CHAPTER I

Introduction

The thesis titled ‘Writing Caste in Sotto Voce : The Paradigms of Savarna Discourse and Dalit Dialogue’ is primarily an engaged critique of nine twentieth century ‘progressive’ Malayalam plays.

The second half of the twentieth century is marked by the lateral entry of many erstwhile liminal identities into the centre-stage of discursive practices. Reclaiming a withered past, people, hitherto laid unnoticed in the abyss of unread histories, tried to articulate their identity in a distinct, say, indigenous way, especially in the third world. Thus, canons of culture were criticised under the shadow of a skeptical overview; paradigms of the west starkly adjudged. Yet, one would be wrong to assess that all the counter-discourses engendered in the post-colonial milieu has had a ‘pure’ philosophy free from its past colonial preferences/prejudices, for, the virtual presence of the coloniser still had a home in the deep consciousness of the colonial subjects evidenced by the fertile outgrowth of neocolonial ideologies and the uncritical acceptance of this new slavery in the name of a postcolonial imagined ‘nation’-alism. Consequently, streamlining the history of the third world with an empirical division by employing the terminologies ‘colonial’ and ‘post-colonial’ becomes extremely problematic.

Colonialism: An Overview in the World Context

The settlements of the imperial powers in remote continents were obviously not the exact replicas of the imperial centres¹. Settlement was a consequent
of the maritime explorations of the west. Had there been any other intentions apart from extracting the natural resources, the settlements in Asia, Africa and Latin America would not have been suffered a long and sustained suppression under the regime of the west. Definitely, the axis of the radical advancement of the settler was firmly fixed under the fertile soil of the colonies. Since the power relation manifested in a ‘coloniser-colonised’ dichotomy is vertical in character, the concept of equality (here, I use the term ‘equality’ in a macro/rhetoric level) is out of question. The reign of the imperial authority, characterised by its bi-polar polity, naturally made a rift between its own people in the homeland and the indigenous people of the remote settlements.

The emergence of merchandise as a tool for territorial expansion helped the new epoch of cultural modernity to have its rupture from the Middle Ages. This dissociation, often termed as a cultural shift in the sixteenth century Europe from its medieval legacies, fixed overseas trade as the main catalyst of the forthcoming sea changes in the world scenario. Trade, the harness of which always rested in the hands of the west, renovated the system of monarchy by accentuating its centrality in the colonies and allowing the beneficiaries in the home (ie, its own people) to have their terrain expanded. Affirming its role as an influential class, the beneficiaries of the overseas trade built-up a new social system in which the prototype of late capitalism can be seen. Later, this aristocratic minority decentralised the singularity of the kingdom/s by transforming the economy into a multi-layer social segment and conveyed an erstwhile suppressed plurality. This transformation, as crucial as the later formation of the ‘bourgeois public
sphere”, can be described as a ‘dethronement’, for it compelled the monarch to come outside of the court.

Being a period which disrupted the sovereignty of the king, renaissance sought a spatial reflex of its contemplation on culture. Occurring in a different way in the colonies, the Euro-centric renaissance disparaged its essence as a demi-democratic movement. Unlike the direct invasion or a much real politics of the monarchical system under which the colonies strided headlong into a ‘consent-conflict’ symbiosis, the European renaissance created a substratum of scholarly discourses in which the colonies were reinvented through a western perspective. Situating the colonies in an alien field, the west guised as their patron and guardian in whom, it was explained, the future of the colonial subjects vested.

‘Virtual Dominance’: Locating the Presence of Colonialism in Cultural Institutions

The cultural hegemony thus constructed by a Euro-owned discourse made a refraction in the consciousness of the indigenous people through various institutions, say, colonial in character. The inception of a virtual dominance helped the invader to make the ambience suitable for an appropriation at a larger level. Declaiming that they had been rehabilitating the indigenous culture from its dilapidation, the coloniser set his own culture in a superior realm of imperialist discourse. Deprived of being a people of their own culture with distinct geographical, racial and lingual specificities, the indigenous people gradually sank into a social amnesia of losing identity. This helped the west to speak/write on behalf of the colonial subjects. As
Edward Said puts it, ‘It is Europe that articulates the Orient’⁴. Not only does it epitomise the history of the Orient but also transcribes the cultural tribulations of the entire subaltern.

