ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRARIAN STRUGGLES AND POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Chapter V

ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRARIAN STRUGGLES AND POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

The experiences of North Malabar show that it was the active involvement in the production process that had brought the women into the struggle. Similar view has been adopted by Tanika Sarkar. She states that women, who were not involved in the production process, stayed out of class struggle. Thus there seems to be then a definite equivalence between the potential for politicization and a direct involvement with the production process. Regarding the tribal women in North Bengal, Renu Chakravarthy states that they were active earning members as well as important political agitators.

The main object of this chapter is to analyse why so many women had participated in the struggle. First, the British administrative policies and their new revenue demands and the depression that occurred due to the world war created a crisis of subsistence. This subsistence problem had led them into the struggle. Even though some crisis had emerged in the pre-capitalist economy, the peculiar village social relations and the taras that

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2 Renu Chakravarthy, Communists in Indian Women's Movement, PPH, New Delhi, 1980.
existed in the village community had helped them to overcome the crisis. But the newly emerging situation, the only way before them to overcome the crisis was to take part in the struggle. Secondly, with the emergence of capitalism, the village production relations had come under money nexus and the concept of wage labour had been strengthened. Under this situation most of them went for outside labour and naturally this had led to the degradation of the kudi based economy. Thus the question of the break-up of kudis had made the women labourers to participate in the struggle.

It is an interesting fact that it was only after the formation of Malabar Karshaka Sangham, an All India Karshaka Sangham was organized at Lucknow in 1936. In those days the Karshaka Sangham had developed as a protest against janmis exploitation. And it had taught the peasants that they have to struggle against landlordism on the one side and imperialism on the other. Neeleswaram Raja, Kurumathoor Namboodiri, Karumarat Namboodiri, Kalliat Yagamanan, Karkkkattidam Nayanar, Koodali Nambiar, Vengayil Nayanar etc are some of the important janmis in North Malabar in which the Karshaka Sangham had raised their voice. Since for centuries the peasants had suffered insult and injuries at the hand of the landlords, the organizational work among the tenants was a difficult task for Karshaka Sangham. Besides this the conditions of serfdom and caste practices had enforced restrictions on them. There were references to numerous methods of torture by the landlords for extracting rents from the tenants. Andalat and K. Madhavan
has given ample examples in their work.

With the organization of *Karshaka Sangham*, the struggle against the landlordism had strengthened. The first regular unit of the *Karshaka Sangham* in North Malabar was founded at Karivelloor on September 1934. Similar units of *Karshaka Sangham* were organized at several villages of Malabar. On 1935 July, the Kolacheri *Karshaka Sangham* was organized at Naniyur in Vishnu Bharateeyan’s house, with Vishnu Bharateeyan as president and Keraleeyan as Secretary. The newly formed Kolacheri *Sangham* had raised its voice against Karumarat Illathu Namboodiri. After this the *Sangham* expanded its activities. The organization of the All India Kisan Sabha in April 11, 1936 by the congress socialists and communists with Swami Sahajananda Saraswathi as president and N.G. Ranga as secretary had greatly inspired the Malabar peasantry.

The hunger *jatha* organized by the leftists and *Karshaka Sangham*. In Malabar had conducted a march from Malabar to Madras and presented a

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4 Along with this period i.e., 1934-35. One *Kera Karshaka Sangham* was organized in Travancore, with Changanassery Parameswara Pillai and M.N. Govindan Nair as president and secretary respectively.


memorandum to the government regarding the poverty of the people. A pamphlet titled *pattinijatha* was distributed among the people. Even though the government did not accept the memorandum, the march through the villages aroused a spirit of co-operation and joint action among the peasants and workers for their common cause. On their way the *jatha* was received by the people from different parts. In order to receive the *jatha*, special meetings were conducted throughout Malabar. In the meeting, the leaders reminded them about the necessity of an organization. One of the meetings that was held at Westhill in Calicut was presided over by Dr. Chandu. In that meeting, Chandroth Kunjiraman addressed the women and talked to them about the necessity of an organization. In the same meeting, one student called N.K. Sunitha, bought the *jatha* pamphlet by auction. Besides, Smt. Kunjikkavamma sent a message to the participants of the *jatha* and sent one 'para' paddy for them. So the involvement and attitude of women towards the *jathas* and meetings shows that they were very much involved in the existing situation.

During the earlier period itself, the women were active participants in the struggle against untouchability and unapproachability and were active in the civil disobedience movement. They were active participants in the *Karshaka Sangham*. Interdinings were conducted in various villages. M.K. Parvathi remembers one such interdining that was conducted at  

7 *Mathrubhumi*, June 30, 1936.  
8 *Mathrubhumi*, July 10, 1936.
Puthiyavayal near Kutoor. She and C.P. Kunjatha participated in the procession conducted by the *Karshaka Sangham* against the *janmis*.

In order to expand *Karshaka Sangham* activities in Chirakkal taluk a conference was held at Parassinikadavu on First November, 1936 with A.K. Pillai as the president and this was one of the turning points of the *Karshaka Sangham* Malabar. In order to brake the barriers of caste, interdinning was also conducted along with this conference. Later the *Karshaka Sangham* had extended its activities at other taluks like Kottayam, Kurumbranad and Valluvanad.

The *All Malabar Karshaka Sangham* was organized in 1937 in Calicut with P. Narayanan Nair as president and K.A. Keraleeyan as secretary. Later the activities of the *Sangham* was shifted to Kalliaisseri. After that the *Sangham* intensified its activities by leading *jathas* to the respective areas and presenting grievances and demands of the peasants before the *janmis*. The *Mathrubhumi* news cites that women were also active in conducting meetings and *jathas*. Along with this period so many eviction had taken place and the eviction of Kidaran Chandu by the Alakkad Manipuzha Namboodiri was one of the evictions in Chirakkal Taluk.

The second *All Malabar Karshaka Sangham* was organized at Chevayoor, Calicut on December 18, 1938 and *jathas* from different parts

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9 Personal Interview with M.K. Parvathi Kotoor, on 19.3.03.

10 *Mathrubhumi*, September 22, 1934.
united at Calicut\textsuperscript{11}. When the peasants began to press for their demands, the Revenue Minister T. Prakasam visited all over Malabar and had demanded for the Malabar Tenancy Committee. When the \textit{Karshaka Sangham} was extending its activities, the government took repressive actions against the \textit{Karshaka Sangham} and charged several petty cases against the activists. Wherever the \textit{Karshaka Sangham} organized its meetings and conferences, a women conference was also organized under its purview. In the peasant women's conference that was held at Blathur on 17, January 1939, which was presided over by Ondan Thayamma, about five hundred women participated. On January 18, a peasant conference was held at Blathur and was presided by N.G. Ranga\textsuperscript{12}. In another conference which was held at Blathur on May, 1940 a separate women's conference was held\textsuperscript{13}. All these conferences show that from the very beginning itself, special conferences were conducted for women, which is a very clear indication of the fact that, from the very inception of the \textit{Karshaka Sangham} women were also actively involved along with men in all its activities.

