes and subsequently Dalit communities in Kerala, the question of conjuring ghosts becomes a real challenge. In some of the recent novels published in Malayalam, in fact the long dead and gone characters actualize their lives as real flesh and blood human beings (Vasu, 2014). As they come back to fulfill the prematurely terminated lives. Vowing to actualize their prematurely terminated

lives they return with a vengeance, which is quite often a challenge to the domination that the upper caste used to exercise. In many cases the local people worshipped such liminal figures, which were quite often thought to be very powerful malevolent spirits.

In the background of the above discussion we may now turn to certain important aspects of everyday violence as it affected the lives of the former slave castes. Although they were producers of food crops and other agricultural products they hardly consumed staple food such as rice and other items of food that remained scarce commodities due to structural control on such products. Writings of missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century reproduced the statements of the slave caste people referring to the fact that they were never allowed to have rice except as a meager quantity that would be distributed to them as their wages at the end of the day. Processing it for daily consumption would not have left with them anything as saving for the future except during the harvesting season when they would get more than the usual quantities of raw paddy as their wage. Most slaves would have their evening meal only after processing such hard earned raw paddy in the night after they return home from work. It has been noted that the occasion of the preparation of the meals at night was also the time of creativity as men and women used to sing while engaged in the evening household chores. These could also be occasions of drunken bouts and violence. In many local communities where people have joined the Protestant Church we find the situation changing substantially leading to a disciplined life. Many have observed the remarkable changes in the life of the slaves who joined the Churches as they could hear the sounds of people reading scriptures as well as their prayers instead of the inchoate sounds of quarrels. These examples actually showed the new emotional world slowly developing among the slave castes.

Structural violence of the caste society was better illustrated by the fact that denial of food to the slave caste men and women who produced food and agricultural wealth was the norm. The nineteenth century missionary writings on slave castes more than any other source analyzed this situation and put across the fact that these men and women lived in perpetual hunger and want. The ethnographic field work that we conducted make clear the fact that slave caste men and woman were not allowed to wear proper clothes even in the 1940's. If they had managed somehow to buy white cloths they had to soil it or blacken it with carbon from the bottom of the cooking pots before they could wear them. Over the centuries it has been noted that the slave castes were never allowed to construct

houses. Their houses have been compared to something smaller than a large basket erected on the banks of the paddy fields or on the fringes of farmlands. This denial of the basic requirements of life, food, shelter and clothing was the most important instrument of structural violence of caste society that had a great impact on the emotions of the slave castes. In usual social science practices the problems discussed here does not figure as a significant research questions. However there is the genre of vernacular history where these issues spin different texts in which the emotional questions and affect emerge as significant category of analysis. In the next section I wish to analyse some of these texts to see how they bring in the question of affect.

*Vernacular Histories, Family history, Local history*

In fact there is an organic link between the different genres of history attempted by Dalits today and the writing on the emotional and affective dimensions of the slave caste communities in the long nineteenth century. I use the vernacular histories to speak of certain kind of histories that were influenced by the notions of social time that Dalit communities shared. I do not claim it to be unique to them as we would see Christian notions of genealogy and history influenced many such texts written by Dalit Christians (Patric, 2014). However, there is a curious mixing of such histories with the notions of the past that were made available by the missionary writings on the social experiences of the slave castes. Therefore in the vernacular histories that I am referring to there is a desire to make them as accurate as possible. Most of the texts begin from the days when ancestors of Dalits were free and had a social life that was devoid of any external control. Nevertheless, in the context of Kerala their fall and subsequent enslavement begins some wherein the 6-century Common Era. Thenceforth it is history of sufferings and oppression even as they had their social life. Obviously such a social life would have had complex features. They could also have had occasional joys in life. Arguably, the most significant defining feature of their life was the experience of subordination that they underwent in the form of slavery. Exploring the regional histories the authors of such texts talk about various aspects of slavery; sale and purchase of slaves, break up of families and the emotional violence that they were forced to undergo. In these histories such long nights of slavery never had any end or it seemed that it would never end. Hardly we find anybody in the local society coming up anti-slavery ideas. Therefore until the