The problematisation of ‘virtual dominance’ is imperative in understanding the perennial presence of the coloniser in the distant lands. Even after their physical withdrawal from the remote settlements they still retain power and exert control through various cultural institutions. For instance, consider the pivotal role of language in maintaining a cultural hierarchy of racial emphasis. The educational institutions established by the settler propagated a system of knowledge wherein the opposing binaries (white/black, foreign/vernacular, self/other, orient/occident, etc.) found a dialogic systematisation. Positioning the binaries vis-à-vis each other, the new knowledge system re-articulated the social chasm through various offshoots of language, say, literature, official inscriptions, etc. The indigenous people, who had been portrayed in the western literature as a people with less human qualities, never realised the danger in depicting them as a contrast to the ‘refined’/‘cultured’ western nature. While evaluating Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* Chinua Achebe tried to contrast the difference between the depictions of a black man and a white man by juxtaposing the author’s narration of his discerning of the two:

“A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms”, while he describes his discerning of an english man as, “his calves exposed to the public gaze….dazzled the beholder by the splendour
of their marble-like condition and their rich tone of ivory”

Here we can see an expression of racial prejudices. Less apparent in its manifestations, racialism found a safe hide-out in literature. Acting as an extra-coercive apparatus for domination, literature made a legitimisation of colonial regime.

Colonialism: The Indian Context

This is not a treatise on colonialism. Yet we need to understand the strange ways through which it works on various determinants of culture. For framing a counter-discourse by reaffirming the indigenous identity it is necessary to tear off the labels given to the indigenous people throughout the period of colonial regime. This study particularly focuses on the evolution of theatre in Kerala with special reference to the mode of presentation of Dalit identity in some of the (selected) Malayalam plays. Since it envisages to problematise ‘a stultified’ identity of Dalit ethnicity by placing it against the supposedly virtuous pan-Indian parity, it is necessary to analyse the ‘structuring’ process of Kerala society in a trans-ethnic, trans-cultural, trans-regional and trans-national perspective. India, as a country with centuries old colonial past, must have imbibed a Euro-centric disciplinary system. This ‘hindrance’ faced by a researcher has been apprehensively noted by Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her book Decolonizing Methodologies – Research and Indigenous People:

It is surely difficult to discuss research methodology and indigenous people, in the same breath, without
having an analysis of imperialism, without understanding the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices.  

So, indispensable is the knowing of related disciplines in a social research. As this study aims to locate the political process of retrieving the Dalit identity from an unarticulated ‘otherness’, it is necessary to reread the social history in a political way. Taking nine plays which are said to be significant landmarks in the history of Malayalam theatre as variables, this study encompasses a period of sixty years spanning from the 1920s to 1980s. Crucial is this period in Indian history, for it comprises two halves of distinct realities; one is of serfdom and the other is of freedom. If the former half created a cumulus of struggles densed with national cause, the latter strove to drive out the remnants of imperial Britain by pacing up to a modernity of ‘post-nationalism’. The clear halves of serfdom and freedom provide a more sensible field of problematics opposite in character and homologous in relation. Though this unit of sixty years is comparatively small in historical research, its relevance can hardly be refuted, for it had carried undoubtedly the repercussions of a great many upheavals ranging from the aftermath of World War I to the cold war.

Before entering into the crux of this research we need to understand India’s development towards a capital economy. Converting India into a land with middle class aspirations, the imperial economic priorities largely discarded the basic demand of the oppressed populace pertaining to their share on agriculture land. This was a natural consequent of the industry-based
development paradigm of Britain. Britain, by disseminating English education, created a minority precisely dissimilar to the upper and lower strata of Indian society. In her meticulous study on Indian middle class, Leela Fernandez observes:

English education was a distinguishing feature of the colonial middle class that set this new social group in an uneasy relationship both with traditional elites as well as other less privileged segments.\(^9\)

By the creation of an educated minority, the British government in India sought a facilitation of their colonial administration. On the other side, the men who had been appointed as clerks under the British administration by virtue of their English education gradually imbibed the values of the Enlightenment and the ideas of western democracy. Though their civic/political life reflected these values, it never went beyond the parochialism of Indian caste system. Unable to sever the tether of varnasrama, the middle class had been gradually reduced to a silent propagator of caste in Indian society. The seminals of the capitalist bourgeoisie, characterised by its dialectical binaries, can be seen in the contradictory feature of the nineteenth century Indian middle class. If we trace back the lineage of colonial/postcolonial middle class, we can invariably see its upper caste genealogy. If we do investigate the reason behind this caste-preoccupation of middle class, it would be evident that most of the people who were given English education under the British rule had been come from upper caste Hindu families. Leela Fernandez correctly observes:
Middle class identity is constructed through identities such as caste, gender or religion\textsuperscript{10}.

