



Abraham, Sara (2003) *An ethnographic study of violence experienced by Dalit Christian women in Kerala State, India and the implications of this for feminist practical theology*. PhD thesis.

<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/2456/>

Copyright and moral rights for this thesis are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

**AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF VIOLENCE
EXPERIENCED BY DALIT CHRISTIAN WOMEN IN
KERALA STATE, INDIA AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF
THIS FOR FEMINIST PRACTICAL THEOLOGY**

BY

SARA ABRAHAM

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND
RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN THE ARTS FACULTY, UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

SEPTEMBER

2003

THESIS ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how experiences of violence, which have been secret in the past, can be articulated that they may become resources for theological reflection and Christian action. The research technique employed is ethnography, which is used to uncover the violence experienced in the lives of Dalit Christian women in Kerala State in India.

Part one of this thesis concerns methodology. Chapter one explores how ethnography can be used in Practical Theology in order to make the violence visible. The first chapter explores how the techniques of ethnographic research can be used in order to break women's silence with speech and to consider their lived experience as a primary theological resource. This chapter demonstrates how important feminist ethnography is to manifest women's experience. This chapter argues that there are particular questions that face researchers who are working amongst poor and illiterate women that are different from those faced by white 'western feminist theologians.'

Chapter two examines how other women theologians working amongst poor and marginalised women from non-western cultures have sought to make women's experience visible and have emphasised its theological significance. This chapter explores what I can gain from the work of these women that will help me to develop my own research on Dalit Christian women.

Chapter three describes the research setting by explaining the context for this research, the researched community of Dalits and the location, where Dalit women gathered together. This chapter demonstrates my relations, as an ethnographer, to Dalit Christian women who have converted to Christianity from the Pulaya caste. Finally, this chapter justifies the research strategies employed in this research.

Part two of this thesis contains my field research. Chapter four is about meta-ethnography generated at a one-day seminar and two Bible studies. In chapter five Dalit Christian women, who are the survivors of various kinds of violence, tell their life stories in their own words. In this way Dalit women started to uncover the secret and hidden experience they had in the past.

Part three of this thesis is the analysis of data and conclusion. Chapter six analyses the significant themes, which have emerged from my research into the life experiences of Dalit

women. It demonstrates that Dalit women's experience and the cultural traditions of Dalit community are important resources for the development of a Dalit Feminist Practical Theology. Finally, in the light of my research, I make concrete strategies for action that could bring hope and transformation in the lives of Dalit women who are experiencing violence.

DECLARATION

I affirm that the thesis ‘An Ethnographic Study of Violence Experienced by Dalit Christian Women in Kerala State, India and the Implications of this for Feminist Practical Theology’ is the result of my own research under the supervision of Dr. Heather Walton in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Arts Faculty, University of Glasgow. It has not been submitted to any other university for a degree.

Name: Sara Abraham

Signature

Date:

A red rectangular box, likely a placeholder for a signature or date, positioned to the right of the 'Signature' and 'Date' labels.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank God for His provision throughout my studies in the University of Glasgow. Though the thesis is the result of my own research, it would not have come to be without critical questions, constructive comments and valid suggestions of my supervisor Dr. Heather Walton. I owe particular thanks to Dr. Alison Jasper, who encouraged me in the initial stage to think about the issue of violence against women.

My thanks to Professors David Jasper, John Barclay and Dr. Ian Hazlet for their advice and help I received as a student in the Department. My thanks to the Divinity Department for allotting William Barclay, Marian Blair and Findlater scholarships, Mossbank Legacy, Couper Bequest, Malloweir Travel Fund and Overseas Student Appeal Fund. Thanks to Rev. George Chavanikkamannil and Board Members of the Good News for India for allotting the scholarship from 1998-2003, which covered the partial expense of my stay in the United Kingdom. I am grateful to Rev. Richard and Mrs. Margaret Gorries for the financial support from the Kin Craig Trust and Richard's kind contribution towards the expense of buying a laptop, which was essential for my research in India. I owe particular thanks to Richard for reading my thesis. Thanks to Marjorie Cowie for her contribution towards the expense of printing my thesis. Thanks to Rev. C. George for his prayer support. Thanks to Thomas George and Abraham George for their financial contribution in 1998. My thanks to friends in Anniesland Brethren Assembly and St. Silas Episcopal Church for the spiritual support I received from them. I am grateful to my friends Bill and Ann Wilson, Rev. Paul Watson, Rev. Duncan Peter, Ann Morrison and many other friends whose valuable friendship cheered my family and me throughout my stay in Glasgow.

