Chapter 3

The Lalur Solid Waste Management Controversy

This chapter focuses on public engagement of technoscientific risk in the context of Lalur solid waste controversy. Here the attempt to understand the discursive shaping of a ‘public’ in the context of the controversy. This chapter also deals with how the constructed public is contributing to formulate waste as a subject for political deliberation through their protest and vice versa. This chapter focuses the political engagement of Lalur villagers with the municipal authority over solid waste to find a solution for the waste management crisis in Lalur. It tries to understand the casteist practice related to solid waste management system. This chapter argues that in Lalur villagers’ endeavour to engage with the newly emergent politics of waste (the subpolitics of waste), they have gradually developed their own social theory from their experiences of ‘living with the garbage’ and partaking in the struggles. This chapter will start with a brief introduction to Thrissur corporation and Lalur Village.

Lalur was a dumping yard of human excreta of Thrissur city for almost one century, but after the formation of Thrissur municipality in 1942, the authority started dumping of municipal solid waste which continued till 2012. Dumping of human excreta was stopped in early 1960s after the introduction of modern toilet system in the city. Dumping of municipal solid waste is stopped followed by the tremendous struggles by the people of Lalur. This importance of this study is to understand the shaping of a politics around solid waste in Lalur and the involvement of various stakeholders in it.

Before going into a detailed discussion on the emergence or reasons of Lalur waste controversy and its various dimensions, involvements of different stakeholders, identifying risks and public formation, I would like to give a brief outline of Thrissur Corporation and Lalur village for a better understanding about the controversy.

3.1. Profile of Thrissur Corporation and Lalur Village

Thrissur Corporation is situated in Thrissur district and it is a part of Thrissur legislative assembly and Thrissur Parliament assembly. Thrissur district is almost located in the
middle of the state of Kerala and it is known as “cultural capital of Kerala” due to various places of historical importance and unique cultural traditions like the Thrissur Pooram (Thrissur is known as the city of pooram). The place was ruled by the rulers of the princely state of Cochin for a long time before and after the invasion of colonial forces.

Thrissur Corporation was formed as a municipality in 1942 and it was a municipality for a period of 58 years and it upgraded into corporation by adding the neighbouring panchayats (Ollur, Ayyanthol, Koorkanchery, Ollukara and Vilavattam grama panchayats) and some wards of Nadathara and Kollazhi grama panchayats to the then municipality in the year of 2000. According to census (2011), corporation has a population of around four lakhs. The corporation has been governed by the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) at different time periods, and presently the LDF governing council is in power.

Lalur is a village which is situated in outskirt of Thrissur city (approximately 12 kilometres away from the city) and it is one of the wards of Thrissur Corporation. It was one of the wards of Ayyanthol grama panchayat and later this whole Panchayat was added as part of upgradation of Thrissur municipality to Thrissur corporation in 2000. The following section will give a detailed introduction to the Lalur waste controversy.

The indefinable and incomparable resistance of villagers of Lalur against the dumping of human excreta and municipal solid waste has clearly been divided into two phases based on chronology of events and the nature of public protests. It should be noted that the first protest was against the local rulers and land lords of Thrissur city and it was started before the formation Thrissur municipality, and later part or second wave of the protest was against the state, including state government, Thrissur municipality and Ayyanthol grama panchayat. The first phase of the struggle was against the dumping of

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150 Thrissur Pooram is an annual temple festival held at Vadakkumnadhan temple in Thrissur (See the website of Kerala tourism https://www.keralatourism.org/event/thirssur-pooram/7 accessed on July 05, 2018).
152 Ibid.
human excreta collected from the big drums of *Patta Kakkoose* of Thrissur city (1932 to 1960s).\(^{153}\) This was the beginning of debates on waste and emergence of Lalur waste controversy, which gave much fuel to the struggle of next generations against the dumping of municipal solid waste at the same place where excreta was dumped.

### 3.2. *Paatta Kakkoose*: A Caste Question

As we mentioned the *Paatta Kakkoose* system in the case of Pettipalam solid waste management controversy in the chapter 2, the city dwellers of Thrissur were also using *Patta Kakkoose* to defecate at the turn of the twentieth century. At the time defecation, the excreta was collected to the drums kept in a pit.\(^{154}\) The excreta from each drum was collected from each house by the women from lower strata of the society.\(^{155}\) A few male members were also part of this practice. Most of them were from thotti community (scavengers)\(^{156}\) and from lower- lower class Christian community including dalit Christians.\(^{157}\) They transferred this collected excreta into big drums which placed on handcart. With the help of this handcart, they transferred the excreta to the Lalur dumping yard. This job was considered as similar to slavery and it continued many years after the independence of the country.\(^{158}\) And they were considered as the faceless workforce and uncounted people or *wasted lives* (see Bauman 2003) or *quasi-publics* (see Varughese 2012) and more worsen condition than today’s rag pickers and manual scavengers. The upper caste rich landlords and local rulers had assigned this job to the thotty community (as part of the caste hierarchy), and later poor Christian joined to this job as they were not having an option for living.\(^{159}\) They became municipality workers after the establishment of Thrissur municipality in 1942.\(^{160}\) But they were continuing the same job. The difference is that municipality had given a small quarters to them at

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\(^{153}\) T.K. Vasu (Chairman, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 09, 2016 at Lalur.

\(^{154}\) Ibid.

\(^{155}\) Ibid.

\(^{156}\) Ibid.

\(^{157}\) Ibid.

\(^{158}\) Ibid.

\(^{159}\) Ibid.