Though the later period witnessed a widening of the middle class sphere through the inclusion of more educated Dalits into it, no space for a counter discourse had been created by it. Dalits, the docile subjects of centuries old anathema of \textit{varnasrama dharma}, not seeing the latent politics of untouchability which had been carried out through the safe conduits of the liberal middle class rhetorics, considered the values propagated by middle class as egalitarian and anti-brahmanic. As the middle class mostly comprised Brahmins, it could easily come over to a hegemonic structure of the imperial government. This widened the casteist rift. Leela Fernandez notes:

\begin{quote}
Middle class objectives coincided with the colonial state policy that viewed the primarily low-caste urban poor as a threat to social and political stability.\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

(The term ‘middle class’ is rather broad in conveying the cultural/social/economic priorities of a social stratum; therefore, it is safe to use ‘bourgeoisie’, a term more responsive to the epistemological exigencies. But in this research I prefer using both these terms simultaneously in order to make it clear that the scope of this study only demands to mark a social section for conveying its virtual characteristics rather than carving definite niches for each social stratum.)

It was not accidental that the middle class gradually became an articulate minority in colonial India. By assimilating the essence of both the upper and
lower strata of society, the middle class rebuilt the production relations in such a way that the upper caste could retain its hegemony even in a post-feudal society. Bipin Chandra notes how the mechanics of national struggle jeopardised the Dalit cause:

The rich peasantry has also succeeded in mobilising the poor peasants into popular agitations and movements which primarily serve rich peasants’ interests.\(^{12}\)

Reworking the base structure of the feudal society into its capitalist adaptabilities, the middle class slowly started to transform the superstructure of the society. Partha Chatterjee, in his book, *A Possible India*, writes:

When a bourgeoisie generalises its mode of production in society, it establishes its leadership not only over the economy but over all structures of society, including its ideological-cultural superstructure.\(^{13}\)

Those who control the base structure can easily influence the superstructure of the society. To be precise, the production relations will define the power relations. Various institutions of superstructure strove to perpetuate the power relations in such a way that no upheavals could endanger the existing system of social hierarchies. Partha Chatterjee continues:

The bourgeoisie, through various civil-social institutions – the family, the cultural associations, the media and educational system which in bourgeois society, becomes the most influential part of the state
apparatus – seeks to diffuse its own individualistic worldview over the rest of the society.\textsuperscript{14}

The ways through which the bourgeoisie disseminates its own economic interests are so subtle that it would hardly be discerned in a casual glance. If it need to be precisely understood we have to go through the statistics of the budget allocation set apart for higher education and primary education sectors in India during the period after independence. It is obvious that the bourgeoisie who created a knowledge system for retaining its power over the rest of society had largely used the higher education system as a tool for its perennial sustenance. During the year 1955-56, the increase in the growth rate of enrolment to the higher education sector was seventy four per cent while the primary education sector showed an increase of only thirty seven per cent. More grave was the situation in 1970-71. While the higher education sector showed sixty seven per cent of increase in its growth rate, the primary education sector ran down to twelve\textsuperscript{15}.

The incongruity in approach to the primary education sector and higher education sector shows nothing but the vested interests of the middle class who as a social section endowed with the boon of basic education, sought to embellish its ground of influence through higher education sector. The negligence of primary education resulted in the gradual alienation of the subaltern from the knowledge field. As the link between knowledge and power has been much debated in the light of postcolonial revelations, it is evident that no dominance would be possible without the reinforcement of a supporting knowledge system. Formation of a paradigm in which the dominant caste/race has a pivotal role is indispensable in maintaining the
status quo unperturbed. We have already discussed how and why the subaltern had been exorcised from the trajectory of discursive practices and thus reduced into a trifle no worthy of attention. We also contemplated how the enlightenment values in an emerging democratic society had been synthesised by the middle class, making the process of re-fixing the pre-capital power relations in a new vessel more pragmatic.