At last, not least, I am grateful to my husband Mathai Daniel Abraham and our daughter Ann for their great patience, understandings and adjustments during these years of my studies. I am grateful to my parents Kallarakkal Chacko Ouseph (late) and Annamma Ouseph and my parents-in law Pastor Mathai Daniel (late) and Thankamma Daniel for the love and care I received. I remember our baby Abhishai, whom I miscarried in between my studies in Scotland.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THESIS ABSTRACT	ii
DECLARATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
PART I: METHOD	4
CHAPTER ONE	4
MAKING VIOLENCE VISIBLE: THE USE OF ETHNOGRAPHY IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY	4
<i>Practical Theology: A Conversation between Experience and Faith</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>The Development of Ethnography in Anthropology and Sociology</i>	<i>6</i>
Ethnography	6
Constructing a Method	8
The Study of Social Worlds	9
<i>The Use of Ethnography in the Practical Theology of Gerald Arbuckle</i>	<i>10</i>
The Language of Culture	10
Religious Life as a Case Study	15
The Confident Observer	18
<i>Don S. Browning's Use of Ethnography in Practical Theology</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Recent Developments in Ethnography</i>	<i>25</i>
Critical Ethnography	25
Interpretive Ethnography	26
<i>Feminist Ethnography</i>	<i>28</i>
Researching the Everyday World of Women	28
<i>Principles of Feminist Ethnography</i>	<i>29</i>
Relationship between the Ethnographer and Researched Women	30
Focusing on Women's Experience	30
Woman Listening to Woman	31
Feminist Ethnography in the Indian Context	32
<i>The Use of Ethnography in the Practical Theology of Riet Bons-Storm</i>	<i>33</i>
Need to Counter Invisibility of Women	35
Research Data from Women's Lives	35
Values Self-narrative	36
Socio-cultural Narrative and Its Failure	38
Women's Space as a 'Bird and Its Golden Cage': A Narrow Space in the Sociocultural Narratives	39

No Hierarchy of Knowledge	39
The Strengths of Bons- Storm's Approach	40
The Problems	41
The Challenges of the Indian Context	41
 CHAPTER TWO.....	45
 WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE	45
<i>Womanist Theology</i>	45
Katie G. Cannon	45
<i>Mujerista Theology</i>	56
Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz	56
<i>Asian Feminist Theology</i>	60
Kwok Pui-lan	60
Chung Hyun Kyung.....	70
<i>Conclusion</i>	82
 CHAPTER THREE	84
 RESEARCH SETTING	84
<i>Context of the Research</i>	84
Dalits	84
Caste	87
Caste in the Churches in Kerala	88
Pulayas, Cheramar or Cherumakkal	90
Parippu Village: Ethnographer's Observation	91
New India Bible Church at Parippu: A Cheramar Church	93
Dalit Christian Women: Invisible and Silent.....	94
Dalit Christian Women: Survivors of Oppression by Caste, Colour, Gender and Religion	95
Dalit Christian Women's Experience	98
The Reasons for the Ethnographic Research among the Dalit Christian Women.....	101
<i>Myself as an Ethnographer</i>	102
My First Contact with My Informants.....	102
Insider and Outsider Ethnographer	102
Power Differentials.....	103
Ethnographic Settings.....	104
Personal Relationships	105
<i>My Research Strategies</i>	106
Why One-day Seminar on "Women's Suffering"?	106
Why Bible Studies?.....	107
Why Informal Conversations between the Researcher and the Informants?	109
<i>Conclusion</i>	112

PART II: RESEARCH	113
 CHAPTER FOUR	113
ONE-DAY SEMINAR AND TWO BIBLE STUDIES	113
<i>“Women’s Suffering”: Meta-ethnography at a One-day Seminar</i>	113
Every Day Experience of Abuse.....	114
The Violence of Discrimination	115
Abuse within the Christian Community.....	116
The Effect of Abuse	117
<i>Violence against Women: Meta-ethnography at Two Bible Study Groups</i>	118
Bible Study One: Rape of Tamar	118
Bible Study Two: A Levite and his Concubine	131
<i>Conclusion</i>	144
 CHAPTER FIVE	146
LIFE STORIES	146
<i>Sexual Violence within the Family</i>	146
Leela	146
Kavitha Johnson	151
<i>Domestic Violence: Survivors of Wife Battering</i>	162
Annamma Devasya	162
Elsamma Babychen	166
Mary Babu	172
<i>Cultural Violence</i>	177
Annamma Yohannan: Survivor of Rape and Cultural Oppression.....	177
<i>Conclusion</i>	183
 PART III: CONCLUSION	184
 CHAPTER SIX	184
A NEW THEOLOGY RELAVANT TO DALIT CHRISTIAN WOMEN	184
<i>Significant Themes and Issues, Which Have Emerged from the Research</i>	184
Endemic Nature of Violence against Dalit Women in the Research Group .	184
The Caste Nature of the Society	188
The Economic Position of Dalit Women in a Caste based Society.....	190