\(^{160}\) Ibid.
nearby the Lalur dumping yard and Kuriyachira.\textsuperscript{161} They became the cleaning workers of the municipality once the paatta kakkose system stopped.\textsuperscript{162}

### 3.3. Lalur Solid Waste Management Dispute

People’s life had been in trouble due to the open dumping of human excreta for a long period in Lalur. Due to this the Lalur villagers got organised against the dumping of human excreta under the banner of a protest forum in 1930s which was led by Advocate Kuttiraman and Iyyaakku Raman, and the protest was against the rulers and land lords of Thrissur city.\textsuperscript{163} After the formation of the Thrissur municipality, the authority continued with the practice of dumping human excreta in Lalur.\textsuperscript{164} Parallel to this, the authority started also dumping the municipal solid waste generated in the city along with the human excreta.

In 1960s, the municipality stopped Paatta Kakkoose system after the introduction of modern toilet system by World Health Organisation (WHO).\textsuperscript{165} Following this technological up-gradation, dumping of human excreta in Lalur was stopped but at the same time dumping of municipal solid waste continued.\textsuperscript{166} After the stoppage of dumping of human excreta, Lalur villagers became relieved and thought that dumping of Municipal Solid Waste was quit unproblematic, and they stopped their protest.\textsuperscript{167} However, eventually they realised that it was more dangerous than dumping of human excreta. They took 20 years to realise this. Later on, the amount of solid waste increased as a side effect of urban development. The content of the solid waste drastically changed due to mixing up of various elements like plastic, electronic waste, bio-medical waste and chemical waste.

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{164} Omana (Core Member, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 09, 2016 at Lalur.
\textsuperscript{165} Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi. 2014. \textit{Lalur Samaram: Pinnitta Naalvazhikal} (Booklet, Self-Pub).
\textsuperscript{166} Omana (Core Member, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 10, 2016 at Lalur.
\textsuperscript{167} T.K. Vasu (Convener, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 09, 2016 at Lalur.
3.4. Public Engagement with Risks of Waste

The intensification of dumping of waste started threatening the immediate life of villagers of Lalur. The social and economic risks, and the health related issues resulted from waste disposal in the locality was pathetic and unexplainable. Therefore the villagers decided to oppose the inhuman practice of Thrissur Municipality. They got organised and formed a protest forum in 1988 which was named as Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samara Samiti (Forum against the pollution of Lalur, hereafter Forum) headed by A.V. Aryan as chairman, T.K. Vasu as convenor and P.K Valsan, Lasar Gomas, K. Babu, M.D. Baby and Omana as its core committee members. T.K. Vasu, the convenor of the Forum, explains the background of the issue;

...the protest was started in 1988 by forming a forum, but from 1983 onward we had been submitting many requests to the municipality regarding this issue. As part of urbanisation, the nature of waste had changed and it contained plastics, waste from slaughter houses, medical waste that contains even organs of human beings. Birds were trying to eat those wastes and dumped the left over into habitat areas and in the wells, and number of dogs increased due to the presence of those waste and it was a threat to the life of people. In that pathetic condition of life, we decided to go for a strong protest against the inhuman activities of the municipality...

169 Ibid.
170 A.V. Aryan was a CPI (M) leader and ex M.L.A from Ollur Legislative Assembly in 1965 and 1967 elections. He left CPI (M) in 1972 and joined in Bolshevik party which was a Naxalite organisation and later he left the Bolshevik party. (https://malayalam.oneindia.com/news/2007/02/02/kerala-av-aryan-obit.html accessed on July 06, 2018).
171 T.K. Vasu has a history of working with Naxalite movement and he was a party member of Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). He is still a sympathiser of CPI (ML) and working as an activists in Thrissur district especially on solid waste management issues (Interview)
173 T.K. Vasu (Convener, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 09, 2016 at Lalur.
In the month of October of 1988, the Forum had organised their first interference at the front of Ayyanthol grama panchayat and it was inaugurated by Dr. Sukumar Azheekode, a well-known Malayalam writer. The protesters might have thought to go against the decision of Ayyanthol grama panchayat that gave permission to Thrissur municipality for dumping waste. Unfortunately they believed that the grama panchayat would find a solution for their problem, so they did not go directly against the municipality in the early phase of their resistance. Unfortunately the grama panchayat did not take any action because of two reasons — the dumping yard of Lalur village was belonging to Thrissur municipality and the grama panchayat had no responsibility to find out a solution for this issue due to the political and economic interests. The protest forum realised this political nexus, and this has resulted in the non-violence protest turning into a violent protest. Under the leadership of A.V. Aryan, some youngsters (from different political parties) destroyed 15 trucks of municipality at the front of the trenching yard which had come with municipal solid waste from the city. One of the members of the Forum has justified the demolition of trucks;

... the state is a network of powers and they have been using all their mechanisms to implement their policies in the name of development and most of the time they impose violence. In this particular case also, the municipality has been using inhuman practices to make their city clean and to provide better life to city dwellers, and for this the life of ours has become disorderly. These kinds of aggressive attacks [truck demolitions] are a reply to the state when they behave undemocratically and violate human rights. And it is a way to make the disordered life into an ordered one.