Culture and many of its offshoots like art or literature are predominant in the superstructure of a society. We have seen the ebb and flow of the indigenous languages in two distinct social set-ups, colonial and post-colonial. Literature, as a derivative of language, naturally codifies the paradigms of an existing social system into more concrete character representations, thus allowing the mechanism of domination to play its role. The quest for subaltern identity in literature may start from this point.

The psychological exigencies in situating the self and otherness in thorough opposite domains call for a historical analysis of the narratives which always built characters by epitomising the vice-virtue binary in an exaggerated extent. There are no intricacies in realising the essence of these narratives: Two kinds of people are there on the Earth - one is good and the other is bad. Good people always win the war while the other loses it. God protects the good while he annihilates the other. It is clear that the social sanity envisaged by the narrator/author is supposed to be created only through the crushing up of the ‘vicious other’. We have to understand that the good people portrayed in the narratives were always in possession of a fixed territory of region or land or movable properties like cow or horses. The duty of the belligerent kshatriyas, as described in the Hindu myths, was
nothing but salvaging the possessions of the good people, i.e., the brahmins. Denoted by the names which express their incivility in a grotesque manner, the *rakshasas* were always positioned in strange realms like forest or subterrain. The crux of the matter lies in the fact that the *rakshasas* who have been described as the perturbing forces in a land of tranquility always start their agitation from the boundaries of a territory. This underlines the liminal existence of the *rakshasas*. Their battles are always seen crushed off by the refined arms of *kshatriya* or by the (un)due interference of god or his manifold incarnations. The victories of the *kshatriyas/brahmins* were not only a re-emphasis on their possession but also a rearticulation of their dominance over the alien/subaltern/subterranean cultures. If we thresh out the metaphors in the narratives we can see the pedigree of the caste system in India. The people who had been ostracised by the *brahmin-kshatriya/god-demigod* nexus were subjected to a gradual disappearance from the elite discursive practices. If we juxtapose a dalit life (along with its infinite tribulations) in its materiality and its representations in literature (or connected disciplines) in a common discursive realm, say for example, social science, we can realise that the literature had no other functions besides rationalising the caste discrimination. Alok Mukherjee, when translating Sharan Kumar Limbale’s *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations*, observes:

> The space that occupied by the Dalits outside the village in real life was erased in the world of literature. Thus, if society ensured its purity by relegating the untouchable to a liminal space, literature went a step
further. It ensured that untouchable would not pollute its world even by touching that space.¹⁶

The power structure articulated in literature (ancient and modern) is now entered into more understandable vicinity. For legitimising the politics of dominance of one people over the other, it was necessary to divide our virtual realm into a vice/virtue duality.

Unlike many other countries in the world, India has a rather peculiar genealogy, which is nothing but its varnashrama dharma. Also called as chaturvarnya, it assorted people into four different categories on the basis of their nature of work. The men who had the prerogative to act as mediators between the god and its subjects formed the most privileged category, denoted in the old narratives as Brahmans. Kshatriyas come next in the hierarchy. They are supposed to protect the territory/nation from the alien invasion. The third category, known as Vyshyas, was vested with the duty of mobilising the domestic economy through trade. The men who had been doing the menial jobs either inside or outside the palaces formed the bottom layer – Shudras.

Broadly speaking, the inter-layer relationship, though it has been demarcated by the caste system, produces the base structure of the society. Since the chaturvarnya was dividing the society on an occupational basis, its inter-relations must have been on the basis of production. So, we can see both the determinants of a base structure in chaturvarnya – the relations of production and the forces of production. If the play of these forces is understood in an epistemological way, the roots of the disparities will be
cleared. Before we enter into the discussion of a denotified group, indicated by the demean name, chandala, it is necessary to know what Marxism says about the base and superstructure of a society. In his book Marxism and Literary Criticism, Terry Eagleton writes:

Taken together, these ‘forces’ and ‘relations’ of production form what Marx calls ‘the economic structure of society’, or what is more commonly known by Marxism as the economic ‘base’ or ‘infrastructure’. From this economic base, in every period, emerges a ‘superstructure’—certain forms of law and politics, a certain kind of state, whose essential function is to legitimate the power of the social class which owns the means of economic production. But the superstructure contains more than this: it also consists of certain ‘definite forms of social consciousness’ (political, religious, ethical, aesthetic and so on), which is what Marxism designates as ideology. The function of ideology, also, is to legitimate the power of the ruling class in society; in the last analysis, the dominant ideas of a society are the ideas of its ruling class.17

Labour is the backbone of the economic structure of a society. Being the fabric of the base structure labour designs the unique characteristic of an economic system. It is inevitable for the sustenance of a society that it should keep a ‘labour stock’ in its hand. So, the creation of a labour stock and owning of it determine how a society should distinctively construct a
power relation from the very stem of its base structure. Even though the labour power acts as a leverage of the economic mobilisation, it does not go beyond the defined layers of social hierarchy. So, the progression of a society through its developmental streamline naturally releases its own internal paradoxes. This is termed by Marxism as class difference. By saying that the history of mankind is the history of ‘class conflicts’, Marxism postulated a theory of class-war in which the society was explained as an entity of two opposing forces, i.e., the exploiter and the exploited. As per Marxism the labour class is the exploited one.

Marxism was not the only theory that focused on the tribulations of labour class. There were many philanthropic movements which, though not politically articulate up to the level of Marxism, envisaged an egalitarian society in an era of stark disparities. It is clear from this that the role of labour class is paramount in a production based society despite its demoted dignity. It is equally undisputable that the labour class, as a social force behind the ‘structuring’ of an ‘economic society’, always left spaces for counter discourses, not only in the context of politics, but also in the realm of religion and philanthropy.

From this referral point we need to evaluate the social impact of the division of labour in a chaturvarnya society. Despite prevailing discriminations in that society, all the four varnas had a decisive role in the production process of the society. Even the shudras, the dwellers of the lower stratum, propelled the society into new directions though they were deprived of the fruits of development.
But what was the role of the ostracised one? Were they organised as a separate labour stock outside the village? If they were deprived of a job, how could they manage to get a livelihood? Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer, in his book, *Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Future*, tried to find an answer:

As to the functions of *chandalas* [this term can broadly be placed as a synonym to *nishada, dasyu* or *rakshasa* – see that Krishna Iyer’s treatise has relied much on Prabhati Mukherjee’s Dalit studies], there was a general agreement. They worked as hangmen of kings, carried corpses of those committing suicide or those having no relatives, and as sweepers of village streets. From the Mahabharata we note that *chandalas* were connected with work at the crematorium and collected the clothes of only those whom they hanged or of those who committed suicide or had no relatives.18

The vocations specified here had no direct relation to the production process of the society. The works assigned to *chandalas*19 cannot be considered as a labour by any parameters. It was rather a demeaning strategy through which the stigma of otherness/untouchability was being re-emphasised. The practice of untouchability was legitimised through the queer works they had been doing – how can they be touched while they remain the very carriers of corpses and human excretion? The pertinent fact about these filthy jobs is that during no course of its rendering it ever connected to the nucleus of the prevailing economic system. It is clear from this that the formation of the base structure in a caste oriented system was devoid of the presence of
untouchables. Since the untouchables were not a part of the base structure of the society, it was impossible for them to have a voice in the multiple determinants of the superstructure. So we can rightly arrive at a conclusion that the absence of untouchables in the various institutions of superstructure, say, literature, religion, culture, etc. was not accidental. It was rather a historical process in which the hegemonic social order retained its structure through the ‘mutual protection’ of these various institutions. Here starts the relevance of unraveling the latent politics (the politics of hegemony, disparity and discrimination) carried by the various determinants of the superstructure of a society.