   The second World War had led thousands of men and women into politics. The pro-war attitude of colonial Government had resulted in the resignation of congress ministry. And most of the congress leaders were arrested. The World War created the possible situation of starvation. At this

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Prabhatham}, December 19, 1938.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Mathrubhumi}, January 20, 1939.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Mathrubhumi}, May 5, 1940.
time the *janmis* exploitation increased. The *janmis* hoarded the food grains and decreased the ratio of grain that was given to the peasants as wages. During the war period the activities of *Karshaka Sangham* increased and it turned into militant organization. *Sangham* had conducted *jathas* in different parts and women's active involvement can be seen in this *jathas*. And in many places police had interfered in the meetings and *jathas*. And on December 1939 the Kerala Communist Party was organized at Pinarayi\(^{14}\). The Communist Party had mobilized the people and had brought peasant organizations and trade unions together for a united action.

When the World War crisis worsened the situation, the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC)\(^ {15}\) decided to observe 1940 September 15 as anti-repression day or protest day\(^ {16}\). For this purpose meetings were held at different places like Tellichery, Mattanur, Morazha, Papppinisseri Calicut etc. But the police had interfered in the meetings and in Tellichery two labourers named Abu and Chathukutty were killed. And at Morazha a Sub-Inspector was killed. Following this the *Karshaka Sangham* and KPCC was banned. And all of them went for underground activities.

North Malabar incidents prove that women were active in all the activities. The leaders took special interest in mobilizing women. K. Devayani remembers one incident in which P. Krishnapillai, asked her to

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\(^{15}\) Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee had formed in 1920.

take up the issues of women and to organize them\textsuperscript{17}. Besides these the male members of the Sangham also sent their wives and sisters to political classes under the assumption that if women were trained and sent out among the villages it would be useful for the party\textsuperscript{18}. In the study classes they talked about the existing situations like war, food crisis, \textit{janmis} exploitation etc. Most of the study classes were centered around village libraries and these village libraries played an important role in creating public opinion and spreading political ideas. In those days the state had burned the libraries in so many instances. This shows the importance of libraries. Navajeevan library at Eranjoli, Sri. Harshan Library at Kalliasseri, Velam at Mayyil etc are some of the libraries\textsuperscript{19}.

In those days \textit{punam} cultivation was the main source of livelihood of the tenants and when the relation between the \textit{janmis} and tenants worsened the \textit{janmis} stopped it. At this juncture the \textit{Karshaka Sangham} interfered in it and organized the people. In 1941, the tenants in Kurumbranad taluks like Perambra, Balussery, Kuthali, etc and on 1947 February 22, the tenants of Karakkatidam Nayanars in Ellaranji with the help of Sangham over powered


\textsuperscript{19}Personal Interview with Nellikka Atchuthan, librarian, Navajeevan Library, Eranjoli on 14.2.03 and with U. Kunjappa, Mayyil 21.9.02.
the *punam* cultivation. Following this, the Karakkatidam *janmis* destroyed the schools in Ellaranji and Blathur\(^{20}\).

The World War crisis had created the problem of food scarcity and it led to epidemics like cholera, typhoid etc. A lot of people died due to these epidemics. To overcome this situation, the *Karshaka Sangham* trained volunteers including women. Folk arts were initiated against hoarding etc. Mahila organizations played an important role in this. A lot of references about *Mahila Sangham* had been received. During that period there existed different *Mahila* organizations like *Desasevika Sangham*, *Bharatha Mahila Sangham*, *All Malabar Mahila Sangham*, *Kerala Mahila Sangham* etc. The reference of new nine members working committee including Mrs. Saradakrishnan, Devakipallam, V.P. Devaki, P.C. Karthiyanikutty, P. Yasodha, Mrs. K.N. Krishnan, Mrs. Battathiripad, Mrs. Kayar Narayanan has been given in *Mathrubhumi*. The main motive of this working committee was to organize an *All Malabar Mahila Sangham*\(^{21}\). The activities of *Mahila Sangham* varies regionally. During the World War period, when there emerged food deficiency, they took initiative to distribute food and medicine. They also worked against untouchability and unapproachability and had conducted signature campaign and collected funds for *Karshaka Sangham*.

\(^{20}\) Personal Interview with M.P. Narayanan Nambiar, Mangad, 15.11.02.

\(^{21}\) *Mathrubhumi*, June 20, 1940.
The *Karshaka Sangham* had special interest in conducting cultural programmes they had performed several art forms like *thira, theyyam, drama, kurathipattu, thacholikkali, kaikottikkali, kummi, kolkkali, poorakkali* etc. These were either conducted as a part of fund raising programmes or to make the people aware of the existing situation. Most of these programmes, were conducted as a part of festivals or *melas*. K. Janaki, P. Nani, Edoth Janaki, etc were some of them who had actively involved in the cultural programme. From 1942 onwards, the *Kerala Mahila Sangham* began to change into a communist organization. This was revealed from a resignation letter given by E. Ammukuttyamma. The *All Malabar Mahila Sangham* had worked along with *Karshaka Sangham* and actively participated in the *Karshaka Sangham* conferences and were had previously trained them for that purposes. In those days it was through pamphlets and newspapers like *Desabhimani* that the *Sangham* spread its ideas. In order to raise its fund, the *Deshabhimani* had conducted *melas* all over and they had received good response from the labourers. Most of them had contributed in kind. One of the striking contribution was Palora Matha’s contribution of her only calf. She belongs to Peravur and later she also worked along with A.K. Gopalan

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22 *Mathrubhumi*, December 5, 1942.

23 Personal Interview with Koliyadan Kunjikrishanan Nair, Nandavanam, on 26.3.03.

24 Personal Interview with P. Krishnan Chirakkuni, on 14.2.03.
in the fund raising programme. Cheriyamma\textsuperscript{25} from Kavumbayi, Ponnammada Chemmaruthi from Puliyanoor, Erikkulam Kaarichi, Komathupoyil Manikam from Mokeri had also worked in the \textit{Deshabhimani} fund raising programme\textsuperscript{26}. A \textit{mela} was also organized at Karivelloor which can discussed later.

\textit{Thacholikkali} was another important folk art which was widely used in Badagara, Onchiyam areas.\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Poorakali} was widely spread in Chirakkal Taluk. The main centre of \textit{poorakkali} was Parassinikkadavu, here a political \textit{Poorakali} troop was organized. In Parassinikadavu A. K. Kuttiyappa was the \textit{poorakali} Panikkar and C. Koran master was the composer of \textit{poorakali} songs. This troop had toured in various parts and had performed the art at Bombay party conference. Along with this troop the women also accompanied. Chandroth Yasodha the sister of Koran Master, Kannoth Karthiyayani, Kannoth Lakshmi, Comrade Nani etc. were some among them. \textit{Poorakkali} was enough to raise voice against janmis exploitation\textsuperscript{28}

\[Kattakalathilekethikkunnu,\]
\[Athilpatteedum nellumedichidunnu,\]
\[Mediyunakki, podi kalanju\]

\textsuperscript{25} Personal Interview with E.K. Narayanan Nambiar, Kavumbayil, on 11.2.03.
\textsuperscript{26} Personal Interview with K.P. Balan, Mokeri, 14.8.02.
\textsuperscript{27} Personal Interview with Kumaran, Onchiyam on 10.8. 02.
\textsuperscript{28} Personal Interview with C. V. Krishnan, Appakkutty Koliyatt Valappil, Chandorth Yasodha, Parassinikkadavu, on 18.11.02.
Janmikkuvaramalakkuvanai
Anthakarmikkupavasicheeduvanai
Pakaliravum, dinampakalum paniyeduthu,
Prathipalamam potta kinaram
Paravazhiyai janmimar thattiyeduthidunnu

The lines say that the tenants did hard labour day and night, but the fruits of the labour were denied to them. They were cheated using fake measuring devices.