This incident became a reason for getting better attention to this protest in the media. The villagers continued their protest against the municipality. As part of getting more media attention and better support from the general public of Kerala, they moved their

174 Ibid.
175 Ibid.
177 Baby (member, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 10, 2016 at Lalur.
protest into the roads of Thrissur city from Ayyanthole grama panchayat. This study assumes that the leaders of the protesting group might have realised that they needed significant media attention to their demands so that they could reach in finding a solution by initiating a wider public deliberation. Media has a crucial role in spreading the news and attract the attention of general public to the controversy (Varughese 2011, 36). The protesters under the banner of the Forum had stopped the trucks loaded with municipal waste on the road from Thrissur city and they unloaded the waste on the road in November, 1988 as part of their agitation. This action was construed as crossing all limits of ‘law and order’ and the authority used police force to disperse the protesters, and arrested many people and filed cases against them. The intention of the protesters was successful by getting much media attention to Lalur municipal solid waste controversy, but they failed to get much support from the general public of the state due to the violent mode of protest being adopted. Adding to this, due to the ‘Maoist’ style (the authority argued that there was an involvement of Maoist group in this protest) of attacking the state, the media attention was wrongly gone and municipality got better benefit than the protesters. Authority came with this allegation to make destroy the protest by creating a terror in the minds of protesters and they used the past Naxalite affiliation of A.V. Aryan and T.V. Vasu to substantiate their argument.

The protesters continued opposing the authority of municipality by bypassing the law and order. As part of this, they made a blockade against the then municipal chairperson (Mr. Joyi Kavalakkaattum) in in 1988 which resulted to an attempt of physical attack on him. The municipality was not at all ready to address this issue and the succeeding municipal chairperson Salim Joseph Kaakkassery has also totally neglected the protests. The violent mode of protests used as a reason not to negotiate with protesters and there was militarisation of police at Lalur. The authority of municipality

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179 T.K. Vasu (Convener, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 09, 2016 at Lalur.
181 Ibid.
182 T.K. Vasu (Convener, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 09, 2016 at Lalur.

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continued dumping of waste with the help of police protection. There was a problem in the protest group due to the way of protest resulted the reduction of villagers in the protest. This incident forced to the leaders to withdraw the attacking way of protest. The protesters and their leaders eventually realised that they has chosen a wrong method of protest and it led them to adopt more peaceful methods to make their resistance publicly acceptable. They began a novel protest in front of the municipal office in 1992 by constructing a number of small huts using bamboo and leaves of coconut tree. It is known as Kudil Ketti Samaram. It was a Gandhian way of protest and the protesters were staying overnight at these huts and it went for 40 days, and later the municipality was forced to negotiate with the protesters.

One of the leaders of the Forum, K.K. Gopalan filed a writ (D.P. No. 9184/88) in the Kerala High Court by the end of 1988. Response to this, the high court appointed Advocate M.N. Soman as a single person commission to enquire about the waste management crisis. Parallel to this, the High Court of Kerala made an order (1992) regarding the Lalur waste controversy by considering the report of Advocate M.N. Soman Commission. The report says that the condition of people in Lalur was pathetic due to the tremendous pollution by dumping the toxic solid waste. The report suggests that Lalur needs a modern scientific solid waste disposal mechanism to remove the openly dumped solid waste.

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183 Ibid.
184 Ibid.
185 Ibid.
186 Ibid.
187 Kudil ketti samaram became a widely popular mode of protest with Adivasi Gotha Maha Sabha Protests in front of the Secretariat, Thiruvananthapuram.
189 Ibid.
190 Ibid.
191 T.K. Vasu (Convener, Lalur Malineekaranam Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 09, 2016 at Lalur.
193 Ibid.
As per the recommendation of report, the high Court directed the municipality to find a solution for the waste crisis within six months. The municipality was warned against violating human rights of the citizens of Lalur and the Court banned waste dumping from slaughter houses. Court also directed that the bio-degradable waste should be disposed in the trench and keep layers of bleaching powder and red soil over it. With these conditions, the Court allowed municipality for dumping waste at Lalur dumping yard with taking proper measurement for safety. Thereafter the villagers accepted the verdict and stalled their protest temporarily. However, the protesters did not have any suggestions to solving the issue, and they believed that government would solve their problems with the help of technical expertise. Under this notion, the villagers accepted the proposal of municipality to construct a ‘modern’ solid waste treatment plant at Lalur as a solution for this crisis. The villagers were but not aware of the risks of implementing a solid waste treatment plant.

Protesters have eventually understood the hidden politics of waste management and how political leaders engaged with this issue without suspending their political interests. If we analyse this phase of the protest, we can see that the protesters were trying different methods for negotiation such as non-violent and violent modes of protests, and litigation. Unfortunately, the municipality was not ready to work on this issue and did not have taken any proper permanent mechanism for disposing the waste according to the direction of court. The corporation was making many excuses like lack of fund, lack of facilities, etc. for not to obey the direction of court and successful at certain limit to convince the court about their difficulties to construct a treatment plant. The leader of Forum, Omana, remembers;

...actually, the municipality had totally neglected the direction given by the honourable High Court of 1992 and continued dumping of waste. Due to

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194 Ibid.
195 Ibid.
196 Ibid.
197 Ibid.
198 Ibid.
199 T.K. Vasu (Convener, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 09, 2016 at Lalur.
this, the villagers of Lalur had faced many horrifying situations in the following years. Sashtri Nagar resident [a place in Lalur village] Baby died due to the poisonous air when he was trying to get some fallen utensils from the well, James and Sreekumar also died due to breathing of poisonous air from the well while they tried to save him. This shocking incident was happened on 29th march, 1995...

This incident shows that the risks of waste have been directly threatened the life of the people and became a disaster for the villagers. It is very important to understand that some publics are facing greater risks in their life and they have greater chance to be victims of the risks (Douglas and Wildavsky 1983, 18). This terrifying incident gave a better understanding about the risks of waste. The Forum adopted multiple methods, especially legal fight to reach their goal along with demonstration. Earlier they were shifting from one method to another, and later realised that the importance combining all the methods together. The ‘management’ of solid waste in the city and “disposal’ in the village turned to be a political issue for both Lalur village and Thrissur Corporation which led to the formation of villagers as a ‘quasi publics’ around the solid waste management controversy, deliberating its diverse aspects.