Now we start to see literature in the light of above discussions. Literature is undisputedly the mirror of social consciousness. Terry Eagleton reasserts:

Art [literature], then, is for Marxism part of superstructure of society. It is part of society’s ideology – an element in that complex structure of social perception which ensures that the situation in which one social class has power over the others is either seen by most members of the society as ‘natural’, or not seen at all. To understand literature, then, means understanding the total social process of which it is part. As the Russian Marxist critic Georgy Plekhanov put it: ‘The social mentality of age is conditioned by that age’s social relations. This is nowhere quite as evident as in the history of art and literature’. Literary works are not mysteriously inspired, or explicable simply in terms of
their authors’ psychology. They are forms of perception, particular ways of seeing the world; and as such they have a relation to that dominant ways of seeing the world which is the ‘social mentality’ or ideology of an age. That ideology, in turn, is the product of the concrete social relations into which men enter at a particular time and space; it is the way those class-relations are experienced, legitimised and perpetuated. Moreover, men are not free to choose their social relations; they are constrained into them by material necessity – by the nature and stage of development of their mode of economic production.²⁰

So, literature is to be understood as a carrier of this ‘social mentality’ or ‘ideology’ which is patterned obliviously in it. Exhuming the politics out of literature helps us to see how far a literary production is progressive in its content.

Malayalam literature, marked by its versatility and vigorous responsiveness, has always acted as a harbinger of the approaching social changes. Rich in its social content, the twentieth century Malayalam literature casts light on the much debated social-relations of the past. But taking merely the content as the main indicator of the progressive or reactionary characteristic of a literary work will run the risk of being misguided to the surface realities of the society. It is such a sad thing that most of the literary works which had been considered as ‘progressive’ in Kerala was incapable of seeing the world free from its deeply rooted caste/gender prejudices. There was much in its
silences than what was spoken out. While evaluating Pierre Macherey’s literary approaches, Terry Eagleton underlines the importance of seeing the ‘gaps’ and ‘silences’ which a book leaves behind.

For Macherey, a work is tied to ideology not so much by what it says as by what it does not say. It is in the significant *silences* of a text, in its gaps and absences, that the presence of ideology can be most positively felt. It is these silences which the critic must make ‘speak’. The text is, as it were, ideologically forbidden to say certain things; in trying to tell the truth in his own way, for example, the author finds himself forced to reveal the limits of the ideology within which he writes. He forced to reveal its gaps and silences, what it is unable to articulate.21

Here, in this study, I try to pursue the silences upon which the so called ‘progressive’ literary canons furtively cherished the decayed social-relations of the past. I think that this exhaustive introduction will serve a more definite base for the efficacy of the detailed discussions that arise in the next chapters. As this study particularly focuses to problematise the liminal/no space given to Dalit characters/issues in Malayalam drama in relation to the dominant social paradigms in which caste is a pivotal determinant, it is necessary that we should intermittently glimpse back to the discussions of this long introduction.
The thesis envisage to analyse nine plays – nine plays which are considered by theatre critics as milestones in Malayalam theatre history – in relation to the social paradigms and its direct and virtual domination over the authors who have been considered as the most progressive among the playwrights of Kerala.

The nine plays that this study has taken for analysis are:

1. *Adukkayilninnu Arangathekku* (V. T. Bhattathirippad, 1930)

2. *Marakkudakkullile Mahanarakam* (M. R. Bhattathirippad, 1931)


5. *Nammalonnu* (Cherukad, 1948)


7. *Ningalenne Communistakki* (Thoppil Bhasi, 1952)

8. *Avanavan Kadamba* (Kavalam Narayana Panickar, 1975)


The approach will be interdisciplinary, with a historical-materialist theoretical framework to bring out the relevance of the socio-political ambience in Kerala for the Malayalam theatre with reference to the
development of Dalit aesthetics. At a time when theatre takes up subaltern politics, gender dichotomy and eco-radicalism, theatre in Kerala has covered considerable ground to indicate the existence of dalit/feminist/green theatre. To simply label it as a continuous evolution based on the growth of genres is to miss the complex interaction between theatre and society. It is crucial to look at the ruptures within the tradition to understand the legitimacy that is now bestowed on many of the radical theatre practices.

**Objectives**

The objective of this study is to find adequate understanding about the following questions.

1. What is the role of caste hierarchy in defining the ‘progressive’ outlook of the playwrights?

2. Even after realising the caste system as an anathema, do the playwrights succeed in handling the themes from a subaltern point of view? Are they able to re-position the Dalits in discourses more central to their distinct issues with agency and subjectivity?

3. How/Where do we locate Dalit characters/issues in Malayalam theatre? Do they inhabit a liminal space or do they share a central space along with the other characters/issues?