coming of the protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century we do not come across any efforts at removing the fetters of the slave castes. It is in fact with the missionaries that the world changing events take place, in the case of slave castes. All vernacular histories that we refer to are in agreement with regard to this point. In the context of North Malabar the historian Stanley Patrick refers to the work of the Jesuit missionaries in the late 1930's as the shakers and movers of the case society that eventually brought liberation from caste slavery (Patric, 100-109). Similarly in the case of the local vernacular history of Kunju Kutty Kozhuvanal we observe the baptisms of Pulayas in the village of Anikkad that led to their liberation from caste slavery. However, the author is very cautious of the fact that in his village it was the traditional Syrian Christians, a dominant predominantly peasant caste in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that began the movement among the slave castes. Kozhuvanal is non-committal about the liberatory potential of such a move as the slave castes continued in the subordinated position, as it was Catholic Church dominated by the native Syrian Christian. In the Protestant churches in spite of caste segregation there was a possibility to acquire Biblical knowledge, which would have given them ideological power, however limited it must have been. It was not the case among the Catholics. However, what is significant from the point of view of emotion is the consistent effort by the enslaved people to overcome estrangement. Comparing these texts would be instructive for a couple of reasons. Both the texts deal with Catholic mission among the slave castes. However in the text of Kozhuvanal the Church is Syrian and controlled by them who had been exploiting slave castes for ages (Kozhuvanal, 2006). While in the North Malabar case the mission was exclusively addressing the question of slave castes and the missionaries were Italian Catholics. The absence of the local dominant caste in the church made it a space of freedom for those from the slave castes who joined the mission in North Malabar whereas in the example provided by Kozhuvanal such a possibility never evolved as the slave castes were dominated by the traditional upper caste Christians (Kozhuvanal, 11-12). The emotional estrangement continued and it was very difficult for Dalits to resolve it even in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the third text of this genre written by Peter Mathew as narrated by the protagonists we get interesting history of local Dalit Christian in Malabar who had settled down from the native state of Travancore beginning in the late 1940's. Therefore in this text we get the narratives of life before migration the southern native state of Travancore as well as their efforts at developing new social life



in the migrant villages in Malabar. There are narratives of travel to Malabar, efforts to settle down there and the caste segregation they had to face within the upper caste dominated Church. Eventually they move out of that Church and establish a new Church with the help of, Fr. Joseph Taffrel an Italian Jesuit missionary who was originally a missionary of the Chirakkal Mission of North Malabar<sup>32</sup>. This narrative is emotionally charged with people recollecting several events that had a decisive impact on their very survival as a social collective. The elder generation who migrated and worked hard for a new life look at their history from an emotional point of view imbuing their narratives with the days of caste slavery as they had learned from their parents and grandparents. Today all those informants who are above eighty-five years could provide information on the days when caste slavery was very live in spite of its abolition in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>33</sup>. In this example we find the interplay of caste, Christianity and the longing for liberation that spun the everyday life and emotions of Dalits. However the significant point of departure is the arrival of a Catholic Jesuit missionary who could turn the terms of the discourse. Today such histories in the vernacular mode are recalled in an emotional manner deploying the categories that were used by the missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Closely following this we may mention the significance of family histories that have been written by alit Christians. In the case of family histories also Christian notions of history influence them. As a result of it family genealogy becomes very crucial. However as distinct from the family histories of Syrian Christians in Kerala the few family histories of Dalit Christians in fact refer to the salve experience of their ancestors of for parents. In the case of one family history, Thekkethil family history, their history begins from the days of slavery the author's great great grandfather was bought from a village named Mathikad near Shertalai in Alleppy district and brought to a village near Kottayam where the slave and his wife was presented as a gift by the Nair landlord to his niece<sup>34</sup>. The salve couples eventually had children and all of them were working for the landlords. The second-generation children also marry and beget children and meanwhile in 1862 they were Baptised by the Anglican missionaries based in Kottayam who came to their village in Tiruvanchoor. As I argued earlier with their baptism they enter a different time and history, which the author of the family history tries to follow up in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to write the family history. When we analyze the narrative of the family history emotional aspects of the social and family life of the slave castes become the central concern of the text. However we could also discern the spirit of changing times and

their impact on the slave castes. Although they were brought in the vortex of social change we still are encountering “ordinary lives” in this family history (Pandian, 34-40). However, the narrative structure in fact follows the missionary genre as it is around the question of emotions and affect that the text had evolved.

While they also have undergone social change it was paradigmatic as the most significant event that marked mobility was the employment in the plantation as a middleman recruiting labour. However that was a significant moment as they could leapfrog from poverty that was rampant. In the course of the narrative we also note the instance of one of the family members moving away from agriculture labor to take up the job of a butcher in the weekend. In the mid twentieth century we find the authors children getting modern education. What I wish to emphasize here is the fact that, the emotional changes that were thought to be central to the missionary narratives on slave castes continued to remain as a significant elements in the narratives of Dalit Christians that available today as vernacular histories and family histories.