Coming back to the case, Baby’s wife Annie had filed a case at Revenue Divisional Office (RDO) Court on 20th April 1995 against the municipality in the context of death of three residence of Lalur and she argued that it was a massacre by the authority of municipality. After the investigation and the trials, the revenue division office commissioner released an order in favour to the petitioner on 19 December 1996 and the court mentioned that the municipality should give compensation to the victims’ relatives. Along with this, the RDO commissioner gave direction to Kerala State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) to submit a report on pollution status at Lalur. The High Court also made an important judgment on 6th June 1997 regarding the chaos and

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200 Omana (Core Member, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 10, 2016 at Lalur.
202 Ibid.
203 Ibid.
violation of law and order made by the protesters, and the order was prohibiting the entry of leaders of protest forum to the trenching ground. The municipality wanted to disrupt the protest by making disturbance or taking legal actions against the leaders of the forum, so that the authority was trying to find out various methods to do the same. The KSPCB submitted a report to the RDO on 8th August, 1997 and the report says that the surface and ground water is highly polluted and the presence of coliform bacteria in the wells are high. KSPCB closed nine wells near to the dumping yard and gave warning to the villagers not to use the water from wells.

Following this on 19th November of 1997, the RDO Commissioner, V.M. Gopalamenon released another order to give directions to the municipality for stopping waste dumping at Lalur. This direction is due to another petition by the Forum (Case Number M.D. 274/96). But the municipality collected a stay order from the High Court by giving a revision appeal to the judgement of RDO court (CRRP Number 416/98), and continued dumping of solid waste. Along with this the High Court mentioned that the municipality should take immediate actions to establish a ‘modern’ solid waste treatment mechanism in Lalur as earlier as possible and till it is functional, the municipality could dump waste at the dumping yard with some restrictions (the restriction already mentioned when we discussed about the M.N. Soman report).

Two points should be noted in the context of these judgments by the RDO court and the High Court. First one is that both Courts have never constituted a monitoring mechanism to scrutinize the implementation of their judgments. Second one is that all the times the courts have given to municipality a long duration or not mentioned a particular time period for implementation of courts’ order or finding solution for the particular uncertainty. The court always was relaxed about the time frame set by it for the municipality to resolve the problem. It creates a doubt about the interest of judiciary

204 Ibid. 205 Ibid. 206 Ibid. 207 Ibid. 208 Ibid. 209 Ibid. 210 Ibid.
to keep to continue the dumping yard in the same place and they are also placing themselves in the side or part of scientific-citizen publics. More over their engagement with the society is similar to these publics or they are contributing their share to the shaping of these publics as well as controversy. When we analyse the courts’ judgments we can see that most of the judgments are in favour of the villagers but if we are closely analysing them, it is visible that ultimately the judgements benefit the city dwellers for lack of strictures from and an effective monitoring mechanism to ensure that the verdicts are followed by the local government.

Parallel to the legal fight, the protesters were continuing their demonstrations against municipality. Thrissur city has witnessed a different form of demonstrations by the protesters soon after. A large number of villagers including children marched to the municipality office in the month of February 1998 with holding mud pots and other utensils and fire-wood for making food, and bed sheet for sleeping, and the protesters planned that to stay in front of the municipality office by making food and sleeping overnight. But the march had been stopped by the police in front of the municipality office gate and with the aid of a lathi charge police dispersed them.²¹¹

When I looked at the lineage of protest so far and the behaviour of protesters, found that the villagers were confused and panic due to the unexpected incidents happened to them around the controversy and lack of following a particular ideology. It is clearly visible in their methods of operation when they go for a protest that due to the provoking actions by a small group of people within the protesters, and this group’s behaviour is quite different from the rest of the quasi-public of Lalur. Some villagers were supporting secretly the corporation when they participating in the protest led to get a better upper hand to the municipality for managing the protesters by using the judiciary and police. They are quite flexible in nature and in behaviour, and the individuals of this group are changing their stand or their goal according to different political alliances or changing of government at Thrissur municipality and / or Ayyanthol grama panchayat and / or

²¹¹ T.K. Vasu (Convener, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on 09/08/2016 at Lalur.
legislative assembly. They were called as *Karimkalikal* (the literal translation of the word *karimkalikal* is Brutus in the clan or turncoat) in local.

It should be noted that Ayyonthol grama panchayat never addressed the violation of fundamental right of Lalur villagers. One of the leaders of the Forum has argued that

...there were some adjustments between the municipality authority and panchayat authority. The dumping yard in Lalur was a profit making ‘enterprise’ for both of them, irrespective of any political parties’ combination in power, and corruption was also occurred. They were showing in paper the total number of trucks had gone to the dumping which was higher than the actual number of trucks had gone to the dumping yard, and they were sharing that the corrupted money...

Another leader, Mathu has used the word “Karava Pashu” (cow being milked excessively) to represent the profit making ‘enterprise’ and corruption which was related to the dumping of waste. But these allegations by the protester had been rejected by the municipality authority and they argued that protesters were playing ‘politics’ to taint the governing council for opposition parties.

Lalur waste controversy entered in to a new political situation in 2000 after the upgrading of the municipality to corporation, and Lalur also became an integral part (one of the wards) of Thrissur Corporation. Along with this change, there was a shift in the protest and the protesters also became ‘city dwellers’, and fighting against their own corporation for getting democracy and their fundamental rights. And they cannot argue that corporation waste should be disposed in the corporation only as Lalur dumping yard shifted to inside the corporation.