P.M. Madhavi (Karinchi) was one of the founding members of the Parassinikadavu Mahila Sangham. She became the participant of the Kozhikode communist party conference that was held in 1943 and besides this she had also participated in several Karshaka Sanagam conferences. She was one of the main supporters of the Karshaka Sangham in Parassinikadavu29. Chandroth Madhavi (Paidal) was another Mahila Sangham worker in Parassinikkadavu. She worked along with P. Yasodha, C.V. Krishnan and others. In connection with the Karshaka Sangham conferences and also as a part of fund raising programmes they had collected coconut, pidiyari (a fistful of rice) from different houses. In most cases pidiyari was collected in weekends. This collection did help them to keep contact with the women in different areas and make them aware of the existing political

29 Personal Interview with K. Janaki, Bakkalam, on 10.2.03; Pinarayi-Parappuram... Op.Cit., p.220.
P. Yasodha was the founding members of the Keecheri Mahila Sangham that was organized in 1937 and she become a teacher at the age of fifteen and was one of the first teacher of Kallisserry South L.P. School. She was an active communist party worker and acted as the local correspondent of the Deshabhimani daily. As a correspondent she had made direct contact with different people. She visited many areas of agrarian struggles like Kayyur, Kandakkai, Punnappra-Vayalar etc and clearly depicts her experiences in her editorial column in a different angle. As a correspondent, a striking event in her life was her visit and interaction with the four Kayyur comrades who where sentenced to death after Kayyur incident. These four comrades regretted that the women had no freedom and they asked the women to come forward. They added that before their death, they were very happy to know the fact that Kerala women also came forward for struggle. But the interesting fact is that, although this statement of Kayyur comrades, reported by Yasodha, is quoted by many prominent Kerala historians, they

30 Personal Interview with Chandroth Madhavi, Parassinikkadavu, on 18.11.02; K. Janaki Bakkalam on 10.2.03.

31 Personal Interview with P. Yasodha Kalyasseri on 2001.

32 These comrades were sentenced for having joined a riot in the Kayyur village on the occasion of an anti-imperialist procession on 28th March 1941 in which a policeman was killed. Later they were hanged on 29th March 1943 at the Kannur Jail.

33 Deshabhimani, April 11, 1943.
never mentioned the identify of the reporter. Because of her active work she was attacked by the local gundas at her residence. After this attack she was doing clandestine work for three years. While she was hiding herself, her name was Devaki and during this period she made wide contacts with many prominent party leaders. On 1952 under the initiative of the party Yasodha married Kanthalat Kunjambu, who was her fellow comrade and they had no issues. She traveled widely in different parts and had attended several national conferences.

A Mahila Sangham was organized at Mokeri, Calicut under the leadership of V.P. Ammalu. She was the local correspondent in that area. During that period, under the leadership of Komattupoyil Manikkamma and Kotta Achama a Mahila Sangham was organized at Komattupoyil34. In those days, the Mahila Sangham focused on major women issues like education, employment etc.

From 1942 onwards K. Janaki from Bakkalam became the active Mahila Sangham worker in Bakkalam-Morazha area and also became a teacher. She spread the ideas of Karshaka Sangham along with P. Yasodha and had supplied party pamphlets in fairs and festivals. She had performed several dramas as a part of the cultural programmes organized on different fund raising programme. She had married Kottayadan Raghavan an active Sangham worker35. Likewise, P. Nani from Morazha also worked along with

34 Personal Interview with K.P. Balan, Mokeri, on 14.8.02.
35 Personal Interview with K. Janaki, Bakkalam, on 10.2.03
K. Janaki, P. Devaki, G. Janaki etc, Nani belonged to an agricultural labour class and she came forward through the *Bala Sangham*. She was one of the earliest teachers in Morazha, who had lead the cultural programmes of the *Desabhimani* fund raising procession. As a part of it she had conducted a female drama. Most of these dramas depicted the exploitation of the *janmis* and in those days it was unthinkable for women to act in dramas. But these women came forward and enlightened others. She actively participated in preparing and supplying the printed matters and later married C.H. Narayanan Nambiar, a fellow comrade belonging to upper class. Thus through intercaste marriage they were fighting against existing customs\(^{36}\). In Taliparambu farka, Edoth Janaki had played a major role in organizing *Mahila Sangham*. During the Japanese invasion period, several *Japvirudha mela* was organized and at that instance Edoth Janaki, along with T. Janaki had organized the women in that area and had created opinions against the invaders of Japan. She has acted the secretary of Chirakkal Taluk *Mahila Sangham*\(^{37}\).

Likewise, N.K. Nandini was *Mahila Sangham* worker in Chovva and had acted as the worker of Vanitha Industrial association\(^{38}\). K.T. Janaki from Manjodi was yet another *Mahila Sangham* worker. She had participated in different state conferences that was conducted in different places like

\(^{36}\) Personal Interview with P. Nani, Morazha, on 10.2.03.

\(^{37}\) Personal Interview with Edoth Janaki, on 15.3.03.

\(^{38}\) Personal Interview with N.K. Nandini, Puduppadi, 1.3.03.
Kannur, Palghat, Tellichery etc. during the period of 1952 she played her role as the district board member. She was a needle work teacher and had worked with P. Yasodha and conducted needle work class for women at Mahe. And also participated in the signature campaign following the KPR Gopalan’s Punishment 39.

A.V. Janaki from Peralam near Karivelloor had also worked along with P. Yasodha and had attended Karshaka Sangham conferences held at Kottayam. She had worked along with Thankamma Krishna Pillai, Kalyanamma, P.C. Karthiyayanikutty etc. And also supplied printed matters 40. Kadingiyil Narayani was one of the active Mahila Sangham workers belonging to a janmi family in Karivelloor. Important political leaders became regular visitors of her house and their political dialogues and political work stirred her consciousness 41.

P.C. Karthiyayanikutty had been one of the active Mahila Sangham leaders and she belonged to a janmi family and came forward under the inspiration of her husband T.S. Tirumumbu, who was a famous Karshaka Sangham leader. She became the participant of the famous Kodakkat Karshaka Sangham conference and had participated in the interdinings. She had widely inspired women in different villages through her speeches at a period

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39 Personal Interview with K.T. Janaki, Manjodi, 14.2.03.
40 Personal Interview with A.V. Janaki, Peralam, on 26.9.02.
41 Personal Interview with Kadingiyil Narayani, Karivelloor, on 5.4.03.
when it was unthinkable for women to speak at a public platform. In the Cheemeni Tholvirakusamaram, even though she does not participate under the Mahila Sangham, she played an important role in organizing women\textsuperscript{42}. C. Lakshmikutty\textsuperscript{43} was one of the important organizers of Teacher's Union and worked along with Achayi teacher. Her husband T.C. Narayanan Nambiar was the president of Chirakkal Taluk Teacher's Union. Along with Thankamma Krishnapilla, K. Devayani, Priyadutta and so on, she had participated in the Kozhikode Commune. The main centre of the Mahila Sangham in Kozhikode was the house of advocate Tharammal Krishnan. K.O. Ambujakshi\textsuperscript{44} from Vesala, M.K. Parvathi and C.P. Kunjatha from Eramam, K. Saradha and Thondikkot Janaki from Chirakkuni\textsuperscript{45}, Chemmaruthi from Kayoor etc are some of the other Mahila Sangham workers.