### *Conclusion*

The missionary narratives of intimate aspects of the life of the slave castes in Kerala open up several possibilities for understanding the social and emotional world of both the slave castes as well as the missionaries. As I have argued it was in the narratives of missionaries that for the first time the emotional world of the slaves in Kerala became available to the world at large. In fact many of these writings on the slave castes were published in the missionary journals that provided it a global reach. Personal and family lives of the slaves were reorganized and specific gender roles in the family became decisive. Yet we find the continuation of several aspects of their social life betraying the elements social life that bequeathed to them from their pre-Christian past. What in fact we find is interesting mix of several practices having a direct bearing in the emotions of the slave castes. In the contemporary studies on Christian missions the new emotional life that came into existence in the context of the missionary labor among the non-European societies assume significance. Following the experiences of the slave castes in Kerala, it is possible to identify new forms of emotional life evolving in the communities in the context of their becoming free from the control of upper caste land lords, their tormentors. It is in this context that they began to evolve as modern individuals and the emotional transformation was very decisive in marking changes.

## NOTES

1. The CMS missionary WS Hunt refers to the case of a Pulaya girl of who was sold to a European gentleman leaving for Java to accompany his family. However she escaped and pleaded the missionary Rev. Ridsdale and his wife for refuge and escaped from her fate of being taken out of Kerala. Although there is information of slaves being taken away from Kerala, we are yet to have a substantial study on this aspect of slavery. For details on Kali see Hunt, 1920: 161.
2. Missionaries were the keenest observers of the life and conditions of the slave castes and the information repeatedly occurring on Pulayas and Parayas including census reports and other government documents in Kerala, "they are regarded as so unclean that they are thought to carry pollution to their fellow creatures by contact and even by approach. They are so wretchedly provided with necessaries of life that the most loathsome things are a feast to them. Their person entirely at the disposal of their masters by who they are bought and sold like cattle and are often worse treated" were original written by Rev. George Matthan in his *Journal* for the quarter ending December 21, 1850. CMS Archives, University of Birmingham.
3. In the Tamil context Rupa Viswanath has shown the absolutely stunning practice of the Wesleyan missionary Rev. William Goudie who actually painstakingly inspected the shit of the Pariah families to assess the extent poverty as they had to subsist on a variety of cactus whose red seeds would not be digested. This was to measure the extent famine that mad the people ((Pariahs) to subsist on Cactus. For details see Viswanath, 2014:11.
4. For a critical reflection on the meaning of slavery to the contemporary generation of African- American see Hartman, 2008.
5. Mohan, 2015: 38-115; for an argument from the history of emotions see, Ray, 2003:124-29
6. Study of emotions has become central to the contemporary concerns of scholars studying history and anthropology of colonial missions. For a detailed discussion see, McLisky et.al. 2015; also see Cannel, 2006.
7. For a discussion on these issues see Jeffrey, 2014:214-47; for a critical Social Science Perspective on the same questions see Arunima, 2003.
8. For details see Mohan 2015:76-82.
9. For details see the John Hawksworth, Questions by a Missionary Answers by Travancore Slaves Taught in a School of the CM Society dated 19 August, 1853, manuscript true copy of the original C12/07/24.
10. For a reference to early documentation on slavery see, Narayanan, 1996:154.
11. See the extant Journals of the rev. George Matthan from 1846-69, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham
12. John Abbs, 'On Slavery in Travancore' Box No. 3, Folder No. 1 Jacket C,29 March,p.3
13. Slave schools were a world changing institution for the slave castes even as it remained as a humble thatch hut, similar to the huts of the slave castes.
14. In fact the missionaries encouraged the slaves to read the scriptures and we read from their reports the case of slaves who were capable of reading. We may recall here that in the tradition caste society slave castes were forbidden from reading.
15. For details see Mohan 2015.