The villagers were not ready to give up their protest against the dumping of solid waste in their surroundings by the corporation authority. On 20th September, 2000, the protesters changed their site of protest from Lalur town to the trenching ground’s gate

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212 Baby (Member, Lalur Malinee Karana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 10, 2016 at Lalur.
and started an indefinite strike which was inaugurated by Dr. Sukumar Azheekkode- a well-known Malayalam writer.\textsuperscript{213}

The RDO court has again set an ultimatum to the corporation for setting up a permanent treatment plant to disposal the waste eco-friendly on or before 30\textsuperscript{th} June, 2000, but unfortunately the corporation did not take any further step for constructing the plant.\textsuperscript{214} Hence, the protest forum leaders filed a case in RDO court against the secretary of the corporation for violating the court’s order.\textsuperscript{215} As a result of this, the court gave direction to the then district collector T.O. Sooraj to submit a report regarding it. The collector submitted an enquiry report to the court, which criticised the corporation.\textsuperscript{216} Nevertheless the corporation managed to convince the court and got an extension of six more months to obey the previous judgement by installing the solid waste treatment plant.

3.5. Involvement of Political Parties

The then corporation governing body was ruled by UDF under the leadership of Indian National congress (INC) and CPI (M) led LDF wanted to get in to the power of corporation governance (majority of voters are sympathises of UDF and most of the times UDF had managed to get the majority in the council), hence they might have decided to use the issue of Lalur as a tool for mobilising the people against the corporation. The old protest forum was an obstruction for them so that they tried to mess up the forum in different way. Finally they decided to organise another forum named as \textit{Janakeeya Samithi} (People’s Forum, hereafter Samithi in rest of this chapter) to ‘fight’ against the corporation governing body in September, 2001 under the leadership of Baby John.\textsuperscript{217} CPI (M) leaders never accepted these allegations by the Forum, and they argued that they never tried to make any disturbance to the Forum, and the new forum (Samithi) was started for fighting against the inhuman activities corporation with a clear

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi. 2014. \textit{Lalur Samaram: Pinnitta Naalvazhikal} (Booklet, Self-Pub).
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item T.K. Vasu (Convener, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 09, 2016 at Lalur.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
political vision and to find a permanent solution to this crisis.\textsuperscript{218} They also argued that there should be a change in the governing from UDF to LDF to solve this problem permanently and this slogan was missing from their [first forum] protest.\textsuperscript{219} CPI (M) did not get any chance to involve into this protest due to the leaders like A.V. Aryan and T.K. Vasu because both were from a Naxalite organisation and more over A.V. Aryan was a former leader of CPI (M) and represented twice as CPI (M)’s M.L.A in Ollur Legislative Assembly. And later he expelled from the party in 1972. CPI (M) was not ready to compromise these things and decided to use Lalur as tool for opposing UDF and formulated a protest forum.

T.K. Vasu opined

...we [protesters] were facing much intolerance from the corporation authority as well as from the political parties. They tried to create a rumour that some leaders of the protest forum were connected with the Maoist groups. At the peak of this, they managed to organise another protest forum and started protest near the first protest forum’s samara panthal against the corporation, and argued for stopping the dumping of the solid waste...\textsuperscript{220}

He added that the newly organised forum was arguing that the old forum had been playing politics and they did not want to stop the dumping of the waste in Lalur.

Once CPI (M) started their engagement with this issue, the state government intervened directly for the first time after fourteen years of struggles, and the then chief minister A.K. Antony (INC led UDF government) called for meeting with the protesters on 27\textsuperscript{th} September, 2001.\textsuperscript{221} This change in attitude was due to a political party that took up the issue against the corporation. At this juncture, suddenly INC led state government (CPI (M) led LDF also had come to power in 1996 and they were also not giving any attention

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\textsuperscript{218} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{220} T.K. Vasu (Convener, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 09, 2016 at Lalur.
\textsuperscript{221} Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi. 2014. \textit{Lalur Samaram: Pinnitta Naalvazhikal} (Booklet, Self-Pub).
\end{flushleft}
to this issue) decided to intervene into the controversy. The chief minister gave a promise to the protesters in that meeting that he would make a solution after having an all-party meeting (various stakeholders of the controversy) very soon.  

Once CPI (M) started protesting against the corporation, INC led UDF governing body of the municipality understood that this waste dispute could be a reason for their failure in the next election (i.e. in 2005). CPI (M) had realised that the depth of this controversy and they used it as a political tool against the UDF governed municipal council, and they mobilised people through a campaign regarding solid waste management. Thus, waste has become a strong political moot point in the corporation and various stakeholders were engaging with it.

It should be noted that any political parties who are involved in any issue related to municipal solid waste management maintained it as an issue of local importance rather than linking it with other waste controversies and making it a state level political issue. The implied political understanding was that waste controversies (any environmental issue, for that matter) are just local issues without any scope for larger public deliberation and engagement. Both the forums (Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samara Samiti and Janakeeya Samithi) continued their protests even though they got a promise from the chief minister to resolve the problem. And announced that they would continue till they get the government order about the closure of the yard. The Forum called for a hartal in Thrissur district on 9th October 2001 to show their condolence to the three villagers who had died due to Leptospirosis, and spread the news to the whole state to get maximum support for their struggles. The very next day, a stakeholders’ meeting including leaders of various political parties occurred in the presence of the chief minister and the district collector, and they arrived at a decision to establishing a modern solid waste treatment plant in Lalur for treating and disposing bio-degradable waste. They also decided that treatment of the non-degradable waste would not be

222 Ibid.
223 Leptospirosis is a kind of infectious decease cause due to the bacteria which is transmitted from domestic animal as well as wild animal and also from rodents.
225 Ibid.
done in the Lalur village. Both the protest forums accepted this agreement and stopped their protest for a while. The Corporation took almost two years to set up a ‘modern’ solid waste treatment plant and it started working in September 2003.