The problem of food crisis had demanded the Karshaka Sangham to initiate new techniques of struggle. And vihittavan vilakoyyum was their main slogan during this period. When the tenants were not allowed to reap their crops, the Karshaka Sangham had harvested the paddy and had taken the reaped crop to the tenants house. In the paddy harvesting struggles known as vilakoittu samaram a large number of women had participated directly. Besides paddy, they also cut grass from the fields called grass

\textsuperscript{42} Personal Interview with P.C. Karthiyayanikutty, Pilikkode, on 5.4.04.

\textsuperscript{43} Personal Interview with C. Lakshmikutty, Kolacheri, on 20.11.02.

\textsuperscript{44} Personal Interview with K.O. Ambujakshi, Vesala, on 19.11.02.

\textsuperscript{45} Personal Interview with P. Krishnan, Chirakkuni, on 14.02.03.
cutting or pullupari samaram. In the nelledukkal samarams wide participation of women could be seen. The nelledukkal samaram often ended in clashes with the police. The Palayi, Udinoor, Madikkai, Basmayithar, Puliyanoor etc. were the important harvesting struggle in which the Karshaka Sangham put forth their slogan vitthittavan vilakoyyum. Most of the struggle had taken place when the janmis of that area did not allow the tenants to reap crops.

One such harvest had take place in Palayi, a place near Kayyur. A major portion of land in Palayi was under Neeleswaram Raja. On February 1941, the Karshaka Sangham members in Palayi had harvested the crop of Tandalat Ambadi and Kovval Ambadi, when the janmi Ayala Valappil Kunjikrishnan Nambiar did not allow them to harvest the crop46. Kunjamma, one of the participants of the struggle remembers that along with the men, women like Karippiyamma and others also participated in the harvest47. Following this the janmi had filed a petition against the Karshaka Sangham. Similar type of struggles had taken place in Udinoor48. It was a place near Kanjargad and in the Udinoor harvest of September, 3, 1942, the Karshaka Sangham had harvested Vengalat Kunjambu Nairs field. Kizhakool Lakshmi,
tells that on the previous night itself all the members of the *Karshaka Sangham* in the nearby places gathered at the Thadiyan Kovval L.P. School. She further tells that it was the women who took initiative to collect sickles from neighbouring areas and hoarded the sickles in the paddy field⁴⁹. According to Kolavalappil Parvathi⁵⁰, another participant tells that after harvesting they had reaped the crop and threshed it and brought to their own homes⁵¹.

In the Puliyanoor harvesting struggle of 1944, about hundred women participated. This was one of the harvests in which large number of women participated⁵². According to Meethale Purayil Kunjatha, one of the participants of the struggle, leaders like Subrahmania Tirumumbu, M.G. Kammat, A.V. Kunjambu, V.V. Kunjambu, K.A. Keraleeyan etc had visited their village and stayed in Kovval Gopalan’s house. These leaders inspired them to start struggle against the *janmis*. During that period, most of the land in that area was under the Thazhakat Devaswam. She further tells us that while they were harvesting the paddy, the police at first tried to stop them. But when the peasant women stood firmly, the police retreated. After the harvest the police arrested thirteen male members including her brother

⁴⁹ Personal Interview with Kizhakool Lakshmi, Udinoor, on 10.4.04.

⁵⁰ Kizhakool Lakshmi, Thattakod Puravankara Ammaru, Kanichu Kulangara Uchira, Theke Vengalat Meenakshi etc are the other participants of this struggle.

⁵¹ Personal Interview with Kolavalappil Parvathi, Udinoor, on 10.4.04.

Ambadi and put them in Jail for nine months\textsuperscript{53}.

In 1941 and in 1948 the tenants of Timiri harvested the crops\textsuperscript{54}. In the 1948 Timiri harvest, the women were brought before the court. Out of the twenty eight, eight of them were women. On 1948 Unniyadan Narayanan Nair, the Karanavar of Thazhakatmana and also the leader of Karshaka Sangham was imprisoned. Following his imprisonment only three female members were left in his \textit{mana}. At that instance, the congress leader Unnikrishnaturumumbu tried to prevent them from harvesting their crop. Under this circumstance, Nangayikutty one of the members of the \textit{mana} along with others\textsuperscript{55} had harvested the crop even though the police interfered\textsuperscript{56}.

Kattacheri was a place near Karivelloor and on 1942 the Karshaka Sangham heard that one Koran Panikkar had forcibly harvested the crop of a

\textsuperscript{53} Personal Interview with Meethale Kunjatha, Chandran, Puliyannoor, on 9.4.04.; Along with her Cherikkal Chemmaruthi, Cherikkal Kaarichi, Puthiyapurayil Cheriya, Kalakarante Manikam, C.V. Cheriya, C.V. Kunja, C.V. Kunjamma, Thazhathu Veetil Parvathi, Kunjipurayil Chettichi, T.V. Kunjanga, Padinjaravalappil Madhavi, Puthiyaveetil Madhavi, Vannathadichi Karichi etc had been reaped the crops.


\textsuperscript{55} Like Poochakadichi Uchira, Pandara Purayil Eruvadi, Manikam, Pothatti Umbichi, Palerikumba, Mekkara Meenakshi, Aatakkari Bhavani, Poduvatti Parvathi etc.

\textsuperscript{56} Personal Interview with V. Kammaran, Sridevikuttyamma, P. Kunjambu, Timiri, on 5.4.04.
poor tenant Kaadakannan. Then the Sangham held a meeting and decided to reap the crop of Koran Panikkar. Thotoon Veetil Krishnan tells that people from nearby places gathered and harvested the crop and in the harvesting, along with them, women like V.V. Mani, V.V. Unnagamma and so on. had actively participated\textsuperscript{57}.

In the Eleri\textsuperscript{58} harvest, a large number of women’s participation can be seen. Valliyot Mani, one of the participants tells us that, on the previous night itself, a large number of women from distant places like Karyankode, Mayeecha etc had gathered at different houses in Eleri. And on the next day they reaped the crop of Veluthedan Kelu Nair and had taken the crop to their house\textsuperscript{59}. Podora Kunjambu tells us\textsuperscript{60} the names of the other participants. Thazheveetil Kaarichi, one of the participants, went for the harvest with her three month child and kept her child near the field while they reaped\textsuperscript{61}.

Grass cutting struggle or pullupari samaram was another type of

\textsuperscript{57} Personal Interview, with Thotoonveetil Krishnan, Karivelloor, on 2.4.03.

\textsuperscript{58} For more reference about Eleri see K. Madhavan, Oru Gandhian ...Op. Cit., p. 196.

\textsuperscript{59} Personal Interview, with Valliyot Mani, Katoor Parvathi, Chirutheyi, Thambayi, Edoloth Chiri, Churikad Cheriya on 7.4.03 to 8.4.03; Valliyotmani, Valliyot Paatti, Edoloth Chiri, Thottiyil Cheriya, Katoor Parvathi, Katoor Madhavi, Kuruvatee Mani, Kuruvatee Parvathi, Valliyot Cheriya, Valliyot Lakshmi, Tazheveetil Karichi etc were the participants.

\textsuperscript{60} Personal Interview with Podora Kunjambu, Eleri, on 4.4.03.

\textsuperscript{61} Personal Interview with Thazheveetil Kaarichi, Eleri, on 7.4.03.
struggle in which women were actively involved. Kandakkai pullupari samaram, Peringome pullupari samaram, etc were some of them. During that period the tenants thatched the roof of their house by using particular grass that was thickly grown in barren lands. When the relation between the janmis and tenants worsened, the tenants were no longer allowed to cut those grass. It was the duty of women to collect those grass and naturally they took initiative to start the struggle. It shows that they participated in the struggle when the issues related to their direct livelihoods like paddy, manure, etc had been questioned. So they came forward in order to protest such injustice towards them.