The Impact of Caste-Society upon Dalit Men	194
Special Issues Relating to Dalit Women.....	197
Silence and Secrecy	198
Dalit Christian Women and Religion.....	205
<i>A New Theology: Bare-Breasted Theology</i>	<i>212</i>
BBT- A Form of Liberation Theology.....	213
BBT- A Survival Point for Dalit Christian Women.....	213
BBT- Help Dalit Christian Women to overcome Shame and Stereotyping them as Unclean	214
BBT- A Public Voice of Dalit Christian Women Breaking Secrecy	214
BBT- A Body Theology	214
<i>Resources in Dalit Cultural Traditions for Constructing New Theology: -</i>	<i>215</i>
Slave Narratives	215
Dalit Stories	216
Experience of Dalit Struggle	218
Practical Theology: A Theology in Action.....	221
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	223

INTRODUCTION

My concern towards the Dalits started in 1985, while I was working as a lecturer in a Bible College in India. I noticed one of my students, who is a jovial Dalit Christian, looked very distressed one day. I called her to my office for a personal talk to enquire what was troubling her and whether I could be a help to her in anyway. She was bit hesitant to share her problem but when I insisted she shared it confidentially. As she started to speak she burst into tears, I reached out and assured her that I was willing to listen to her problem. She explained that one of the teachers often discriminated and degraded her on the basis of her skin colour. She said, "Teacher, I am black [I am a Dalit] therefore, that sir [male teacher] always hurts me by his words and dealings. He is well behaved to white [high caste and Syrian Christian] girls." I understood her agony as she wept in front of me and I found it difficult to comfort her in that situation. She was a capable student leader but she was shattered by the discrimination she experienced on the basis of her caste and colour. This incident opened my eyes towards the difficulties and discrimination Dalits experience in India. Since then I became very sensitive to the needs of Dalit students in the College. This incident raised questions in my mind as to, how can I be a help to Dalits for their liberation and what can I offer for their liberation. However I decided to challenge the evil caste system. Therefore I started with encouraging my students to do the same. In 1998 I joined the University of Glasgow for further theological education. Two course on Feminist Theology and Practical Theology sharpened my mind to seek a practical solution for liberating Dalit women, who experience violence, and I decided to do research which could uncover their hidden experience. This a most significant work from the Indian context because this thesis explores the violence experienced in the lives of Dalit Christian women by active listening to their life stories, which have not been written or recorded previously by academic researchers. My research proves that techniques of ethnography, which have developed primarily within anthropology and sociology are relevant to explore the violence Dalit Christian women experience so that Dalit women's experience might become the focus of theological reflection and Christian action in Practical Theology.

The whole thesis is divided into three parts and there are six chapters. Chapter one explores how ethnography can be used in Practical Theology in order to make the violence visible. The first chapter considers how the techniques of ethnography can be used in order to make women's experience visible, to break their silence with speech and to consider their lived experience a primary theological resource. This chapter finds that feminist ethnography is suitable to uncover women's experience. Furthermore this chapter

addresses particular questions, which face researchers who are working amongst poor and illiterate women.

Chapter two explores how women theologians Katie G. Cannon, Ada Maria Isasi Diaz, Kwok Pui-lan, and Chung Hyun Kyung have sought to make poor and marginalised women's experience visible and have emphasised its theological significance. These theologians used ethnographic techniques in their research, when they explored how to use women's experience as a primary source for reflection in Christian theology. Cannon uses ethnographic technique in a different way from the other three women theologians by analysing Black women's literary tradition and exploring Black women's experience. Diaz uses ethnographic technique by the active involvement and reflection of the participant Hispanic women in her research. In this way Hispanic women raise their voices for their liberation and in the process of articulating their own theology, where their lived experience became the source for their theology. Asian theologians Pui-lan and Kyung use techniques of ethnography by listening to the stories of women and considering women's experience as a resource to develop theology for Asian women. I explore whether I can gain from the work of these theologians something that will help me to do my own research on Dalit Christian women.

In chapter three the context of the research is explained by analysing who are Dalits and then how the caste system has an impact upon the lives of Dalit Christian women. This chapter also describes a Dalit church at Parippu and explains the settings of the research. Finally, this chapter explains three strategies I used in the research to explore the violence Dalit Christian women experience.