The corporation has allotted 2 crore for the plant. The whole area of the plant is covered approximately 5 hectares including the earlier dumping yard. As per design, the plant was divided into 3 sectors; solid waste storage and treatment unit, a covered place for aerobic composting and the dumping yard of rejects as well as plastics after the treatment. The technology used for the plant was aerobic composting and there was not facility for treating the leachate came as part of the aerobic reaction. The leachate was directly flowing to a pit nearby the plant.

Omana, one of the leaders of the Forum mentioned that

...waste treatment plant was a total failure and it did not give a good result and more over it worsened the condition. In the starting of the plant, we were not aware about the problems would be created due to the working of plant. The plant did not have much capacity to accommodate the total waste being produced in the city. Due to this, a huge amount of waste had been accumulated near to the plant and it made the life of the people in trouble again. The court disposed all the cases were filed by the villagers against the corporation after the establishment of the plant...

The corporation submitted an affidavit regarding the amount of total waste being dumped at Lalur was 30-40 tonnes per day, but the villagers are not ready to believe it blindly because of their earlier experiences. They found that around 70 tonnes per day by observing the total vehicles coming to the dumping yard and calculating with their knowledge. The corporation installed only one solid waste treatment machine at the plant and they claimed that the machine would process 7 tonnes waste per day. But the

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226 T.K. Vasu (Convener, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 09, 2016 at Lalur.
227 Ibid.
228 Omana (Core Member, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 09, 2016 at Lalur.
villagers did a close observation about the working of the plant and made a calculation and reached in a conclusion that the plant was processing 2 tonnes waste per day, and they informed this to the court. After a long engagement with the technoscientific risks, people are not ready to accept the authority and they lost their trust on technoscience. It leads them to observe the activities of corporation and technoscience very closely and they find conclusion which is challenging the authority along with scientific community. The corporation admitted this fact and they installed two more machines for processing the solid waste. The villagers were watching the working of the plant very seriously and they found that the plant did not have a leachate water treatment plant.

CPI (M) got a majority in the Thrissur corporation council in 2005 local self-government election under the leadership of Prof. R. Bindu.\(^{229}\) The corporation authority came with a proposal of ‘new’ technological method to dispose the dumped waste ‘scientifically’ which was called ‘engineering land filling’.\(^{230}\) It should be noted that plant was unable to process all the 70 tonnes waste per day, so there was a need of another mechanism to dispose the rest of waste along with the dumped waste at the dumping yard. Moreover, CPI (M) majority corporation governing body could not keep it as because they were protesting against the plant with an allegation that the plant was a failure. For this an amount of 10 Crore was being allotted by the corporation from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) fund.\(^{231}\)

However, later the villagers pointed out that this method was not at all a new method and it would not solve the issue, and it was the same as the old land filling method with new ‘standard’ name in connection with technology.\(^{232}\) To realise this, the villagers took around three years. After getting the majority in corporation council, the second forum slowly stopped their protest, but they kept their samara panthal there. CPI (M) never announced that they withdrew their protest against the corporation, and at the same time

\(^{230}\) Ibid.
\(^{231}\) Ibid.
\(^{232}\) Omana (Core Member, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 10, 2016 at Lalur.
they argued that they were trying to pressurise the corporation for finding a permanent solution to this waste crisis. CPI (M) led LDF came into the power of the legislative assembly with a huge majority (99 out of 140 seats) in 2006 election (R. Bindu was elected as the mayor of the Thrissur corporation in 2005 election) and V.S. Achuthananthan got elected as the chief minister of the state, replacing the previous UDF government. At the same time, there was a disastrous happened in the dumping yard.

The air contacted with dumping yard was filled with methane gas produced by the waste and it started burning by contacting with burning cigarette had been thrown by someone.\(^{233}\) This incident was reported on 8\(^{th}\) January 2007 and a number of people were admitted in various hospitals of the city after getting a breathing trouble due to the burning methane.\(^{234}\) This incident gave a shock to the villagers and they understood that the newly elected governing body of the corporation was also cheating them in the name of different methods or using some scientific terms with the help of engineers and scientists. The villagers resumed their protest after six years of decision taken for establishing a plant under the banner of first protest forum (i.e. Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi, the Forum) and organised a march to Thrissur collectorate, but the government managed to handle the protesters by using police.\(^{235}\) At the same time the corporation was continuing the dumping of waste in the name of engineering land filling and they convinced the court that they were using modern technology to dispose the waste. Some amount of waste has been transferred into the plant for converting into bio-manure.

In 2008, engineers of pollution control board had found that the presence of coliform bacteria in the wells near the waste dumping yard was very high and they declared that water of 40 wells were no more useful.\(^{236}\) One of the leaders of the Forum, Rosli

\(^{233}\) Rosli Mathew (Core Member, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 11, 2016 at Lalur.


\(^{235}\) Rosli Mathew (Core Member, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 11, 2016 at Lalur.