The Peringome Vayakkara grass cutting struggle was conducted in 1946 November 23. According to Pilakoo Meenakshi and Pilakoo Chiri, the participants of this struggle, they had cut the grass from Echilampara. And along with them Maniyerilakshmi, Puthiyaveetil Lakshmi, Avarottinarayani, Kana Cheriya etc, had cut the grass from Echilampara.

The Kandakkai grass cutting struggle of December, 19, 1946 was one of the important struggle. When E.P. Govindan Namibiar, the Assistant of Karakkatidam Nayanar had restricted the peasants from cutting grass, the peasants violated this by jointly cutting grass from Nambiars land. The women participants were Vayalprathu Kunjathi, Edavan parvathi, Maruthiyot Thambayi, Cheeyayi, M.V. Devaki, P.K. Kunjakkamma, Cheriya,

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62 Personal Interview with Pilakoo Meenakshi and Pilakoo Chiri, Chandravayal on 27.3.03.
P.K. Lakshmi, Sridevi etc. The infuriated *janmi* filed a petition against them and the *MSP* brutally attacked the tenant’s house, destroyed their property and injuring them. When the *janmis* agents molested their life and property, P.K. Kunjakkamma, a tenant women led a procession of women to the *janmis* house on January, 22, 1947. In their procession, they carried the destroyed pots and vessels. This procession was called *Kalamkettu*. By carrying the destroyed household articles, the women expressed their anger towards the *janmi*. According to Meenakshi, the daughter of one of the participants, on the next day, the *MSP* caught three women belonging to this group. They were taken to *janmi*’s house and were asked them to remove the destroyed things but they refused. The infuriated *janmi* filed a petition against the peasants and along with men, they arrested Kunjakkamma on February 18, 194763.

The Deshabhimani daily of that period provides details regarding the sufferings of the people in Kandakkai, on which P. Yasodha64 was the reporter. As a local correspondent she made direct contact with different people. She reported that, in the Kandakkai village, the *MSP* had brutally attacked the tenants and destroyed their and property. She had visited Kunjakamma, one of the leaders of the Kandakkai struggle, and fourteen

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64 One of the founding member of the Mahila *Sangham* in Kalliasserri.
year old Kunjiraman. Kunjiraman, wrote and displayed a board that the MSP should not attack poor people. Thus through her reports Yasodha clearly depicts the courage of Kandakkai tenants.

Similar types of kalamkettu had taken place in Uduma in 1948. In Uduma when the MSP destroyed their property a 15 year old girl named Santha led a procession to the magistrate court along with Pullaikodi Chirutha and other twenty six women. When the MSP had destroyed their property, the women in Aalai under the leadership of Kunjammar led a procession to the congress president’s house. In the Aalai kalamkettu along with Kunjammar, Chaappayil Linkamma, Vadakkekara Manikam, Kallinkeel Ammara, Karuvakkal Kunjatha, Aalai Vellachi, CheriyoL, Vazhakkodacchi Kumba, etc.

Like the paddy harvesting struggle, women’s participated in the paddy grabbing i.e., capturing paddy forcibly from janmis godowns or preventing the agents of the janmis from capturing paddy also. In the paddy grabbing struggle, the Karshaka Sangham grabbed paddy from janmis store houses or grabbed paddy while the janmis agents collected the rents. The Karshaka Sangham had grabbed paddy from different janmis like Kunnath

65 Deshabhimani, September 7, 1947.

66 Personal Interview with P.P. Kunjiraman, Kandakkai, 23.9.02.


68 V. Kuttiiyan (ed.). Nerippu, Madikkai Grama Panchayat, Development Programme, 2004, p.138, and Personal interview with Panakool Veetil Ammaramma, V. Kotti, V.V. Kaarichi, Chappayil Ammu, Aalai, on 6.4.04.
Illam, Kanjirapalli Illam, Elaneer Madam from Kazarakode, Kundulayar from Pulloor, Kakkothayar from Madikkai, Karinthalam Raman, Kottayil Raman from Eleri.

On December, 20, 1946 this type of paddy procuring had taken place in Kuniyan, Karivelloor. When the women in Karivelloor heard about Kuniyan action, a group of them, V.V. Mani, V.V. Unnagamma, M.V. Parvathi, M.V. Kalyani, Aithale Veetil Lakshmi, K. Devayani etc rushed to the spot with their sickles but they were stopped by the men.

In Tillenkeri, when the Kottayam Rajas agents had taken the rented paddy to Koothuparamba, Karshaka Sangham members stopped the vehicle of the paddy and distributed it among the people following this struggle in 1948, a large number of men were arrested including old men. At this instance a group of old women labourers had decided to stop the MSP van that containing the arrested persons. For this purpose they waited for the MSP vehicle in a particular junction. As soon as the group heard of the noise of the vehicle, they rushed to the spot. But the MSP heard of their plan

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69 Personal Interview with V.V. Manikkam, V.V. Sarojini, M.V. Kalyani and Thotton Veetil Krishnan, Karivelloor on 2.4.03; K. Devayani’s Chorayum Kaneerum Nananja Vazhikal, Chintha Publications, Trivandrum, p.45.

70 Including Kallikalyani, Kadamberi Chappila, Narothu Cheerutti, Kelembeth Kunjimanikkam and Kelambeth Matha along with Narothu Kunji Kannan and others

71 During war years, the Malabar Special Police was largely occupied in guarding vulnerable points. Four companies of MSP continued to be on special duty throughout the year in North Malabar to combat communist activities.
and took precaution against this attempt. Here, they were even ready for open clashes with police. A similar incident was cited in Telangana struggle. In Penukonda, two hundred peasant women stood together and chased the police out of village. In Appajipet, women encircled a police van, attacked the police with pestles and chilly powder and secured the release of their Sangham activists.

In Erikkulam, when the Karshaka Sangham marched to Uravil Kakkothayar’s house to grab paddy, the frightened janmi permitted them. At the same time the janmi secretly transported the paddy to Neeleswaram. At this instance, including some women like Thalayat Korambi, Umbichi, Kunjammara Erikkulam Karichi, etc. had grabbed the paddy near Erikkulam rock.

Following the Kavumbayi paddy grabbing on December 30, 1946 the landlords let loose oppressive measures with the help of MSP. When their oppression increased, the tenants, including women conducted a procession infront of the Erikoor police station. Another reference about paddy grabbing can be seen in A.C. Kannan Nair’s diary. He had watched a group of people including men, women and children armed with sticks had

72 Personal Interview with Naroth Kallu, Kelambeth Janaki and Madhavi, Velakki Cheerutti, Chalil Janaki, Kalli Kunjikannan, Karathan Janaki, Tillenkeri, on 25.4.03.

73 Vasantha Kannabiran et.al., That Magic..., Op.Cit, p.188.

74 Personal Interview with A.V. Atchuthan, Erikkulam, on 11.4.04.

marched to the landlord named Kundalayar\textsuperscript{76}.