16. Annual letter of John Hawksworth from Alleppey to the International Secretary of the CMS, 1861 detailing the work among the slave castes, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham
17. For details see the John Hawksworth, Questions by a Missionary Answers by Travancore Slaves Taught in a School of the CM Society dated 19 August, 1853, manuscript true copy of the original C12/07/24.
18. My field work among Dalit Christians in Karikkottakkary in Kannur district of Kerala shows that slaves used to be bought and sold in Kerala in the first decade of twentieth century.
19. In fact towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were lot of discussion on the education of children especially girl children. For example see. Bishop of Kottayam to Mr. Wigram, CMS International Secretariat, London, Document 36, July 4, 1918
20. Journal of Oommen Mammen for the Quarter ending June 30, 1856. Cavoor, 13<sup>th</sup> Lords Day, CMS Archives, University of Birmingham
21. This is a recurrent theme in the oral tradition of the slave castes and made into a theological category in the discourses of Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha, a Dalit religious and social movement. For details see, Mohan, 2015: 214-65.
22. For details see the John Hawksworth, Questions by a Missionary Answers by Travancore Slaves Taught in a School of the CM Society dated 19 August, 1853, manuscript true copy of the original C12/07/24.
23. Ibid.
24. For details see K M Abraham, *Thekkethi Kudumba Charithram* (Family History forthcoming, Kerala Council for Historical Research, Thiruvananthapuram)
25. For details see the John Hawksworth, Questions by a Missionary Answers by Travancore Slaves Taught in a School of the CM Society dated 19 August, 1853, manuscript true copy of the original C12/07/24
26. John Abbs, 'On Slavery in Travancore' Box No. 3, Folder No. 1 Jacket C, 29 March, 1847
27. Ibid
28. See for a similar argument from global missions, Jolly, 27-48
29. Balakrishnan Nair, U. Nare-Beli, *Calcutta review*, April, 1902
30. The Hindu Kerala Edition, Pathanamthitta District, July 30, 2015
31. Interview with Yohannan Ayya at his residence on December 2, 2013 as part of the Social Science Research Council New York funded project New Directions in the Study of Prayers.
32. Peter Mathew, Interviews with Dalit Christian elders of Kottukappara, Karikkottakkari and Parkkappara, Manuscript, 2015. pp.9-53
33. Ibid, pp.91-107
34. For details see K M Abraham, *Thekkethi Kudumba Charithram* (Family History forthcoming, Kerala Council for Historical Research, Thiruvananthapuram)

## REFERENCES

- Arunima, G. 2003. *There Comes Papa: Colonialism and the Transformation of Matriliney in Kerala, Malabar, c. 1850-1940*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan.
- Baker Jr., Henry. 1862. *The Hill Arayan's of Travancore and the Progress of Christianity among Them*. London: Werthiem Macintosh & Hunt.

- Cannel, Fenella. 2006. ed. *Anthropology of Christianity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Day, Francis. 2006[1863]). *Land of the Perumals: or Cochin its Past and its Present*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. 1903[1996]. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: The Modern Library.
- Hartman, Saidiya. 2008. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York: Faber, Straus and Giroux.
- Hunt, W.S. 1920. *The Anglican Church in Travancore and Cochin, 1816-1916*. Vol. I. Kottayam: Church Missionary Society Press.
- Jeffrey, Robin. 2014. *The Decline of Nair Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore 1847-1908*. New Delhi: Manohar.
- John, Mariamma. 1998. *Manikkam Pennu*. Changanassery: Manusham.
- Jolly, Margaret. 1991. "To save the Girls for Brighter and Better Lives': Presbyterian Missions and Women in South of Vanuatu: 1848-1870". *The Journal of Pacific History*. Vol.26, No. 1 (January) pp. 27-48.
- Kozhuvanal, Kunjukutty. 2006. *Anickadu Adimajanathayum Lekhu Charithravum*. Anickadu: Indian Education Development Charitable Society
- Kusuman, K.K. 1973. *Slavery in Travancore*. Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society.
- Logan, William. 1989[1887]. *Malabar*. Madras: Asian Education Services.
- Major, Andrea. 2012. *Slavery, Abolitionism and Empire in India 1772-1843*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- McLisky, Claire. et.al. 2015. eds. *Emotions and Christian Missions: Historical Perspectives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mohan, P. Sanal. 2015. *Modernity of Slavery: Struggles against Caste Inequality in Colonial Kerala*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Narayanan, M.G.S. 1996. *Perumals of Kerala: Political and Social Conditions of Kerala under the Cera Perumals of Makotai, c.800 AD-1124 AD*. Calicut: Xavier Press.
- Pandian, M.S.S. 2008. "Writing Ordinary Lives", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 43. Issue No 38, 20 September. pp.34-40.
- Patric, Stanly. 2014. *Malabarile Dalith Dalith Christava Charithravum Varthamanavum*. Kochi: Viani Printings.
- Patterson, Orlando. 1982. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Ray, Rajat Kanta. 2003. *Exploring Emotional History: Gender, Mentality and Literature in the Indian Awakening*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Saradamony, K. 1980. *Emergence of a Slave Caste: Pulayats of Kerala*. New Delhi: People's Publishing House.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1995. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Vasu, Raju K. 2014. *Chavu thullal Kottayam*. DC Books.
- Viswanath, Rupa. 2014. *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion and the Social in Modern India*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- W B. 1928. *In A Tapioca Garden: The Story of an Outcaste Girl of Travancore*. London: CMS.