\(^{236}\) Ibid.
remembered that they were getting drinking water only twice in a week when the tanker lorry came with water.237

In January 2009, the ‘mountain’ of waste was broken due to heavy rains and the watery toxic waste spread to the nearby areas and worsened the life of people.238 Following this, the villagers marched into the corporation office carrying this toxic waste water in small glass bottles and did a gherao of the then deputy mayor of the corporation at his office. The protesters argued for an immediate solution for this crisis.239

Parallel to this, under the leadership of K.K. Omana, Mary and Rosli Mathew, a group of protesters have made a blockade of the then mayor R. Bindu at her office.240 Simultaneously, the Forum filed a Public Interest Litigation on this issue in the High Court. The corporation was directed by the Thrissur district court that it should clear the waste water from the habitat areas within five days, and the corporation managed to do this with the help of villagers.241 The villagers offered their full support to the corporation to resolve this issue. On 9th August 2009, the corporation called for a whole party meeting in the presence of the then minister for local self-governance Paloli Muhammad Kutty, but corporation authority excluded the Forum (but the Samithi was invited) from the meeting due to their recent blockade to the mayor and deputy mayor at their office.242 Against this, the Forum workers protested inside the corporation office by covering their mouth with black cloth.243 The meeting decided to make a permanent solution for the waste crisis by establishing a high tech solid waste treatment plant at Lalur dumping yard.244 And also identified that the earlier solid waste treatment plant

237 Ibid.
239 Ibid.
240 Ibid.
241 Omana (Core Member, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 11, 2016 at Lalur.
243 Omana (Core Member, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 11, 2016 at Lalur.
244 T.K. Vasu (Convener, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 09, 2016 at Lalur.
was a failure which made more complications to the issue.\textsuperscript{245} Moreover, it is apolitical stand of the CPI (M) led corporation authority against the previous UDF governing body because CPI (M) was opposing this plant when they were protesting.

The high court has taken the PIL in the context of leakage of waste water from the dumping yard and the high court gave direction to the district judge to submit a detailed report to the court after studying the present situation of Lalur waste crisis.\textsuperscript{246} Kamal Pasha, The District judge, visited the dumping yard on 12\textsuperscript{th} august 2009 and collected information from individuals and from both the Forum and Samithi, and submitted a report to the High court.\textsuperscript{247} The report says that Lalur was a graveyard of innocent people.\textsuperscript{248} Following this, two more judges (M.P. Badran and Jyotheendranath) visited Lalur and sent a report to the High Court in favour of the villagers.\textsuperscript{249} The high court did not take any immediate actions even after getting two reports in favour of villagers from the district judges. Parallel to this the mayor has given a promise to the protesters that the corporation would remove the entire waste from the dumping yard within three months. If we analyse the facts we can see that it was a tricky decision by the corporation for delaying the judgment of High court in the context of the two reports that pointed fingers to the Corporation’s lackadaisical attitude.

CPI (M) wanted to protect their governments; hence they formed an action council to ‘solve’ the issue. Along with this, the then CPI (M) Thrissur district secretary Baby John suggested that corporation could use the waste for construction work.\textsuperscript{250} Protesters argued that it was a ‘trump card’ to protect the corporation and misguide the courts because it was not possible to use the municipal solid waste for land filling as people would not allow this.\textsuperscript{251} The protesters were very much right in this case and there were no follow up news regarding this suggestion. Moreover, they stated that they would not

\textsuperscript{245} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{246} Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi. 2014. Lalur Samaram: Pinnitta Naalvazhikal (Booklet, Self-Pub).
\textsuperscript{247} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{248} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{249} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{250} T.K. Vasu (Convener, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 09, 2016 at Lalur.
\textsuperscript{251} Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi. 2014. Lalur Samaram: Pinnitta Naalvazhikal (Booklet, Self-Pub).
allow for constructing any place as another ‘Lalur’ by transferring the waste from Lalur. This ‘unruly’ public opposed to shift the risk to another place politically and technologically. By saying this, the villagers uplifted their high political consciousness and the concern about the fellow beings.

3.6. Lalur Model Project for Solid Waste Management (LAMPS)

Another P.I.L. was filed in High Court of Kerala on 23 October 2009 by P.D. Joseph and the courts gave direction to the district judge to give another report regarding the situation of Lalur. Kamal Pasha came to Lalur for his second visit on 3rd November 2009 to collect information about the dispute and he submitted a detailed report to the Court again in favour of villagers. But the High Court did not make any judgment after getting this report also and waste dispute has continued without an end. The protesters did a campaign on 24th November 2009 to spread awareness about the waste controversy, and again built a samara panthal in front of trenching ground as part of starting an infinite hunger strike which was inaugurated by Sara Joseph, a famous Malayalam writer and social activist. The corporation authority and the state government totally neglected this protest and the protesters locked the gate of trenching ground on 13 January, 2010 after two months of relay hunger strike. Following this, twenty two protesters were arrested by the police for locking the gate. The rest of the protesters were not ready to allow dumping the waste at the trenching ground and it created a crisis for the waste management of the city. On 28th January, 2010 the high court came with a suggestion that Lalur waste dispute should be solved by discussion as earlier as possible, but the court was not ready to make a judgement by analysing the three reports being submitted by the district judges.

252 Ibid.
253 Ibid.
254 Ibid.
255 Ibid.
256 Ibid.
257 Ibid.
In this particular situation, the High Court appointed advocate Suhara on 3\textsuperscript{rd} February, 2010 as a mediator to resolve the controversy.\textsuperscript{258} She held a meeting at the mediation centre of the High Court on 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 17\textsuperscript{th} and 27\textsuperscript{th} February, 2010 and the Forum came up with some suggestions, demanding a decentralised waste treatment plan rather than a centralised one.\textsuperscript{259} They demanded that the dumped waste should be removed from Lalur, and that this waste could be used for filling the Quarries and high way dividers.\textsuperscript{260} The mediator had called another meeting on 28\textsuperscript{th} February, 2010 and the mediator informed that the agreement of protesters’ demand of removing waste from Lalur. Consensus was also achieved to form an expert panel to look into the matter with Dr. M.R. Govindan, R.V.G. Menon and N.P. Parameshwaran as its members.\textsuperscript{261}

Following this, as per the suggestion of the Forum, the High Court directed the Corporation that there should be six decentralised waste treatment plants in different parts of the city (not in Lalur) to treat the waste.\textsuperscript{262} The understanding is that the municipal solid waste should be processed in city only. The protests continued their indefinite relay hunger strike even after the judgment of the high court because the protesters wanted a permanent solution for the already dumped solid waste at Lalur dumping yard and order of closure of the plant. When we look at the whole issue, we can see that how the technology failed in solving the waste crisis in Lalur. This study found that it is due to the lack of proper implementation and due to the centralised method. The earlier solid waste treatment plant was failed to treat solid waste eco-friendly and completely, and there was no technology to treat waste water coming from the waste. The second plan was to dispose waste by engineering landfill. It was dropped because of the strong resistance from the protesters which have seen in the earlier section.