Thus throughout the villages the relation between the \textit{janmi} and peasants became strained. The cordial relations that existed in the earlier period did not remain. The \textit{janmi} imposed many restrictions upon them. He sent his agents to tenants and they punished the tenants even for minor things. Whenever the tenants questioned them, they hanged the bark of certain trees (\textit{thol}) on tenants well or house. After putting \textit{thol}, the tenants were not allowed to touch that thing\textsuperscript{77}. When the tenants went for another \textit{janmis}, work the \textit{janmis} did not permit him further work. Restriction was imposed even on the collection of firewood and fodder\textsuperscript{78}. Under such situations, the tenants began to resist. During that period a lot of women were involved in the collection of \textit{thol} and this was one of their major sources of income\textsuperscript{79}. In the \textit{Tholvirakusamaram}, that took place in Kasargod in 1946 November 15, hundreds of women had participated\textsuperscript{80}. This can be cited as one of the instances in which women labourers directly led an agitation. This struggle took place when the women labourers were forcibly prevented from

\begin{itemize}
\item K.K.N. Kurup, \textit{A.C. Kannan Nair; A Study} (Dairies of A.C. Kannan Nair) Mal, State Institute of Languages, Kerala, Trivandrum, 1985, p. 159.
\item Personal Interview with Kizhakool Lakshmi, Udinoor, on 10.4.04.
\item Personal Interview with Kaarichi, Madikkai, on 11.4.04.
\item Mathrubhumi, Personal Interview with E.T. Karthiyayani, Cheruvathoor, on 26.3.03.
\end{itemize}
entering the forest and collecting firewood and fodder as that area was transferred to Joseph Kottukappalli a planter for setting up an estate. The women labourers demanding their rights for entering the forests and forcibly entered the forest breaking the barricades by singing the song.

\begin{verbatim}
Tholum virakum Nangal edukkum
Kalan vannu thaduthennalum
Aarum swantham Nediyathella
Varidipole kidakkum vipinam
Krishiavashyathinnayi tholum,
Veetavashyathinnayi virakum
Nangaledukkum kaattilninnu
Engathil samsayamarkkum venda
\end{verbatim}

This song had been sung when the landlord prohibiting them from taking firewood and barks from the forest.

After this, there was brutal police oppression in which one woman was sexually abused; another was molested and others were thoroughly beaten up. Kutoor Paattiyamma played an important role in leading this struggle\textsuperscript{81}. According to E. T. Karthiyani and C. Madhavi, some participants of this struggle, women from nearby villages like Kodakkad, Puthhilot, Karivelloor, Puliyanoor, Timiri Klayikode, Cheruvathur etc. had been

participated in this struggle\textsuperscript{82}.

They carried party publications secretly and distributed it day and night. This was the case of Pulikkodon Veetil Kunjammaramma\textsuperscript{83}. During that period, she like a man, wore shirts and dhotis and carried the pamphlets at night. They were able to travel alone even at night. Here the existing norms about women's travel at night was questioned. It was the women who took initiative to sell party literature during Sangham meetings and other festive occasions. Women's involvement in agrarian struggle has to be understood as part of anger class and also their frustration against janmis and their increasing awareness mediated by socio-economic situation.

Most of the villages came under the control of punitive police and Malabar Special Police (MSP) After the agrarian struggles most of the male members of the Karshaka Sangham had gone to forest because of the severe brutalities and atrocities from the hands of the janmis and authorities. At this instance the agrarian women struggled hard to protect their family. Besides these they were involved in supporting the Sangham worker's by supplying printed matters, food and shelter. In these activities, some of them were even put behind bars. There was brutal police repression in which they were sexually abused and molested and they were thoroughly beaten up. The women from different agrarian villages tells us about the cruelties that they

\textsuperscript{82} Personal Interview with C. Madhavi, Nandavanam on 26.3.03.

\textsuperscript{83} Personal interview with Pulikkodon Veetil Kunjammaramma, Madikkai, on 6.4. 04.
had suffered in those days.

After the Palayi harvesting struggle on 12th March 1941, the *Karshaka Sangham* in Kayyur had decided to organize a procession against the existing situation. Following the police interference in the procession, one constable was stoned to death by the crowd. Vast arrests took place and four of them were sentenced to death. After this incident this village had come under police control84. The days of terror continued for several months in Kayyur Village. At this Juncture all the *Sangham* members had gone to forest for shelter. Most of the *Karshaka Sangham* leaders admitted that in those days it was due to the women's prudence and constant support that they survived. Kanisan Veetil Mani, A.C.Paatta, Koyithattil Paru, K.V. Manikkam, Chemmaruthi, Chirutha, Kunjamina etc are some of them who had protected the *Sangham* in Kayyur. Subrahmanya Shenoy, one of the leaders of the *Karshaka Sangham* still remembers one Kunjamina Umma, who had helped him by supplying rice flakes and water. She makes her livelihood by husking paddy and rice flake. And following the riot her son Aboobacker was hanged85. K.V. Mani tells us, how the police had brutally lathicharged her while she was sleeping. Besides that the MSP had lathicharged her husband Madathil Kunji Raman and others. They had lathicharged Madathil Appu

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85 Personal Interview with Subrahmania Shenoy, Payyannur, on 18.9.02
while he was sleeping in his teashop on the basis of a false message\textsuperscript{86}. Both Kanisan Veetil Mani and her neighbour A.C. Paatta had talked about E.K. Nayanar who had been in their house in underground. According to Mani, Nayanar's arrival was like lightening and nobody had known about his arrival and departure. He always came with a bag full of books. Her husband Ambu Jyolsyan was an active \textit{Karshaka Sangham} worker and had participated in the struggles. A.C. Patta had provided shelter to leaders like K.T. Kammaran, E.K. Nayanar etc. At that time when the \textit{MSP} had heard that she had provided shelter to K.T. Kammaran, they brutally beat her even though her child was up in her arms. She says the 'the golden coloured Nayanar has turned into charcoal during his stay in their house' Koyithattilparu had provided food to the \textit{Sangham} workers in the forest in the disguise of collecting manure and firewood in the forest. Whenever the \textit{Karshaka Sangham} workers reached their house Araya Kadavil Chirutha provided them food\textsuperscript{87}.

Chemmaruthy tells us about the terror that was created by the \textit{MSP} during that period. Since their house was a shelter to \textit{Sangham} workers, they were always haunted by the \textit{MSP}. The doors and windows of their house had been destroyed. Pot, vessels, and paddy sacks had been put in the wells. Her mother secretly provided shelter to the leaders in the upstairs of their

\textsuperscript{86} Personal Interview with K.V. Manikkam, Kayyur, on 25.3.03.

\textsuperscript{87} Personal Interview with Kanisan Veetil Mani, A.C. Patta, Koyithattil Paru, and Gopalan, Kayyur on 29.3.03.
house. After supplying food to them in upstairs they will spread the paddy on the floor for drying. Otherwise the neighbours will suspect them. Likewise, when her brother was brought someone for food at midnight the remains of the food were secretly destroyed.

Eleri village near the border of Karnataka was a hilly area consisting of forests. This was one of the safest areas, in which most of the Sangham workers had been in underground for several months. In view of various cases like Kayyur, Karinthalam, Klayikot Panthal, Paddy grabbing etc. Sangham leaders like N. Narayana Varier, E.K. Nayanar, V.V. Kunjambu, Maniyeri Kannan Nair, Pariyarathu Krishnan Nair, Palliyathu Raman Nair etc had been there. In this village the neighbours were very co-operative to provide support to the Sangham workers. From 1935 onwards, Podora house was one of the important shelters of the Sangham, and the MSP had continuously looted that house and the women of this house severely harassed. Chiruthayiamma in this house was one of the victims of this. The MSP had broken her hands and later she lost her life because of the assault. This house had provided shelter to leaders like A.V. Kunjambu, Subrahmania Shenoy and others. Since, the women in this village were actively involved in underground activities, they were brought to the MSP's camp and were sexually molested.