For the sake of the efficacy of the study, a three-way analysis has been envisaged:
1. Historical study of the evolution of modern theatre in Kerala.

2. Analysis of the impact of political events like the social reform movements, formation of Kerala and the communist government of 1957, the land reform bill, the Emergency, the Naxalite movement, etc. on theatre and vice versa.

3. A radical reading of the political issues in the primary texts and their performances.

**Hypotheses**

1. The Dalit characters and their distinct issues have always been given only a liminal space in the texts.

2. The reason behind this demotion of Dalits was nothing but the social untouchability faced by them.

3. Even when dealing with a progressive subject, the authors have not gone beyond the premises of caste-oriented discursive paradigms.

4. Theatre becomes a legitimising agent of the caste hegemony in Kerala.

5. Rather than inflicting a coercive silencing, the state has opted for a strategy of condescension, appropriation and assimilation for obliterating the Dalit issues from the discursive practices. Theatre in Kerala has become a state apparatus by normalising the process of condescension, appropriation and assimilation within a cultural realm.
Notes

1. See Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies : Research and Indigenous People* (University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 1999), she argues, “Colonies were not exact replicas of the imperial centre, culturally or politically”. (2)


   In Habermas’s initial historical sketch the public sphere designates three distinct, though related, domains – domains which are distributed along a temporal axis that extends from renaissance to the late modern period. The first, or feudal, public sphere was constituted as the unstable domain created by the appearance of the monarch outside the court. The second, bourgeois (classical), public sphere was created when those individuals whose interests were formed as a result of private economic initiatives gathered either to oppose or to
bargain for the social power invested in the state. The third public sphere emerged when the classical (bourgeois) public sphere which had tended to protect public communication from economic imperatives, was overrun by the technological resources of the mass media thereby reducing the public to a ‘target audience’ rather than a dialogically formed collectivity.

(9)


6. The concept ‘Structuring Structures’ has been postulated by Pierrie Bourdieu. See Leela Fernandez, *India’s New Middle Class : Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002).

The ability of social segments to accumulate capital and engage in the strategies of conversion are shaped and constrained by their interaction with existing structures of inequality. Such strategies of conversion are shaped by reworking of long-standing social inequalities such as the symbolic and material structures of caste, class and gender inequality. Bourdieu calls it ‘structuring structures’. (xxx)

8. The term ‘post-nationalism’ marks the shift from the concept of the nation state to our plurality. See Jasbir Jain, ‘Interpreting the Past: Culture and History in Sahgal’s Work’ in Surya Nath Pandey (ed.), *Writing in a Post-colonial Space* (Atlantic Publishers and Distributers, New Delhi, 1999) p.35.


10. Ibid., p.4.

11. Ibid., p.12.


15. For more details please See Leela Fernandez, *India’s New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002)
State subsidised higher education while it neglected primary education. Higher education received a disproportionate share of available funds due to political pressure from the urban middle class and rural elite. (21)


19. Ibid., p.10.

Krishna Iyer traces back the lineage of Dalit towards the *chandalas*.

Among the most despised communities of India were the *chandalas*. But were they moral cripples, mental retardates and physical wrecks? Not at all. They were manly rebels, overpowered by the Aryan settlers or banished from the banquet of better life for the sin of non-co-operation with conquerors – a Gandhian virtue, perhaps. This hypothesis is probabilised by Prabhati Mukherji’s study titled *Beyond the Four Varnas*. Who were the chandalas, that most outcaste category? He
sums up thus: “Candala category was as if the last refuse of all unwanted people. This group not only kept on swelling in number but also consisted of diverse elements. Possibly, therefore, the atavikas also, like others, merged with the candalas after some time, and the former lost identity in due course. This is further strengthened by the fact that later most of the other social groups lost their names and identities but not the candalas. This is supported not only by the structural composition of the candalas but also by the fact that unlike other eponymous caste groups like rajakas, carmakaras, etc. candalas indicate neither any specific occupation nor any definite occupation was prescribed for them.” Significantly, this method of mixing diverse peoples under a common label and then giving them the lowest position in society is not new. Indian social system, in spite of its rigid structure, developed organisational ‘devices’ for absorbing unwanted and ‘alienated’ groups of people, which also acted as safety valves. (10, 11)


21. Ibid., p.34-35.