\textsuperscript{259} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{260} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{261} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{262} T.K. Vasu (Convener, Lalur Malineekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 09, 2016 at Lalur.
The chief minister V.S. Achuthananthan called a meeting on 29th March 2010 to make a solution for this issue in the context of high court information and in this meeting Dr. Pathiyur Gopinathan — one of the scientists from Kerala Agriculture University—suggested an action plan to resolve the issue (this plan was already discussed with the protesters and they agreed).263 The action plan contains a decentralised waste treatment program in city along with the removal of some part of dumped waste from the dumping yard and the rest of the waste should be disposed at the dumping yard by engineering landfill method.264 This action plan was agreed by the ministry and it was announced by the then chief minister in the second meeting was held on 6th April and this project was named as Lalur Model Project for Solid Waste Management (LAMPS), and released on 5th may 2010 by the government order 1604/10.265 The responsibility of implementation of this project was given to Kerala Agriculture University with an agreement by the corporation on 28th August, 2010.266

In between, INC led UDF came in power of the Corporation under the leadership of I.P. Paul in 2010 corporation election. The LAMPS project was inaugurated on 23rd October 2010 by installing a waste treatment plant at the fish market of shakthan market of Thrissur city, but later the functioning of the plant was stopped by Vyapari Vyavasayi Ekopana Samithi (one of the merchant organisation).267 This group argued that the working of the plant would pollute the market and they filed a case in the High Court against the working of this plant.268

The corporation had stopped dumping of waste at Lalur but the corporation did not make any attempt to remove the dumped waste from Lalur, and still the mountain of waste stays there. The state government granted an amount of 9.4 Crore for the LAMPS project and 13 Crore for removing the waste from Lalur in 2011.269 Due to the invention

264 T.K. Vasu (Convener, Lalur Maloneekarana Virudha Samithi), interviewed on August 09, 2016 at Lalur.
266 Ibid.
267 Ibid.
268 Ibid.
269 Ibid.
of the then chief minister V.S. Achuthanandan, an amount of 94 lakhs handover to the Kerala Agriculture University. Even though the corporation has established five more waste treatment plants as part of the LAMPS project, it is not sufficient enough to manage the whole waste being produced in the city. At the same the protesters argued that they would not allow the removal of the waste from Lalur until the corporation inform them about a new place where they could dump that waste. The villagers are more concerned about other fellow beings because they do not want to transfer their suffering to some other people. The protesters were not ready for making another ‘Lalur’ by dumping the waste from Lalur dumping yard. When I visited Lalur dumping yard in July 2016, I have seen that the mountain of waste in the dumping yard. More than 150 years of struggles/fights were staged by Lalur villagers in the long history of the waste controversy. Such an intensity of protest triggered a strong dispute on waste management controversy and fuelled other protests on waste issue in different parts of the state.

So, in this particular case of solid waste management controversy in Lalur, we can see that the emergence of a public in the Village due to the presence of solid waste and their engagement with it. We have already discussed that how waste is emerged as a technoscientific by-product in the previous chapter. In connection with this, if we are taking Varughese’s different categories of publics being constituted while engaging with technoscience as a flexible frame for representing the different groups of publics being constructed around the waste controversy, we can conceptualise Thrissur corporation dwellers as scientific-citizen publics. In sharp contrast to them, the villagers from Lalur are quasi-publics with an understanding that these publics are engaging with technoscience through political deliberations with waste as a subject.

### 3.7. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to map out public engagement with risk of waste with special reference to the discussion over Lalur solid waste controversy. Through the

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270 Ibid.
controversy, we can see that the villagers were negotiating with the authority against the risk of waste which reached their locality from the city. The shifted technoscientific risk multiplied into new risks including social risk which stopped their immediate life and some lost their privilege to be alive. Through negotiation and the serious engagement a new kind of public has been shaped around the risks of waste.

As we have seen in the chapter, the root of solid waste management system (from the patta kakkoose system) was in a casteist practice. Women from the thotty community were forced to this job as part of the caste hierarchy which shows the caste-gender discrimination, and they were considered as faceless people (purambokk in Malayalam). Actually, this community is totally missing from the decision making process. Varughese (2012) argued that they are missing masses or quasi publics. In the modern solid waste management system, the Kudumbashree workers are faceless people who live with the waste to be alive.

This chapter also depicted that how the authority of municipality was trying to mess up the protest by making allegations on leaders of protesters, and how the villagers tackled it. The chapter concludes that the failure of technology to solve the waste crisis, as the case shows, is not simply an engineering problem. Even though the villagers were successful in their protest to attain closure of the plant and the yard, they are still engaging with technoscientific risks associated with municipal solid waste and negotiating with the state for the removal of the dumped waste. This chapter did not look at the contribution of various stakeholders involved in this controversy, as the focus was more on the public engagement with the risks of waste. The forth chapter will discuss on the interventions of various stakeholders in the shaping of the public controversy over solid waste treatment plant at Vilappilsala, Thiruvananthapuram.