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88 Personal Interview with Chemmaruthy, Kayyur, on 25.03.03.

89 Personal Interview with Podora Kunjiraman, West Eleri, Kasargod dist. On 4.4.03.
Katoor Chiruthayi tells us that, on one day, when all the male members had gone to forest the infuriated police caught them and brought them to their camp and severely beaten up. They even threatened them by saying that, till their leaders came forward, they will be continuously harassed. They also threatened that they will be marched to Cheruvathur by putting paddy sacks on their heads. But these threatening and the fear of rape and sexual torture did not deter women from keeping secrets and protecting the Sangham. Though the MSP severely harassed them, they continued their risky activities. Some of them were wandering in the forest carrying beedi, sugar, rice and other printed articles to the Karshaka Sangham members. Kuruvat Parvathi, Valliyot Paatti, Maniyeri Akkuvamma, Palliyath Lakshmi, Edoloth Chirutha, Podoramani, Vadakketh Parvathi, Katoor Parvathi, Thazhaveetil Mani etc were some of the women suppliers. The MSP had severely beaten up Thazhaveetil Karichi and Katoor Parvathi for distributing pamphlets. Valliot Mani tells us how she, along with Thambayi and Akkuvamma, had carried food to the members in the forest and late early morning took, back the empty vessels. Further she tells us how they secretly attended the Karshaka Sangham meeting by wearing black clothes at night.

Kaini Devi from Nandavanam, was even brought to Jail for her secret

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90 Personal Interview with Katoor Chiruthayi, Mankam, Eleri on 7.4.03.
91 Personal Interview with Kuruvat Balakrishnan, Eleri on 7.4.03.
92 Personal Interview with Valliyot Mani, Eleri on 8.4.03.
activities. In one instance when Koliyadan Kunji Krishnan, one of the Karshaka Sangham leaders were hiding in her house, the MSP captured and arrested them. When she was brought before the court the congress tried to pacify her by saying that if she had changed her ideology they will soon release her. But she never changed her ideology. This shows that they were even ready to sacrifice their life for Karshaka Sangham.

Devaki Antharjanam, from Korom Pulleri Illam was one of the Staunch Karshaka Sangham supporters. She had provided shelter to many Sangham workers like A.K. Gopalan, Vannan Chindan and so on in her own illam irrespective of their caste. The threat from the police and her husband Narayanan Nambudiri’s congress stance never changed her attitude towards Sangham. A.K. Gopalan considered Devaki Antharjanam as his mother. Besides these, Chiruthayi, Cheeru, Markkavil Mathi etc. from Koorkara had protected the Karshaka Sangham members. In Kalikadavu, Punnakkodan Raman’s house was the main shelter and meeting place of the Sangham. His mother Paru and his wife Chirutha, actively participated in Kodakkad conference. And P.C. Sridevi had protected Nayanar and Paatatu

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93 Personal Interview with K. Sukumaran son of Kaini Devi, and with Koliyadan Kunji Krishnan Nair, Nandavanam on 26.3.03.


95 Personal Interview with P. Raman Nambiar, Koorkara on 14.3.03.

96 Kavumbayil Smaranika.
Padmanabhan\textsuperscript{97}. Annikkadan Kumba had suffered a lot while her husband was in jail she went for outside labour\textsuperscript{98}.

In Parassinikkadavu, Chandroth house, Atchumaster’s house, Panachikkal house etc became the main shelters and Madappura Paru, P.M. Madhavi, Panachikkal Cheeyayi, Palakkayil Manikam etc were the main women supporters\textsuperscript{99}. Kottila Veetil Kunjathi of Eramam, Kunnunmal Sridevi etc were some of the women who were sexually abused and molested by the MSP. In Kuttoor, after the Kuttoor Madam paddy grabbing, it was the women like C.P. Kunjatha, Kanaparu, Kalyani, M.K. Parvathi, Paattiyamma etc had protected the Sangham\textsuperscript{100}.

Since the Communist Party and Karshaka Sangham were banned, they were not in a better position after independence. In this period the Sangham adopted a revolutionary tactics. The situation of food crisis resulted in the clashes with police and labourers. Between April and May 1948, police firings had taken place at Onchiyam, Pazhassi, Tillenkkeri, Peralam, Munayankunnu, Padikunnu and Korom.

Following the Onchiyam firing of April 30, 1948 seven persons died in the firing and two were incarcerated. After that action, the MSP let loose a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{97} Personal Interview with C.Krishnan Nair, Kalikadavu on 24.3.03.
\item \textsuperscript{98} Personal Interview with T.V. Shankaran son of Kumba, Pollapoyil, on 24.3.03.
\item \textsuperscript{99} Personal Interview with Krishnan C.V., Parassinikkadavu, on 18.11.02.
\item \textsuperscript{100} Personal Interview with M.K. Parvathi and with M.K. Kunjappan, Kuttoor on 19.03.03.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
reign of terror in this village for several months and all the men went into hiding. The atrocities suffered by the women at that time were numerous. In that village Mandodi Kannan was one of the popular leaders who inspired the women. Most of them tells us about Kannan. Even though he belonged to janmis family he worked along with the labouring women and inspired them. He inspired them through songs. Mandodi Kuniyil Manikkam, Cheeru, Kalyani etc are some among who were taught by Kannan. His wife had sung that song101.

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Edavum valamotta pennungale
Chuttum valanjulla pennungale
Nammalu krishikkaru koolikkaru,
Nellum, kizhangum, pazhakulayum
Gothambum, chembum, karimbum, kambum
Epperi, petta muthalukalum
Nammalundaki kodutholanam
janmi, muthalali, mooppanmaru
Endu kathayanu nattukara,
Entu kathayanu pennungale…
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This song depicts the severity of janmis exploitation. Even though the tenants cultivated grains, tubers and fruits for janmi, the janmi exploited them.

101 Personal Interview with Janaki Mokeri, on 14.08.02.
Kannan’s house was one of the shelters of the Sangham leaders. His niece Matha tells us that in one instance, when they had heard about MSP’S raid in their house, the whole family along with the children had to leave their house. At that time nobody provided them shelter so they confined themselves in a temple. When they returned, they found that all the household articles, including the cucumber that had been hanged on the root top destroyed\textsuperscript{102}. After his death, Kannan’s mother had died of mental illness. While her son was hiding in forest, his mother had covered the food packets in blankets and supplied it in forest.

Following the Onchiyam action, the condition of the family of Karshaka Sangham members became worse. C.K. Kalyani, who had lost her brother C.K. Chathu in the firing tells that following the action, the janmi had vacated their house and threatened them with the help of gundas and poured kerosene in their well. Meethale Devaki, Illathu Cheeru also tells us the atrocities suffered by them and their parents and about the mental agony of their parents. Likewise Karakkayil Kannan also tell us how his mother Karichi had protected the under ground workers. Illath Cheeru tells us how she had provided shelter to Krishnapillai and others. Kattil Parambathu Mathu tells us how her mother Manikkam had dressed the wounds of Karshaka Sangham members following the Onchiyam action. Achuthan, son of Menon Kanaran, says that his mother Manthi had provided shelter to

\textsuperscript{102} Personal Interview with Mandodi Matha, niece of Mandodi Kannan, Onchiyam on 1.8.02.
leaders like Krishnapillai and others. K.P. Kunjiraman Master told us how the police had molested the women¹⁰³.

T.V. Narayani from Puthiyappu told us how she had provided food and shelter to Karshaka Sangham leaders like E.K. Nayanar, M. Kelappan, M. Narayanan, Vannathan Raman etc. Since her husband Achuthan Mesthiri was an active Karshaka Sangham worker. It was she who provided the family by carrying stone. Along with this, she also found time for Mahila Sangham work and other activities. Here she carried the double burden of reproductive labour and productive labour¹⁰⁴. Thavarattu Cheeru from Cheruvannur tells us about the MSP atrocities. A few days after her pregnancy she fell ill and at that time MSP had searched their house for her brother Illathu Kelappan. They had looted the whole house and had broken the fingers of Cheeru and had also beaten up her old father¹⁰⁵. In Narakkad, Rayaroth house was one of the shelters of Karshaka Sangham¹⁰⁶.

All these show that the uncountable atrocities suffered by the women at the time when men left for clandestine activities. For their risky activities, the women were even sexually abused and molested and were thoroughly

¹⁰³ Personal Interview with C.K. Kalyani, Meethal Devaki, Illath Cheeru, Kattil Parambatru Mathu, Achuthan, K.P. Kunjiram, Puthan Purayil Kannan Onchiyam on 3, 4.8.02.

¹⁰⁴ Personal Interview with T.V. Narayani, Puthiyap, Badagara on 10.7.02

¹⁰⁵ Personal Interview with Thavarattu Cheeru, Cheruvannur, Badagara on 13.7.02.

¹⁰⁶ Personal Interview with R. Kannan and Sathyabhama, Narakkod, Meppayur on 11.7.02.
beaten up. Some of them were even brought to jail and lost their relatives. But, even in that situation they stood firmly and had supported the Karshaka Sangham and their family. Thus they had the double burden of combining household labour with public labour. We have already stated that, in an agrarian society the household labour and field labour are intermixed. Now their burden of labour in the field increases because of the absence of men. They struggled hard to combine all types of labour. At the same time, they had to protect their family and the Karshaka Sangham workers. In the day time they were involved in field labour and at night they were involved in supplying printed matters food and shelter to the Karshaka Sangham. Thus it is a clear evidence of the fact that it was the labouring women who had acted as the main supporter of the Karshaka Sangham. In those days most of the family had survived because of women's hard labour and their courage.

The above references about women's participation in the various activities tell us what the ordinary history doesn't. It shows that all women, irrespective of their status had become a part of the public activities. And they became part of it, when their very existence was questioned. It also tells us that the women in North Malabar had a history of their own.

Here we can raise the question 'why they had participated in these activities. North Malabar experiences shows that it was their active participation in the production process that had brought them in to these activities. Studies had also shown that only those who were involved in the
production process could actively participate in the struggle\textsuperscript{107}. So, the participation in the production process was one of the reasons for their active participation and these is a dialectical relationship between these two.

Another question regarding this was how the struggle affected them? we can see that, most of the women who directly participated in this struggle were agricultural labourers and most of them belonged to the down trodden class. They came forward, when their position as labourers was questioned. This can be seen from their participation in different struggles like "nelledukkalsamaram", "pulluparisamaram", "tholvirakusamaram", "kalamkettu samaram" etc. In the "tholvirakusamaram", Kandakkai Pulluparisamaram, Kuvumbayi Police action etc we can see the direct participation of women clashing with police. In the "kalamkettu samaram" the women resisted the "janmis" by taking pots and pans as instruments of protests. For them everyday items became their instruments of protests, they raised their voices when it was questioned. This was the case of paddy grabbing, grass cutting and "tholviraku samaram".

The question regarding their cause of motivation for participation was different. Here we can see that in the case of middle class women, most of them belongs to "janmis" class. In their case, it was their education that kept them abreast of the current situation and most of them were school teachers. Another thing is that most of the male members of their family were

\textsuperscript{107}Tanika Sarkar, 'Politics and women in Bengal... Op. Cit., p.236.
important political leaders or active members of the political party and they had sent their wives and sisters to politics. For the agricultural labourer women, it was their involvement in the production process, which had brought them into the struggle.

In those days *Mahila Sangham* played a major role in organizing women. Most of their activities were centred around libraries. It was the middle class women who organized *Mahila Sangham* and illiterate agricultural labourers had accepted the average educated leaders as natural leaders. The middle class’s educational background which provided them this opportunity. We have already discussed the good cooperation between the landlord women and agricultural women. *Mahila Sangham* worked among different working class people like beedi workers, textile workers and among *Karshaka Sanghams*. One of the prominent trade union leader C. Kannan remembers that the *Mahila Sangham* workers like Gracy Aaron, P. Yasodha, V.P. Devaki, Palora Matha, Cheriyamma, Kunjacha and others had played an important role in developing consciousness among the Beedi workers. They focused on major women issues like education, employment untouchability etc and had activated interdinnings and intermarriages. Besides these, they had played a major role in spreading the ideas of *Karshaka Sangham* through *jathas*, meetings and cultural programmes like drama, *Poorakali*, *Kummi* etc. They sold the party pamphlets during

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Karshaka Sangham meetings, temple festivals etc. Besides these, as a part of Karshaka Sangham meetings and other occasions, they had collected Pidiyari from houses. During the cholera period they worked as volunteers. Some of them had even conducted Karshaka Sangham meetings. And some even travelled widely and attended conferences in North India. But some women never came at the forefront. During the period of struggle also they had kept in touch by different modes of communication. This can be compared with the different patterns that had been discussed by Ranajit Guha.109

Another interesting thing is that, women in precapitalist period were more mobile than the capitalist period. During that period, women were active in meetings, jathas and were also active in under ground activities like distributing printed matters, escorting and protecting Sangham leaders and so on. Besides this the fear of rape and sexual torture did not deter them from keeping secrets and protecting the Sanghams. We can see that after the fight against landlordism, some of the open forms of sexual exploitation of women are less. But all forms of sexual exploitation are not done away with. Slowly, sexual vulnerability of women became the standard for in capitalist society. It was this position which prevented women from occupying the same position as men in the public sphere.

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109 Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, OUP, Delhi, 1983. In this work the insurgent consciousness of subalterns in India has been identified and defined by Ranajit Guha in terms of Negation, Ambiguity, Modality, Solidarity, Transmission and Territoriality.
gendered processes, as well as women's and men's institutionalized social roles, get incorporated into social movement strategies\textsuperscript{110}. Besides these, pots and pans are utensils that are in many cases, accessible because of and symbolic of, the domestic labour to which women have been relegated in the gendered division of labour. In the case of tholvirakusamaram the women resisted because fodder and firewood used by them were denied. This can be seen in the case of nelledukkal samarams also. It was the deficiency of articles which led them to came forward for struggle. So, their participation in these struggles shows that they were aware of the existing situations.

With the help of North Malabar experience, we can understand that the main reasons behind the mass participation of women in the agrarian struggle was the problem of subsistence and the question of the disintegration of kudis.

But it shows that their struggle do not result in the preservation of kudis. This was due to the reason that under capitalism the character of land itself changed and it was not possible to survive with the kudis. It also shows that their participation in the struggle had in a limited way facilitated their survival.

\textsuperscript{110} M. Bahati Kuumba, Gender and Social Movements, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p.95.