Part two of this thesis proves that my research strategies are powerful to explore and expose the violence Dalit Christian women experience. Chapter four and five demonstrate that how Dalit Christian women have broken their silence with speaking out in the seminar, interpreting the scripture in the Bible study groups and telling their life stories. Their life stories reveal various kinds of violence they experienced in their private and public life.

In part three of this thesis, chapter six exposes various factors contributing towards the violence against Dalit Christian women. The caste nature of the society is a basic root cause for the violence against Dalit women. Firstly, the caste nature of the society has direct link to the sexual and cultural violence Dalit women experience from high caste

men. Secondly it plays a major role in the poverty and discrimination Dalit women experience. Thirdly, Dalit men are under a lot of pressure because of the caste nature of the society, which contribute to their poverty and lack of land ownerships and they express their frustrations in the form of cruel violence against their wives and children. Finally, this thesis finds that Dalit women's experience and cultural traditions of Dalit community are important resources for articulating Dalit Feminist Practical Theology. Furthermore, in the light of my research, I make concrete strategies for action that could bring hope and transformation in the lives of Dalit Christian women, who are survivors of violence.

PART I: METHOD

CHAPTER ONE

MAKING VIOLENCE VISIBLE: THE USE OF ETHNOGRAPHY IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Practical Theology: A Conversation between Experience and Faith

The concern of this thesis is to explore how experiences of violence, which have been hidden and secret in the past, can be articulated at last in order that they may become the focus of theological reflection and Christian action. Therefore this chapter begins by analysing Practical Theology's conversation between experience and faith.

Although there are many descriptions of Practical Theology, all emphasise that this is an arena, where personal and communal experience enters in to dialogue with the traditions of faith. Stephen Pattison and James Woodward offer the following definition of Practical Theology:

Pastoral/ practical theology is a place where religious belief, tradition and practice meets contemporary experiences, questions and actions and conducts a dialogue that is mutually enriching, intellectually critical and practically transforming.¹

For this transforming conversation to take place it is necessary to be attentive to the voices of those who have traditionally been excluded from theological debate. Sallie McFague argues that in the formation of our religious traditions women and other marginalized people have not been able to contribute their insights and understandings. As a result we need to critically assess the inherited tradition and revision it in order that theology does not add to the oppressive burdens they carry but can become a liberating practice. McFague states:

It is necessary for the conversation of our time within the church, within the academy, and within the world to include as primary partners, setting the agenda and not merely 'adding to it,' the voices that have hitherto been excluded. From very different embodied sites will emerge radically different agendas, agendas which will be for the benefit of a different and more inclusive

¹ Stephen Pattison and James Woodward, 'An Introduction to Pastoral and Practical Theology,' in James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (eds.), *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000, p.126.

community than those presently in positions of power in the church, the academy or the world.²

However, it is no easy matter to move from the situation in which we currently find ourselves to the one McFague envisions. We cannot assume that those who have not been heard in the past will easily find a voice or that they will command the attention of those who currently construct the theology which informs Christian practice.

Practical Theology aims to bring lived experience into conversation with the Christian tradition in order to engage in appropriate forms of Christian practice. Elaine L. Graham states that it is necessary to listen to the voices of women in order to achieve greater justice in our Christian actions:

The pastor and the church have a role to play in listening to women's experience, in breaking the taboos of silence which surround issues of abuse, sexuality and nonconformity, and in rethinking harmful and oppressive images and church teachings in order to achieve greater justice and mutuality.³

The process of active listening to the voices of women is an appropriate procedure to bring their lived experience into conversation with Christian tradition. Listening to women's experience can break the taboo of their silence and enable their voices to become a primary source for articulating practical theology. Therefore, Practical Theology cannot only be a theology of 'theory' but also a theology of 'practice,' whereby theory and practice exist together and function in partnership to bring transformation to the community. I think of feminist practical theology as a theology, through which women's experience comes into conversation with Christian tradition and scripture to generate a transforming practice. The process of attentive listening to women's experiences Graham describes is one which should happen in the ordinary pastoral encounters which take place within the Church. However, because of the many pressures upon women to keep silent⁴ it is also necessary to actively seek out other ways in which women begin to find a voice concerning the realities of their everyday lives.

² Sallie McFague, 'The Theologian as Advocate,' in Sarah Coakley and David A. Pallin (eds.), *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Maurice Wiles*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, p.155.

³ Elaine L. Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, London: Mowbray, 1996, p.126.

⁴ Riet Bons-Storm writes, "The proper role for a Christian woman is obviously to exist as silently and secretly as possible, because according to many texts in the Bible, she is possible means of corruption for proper and pious men." Riet Bons - Storm, *The Incredible Woman: Listening to Women's Silences in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996, p.122. Bons-Storm writes, "Often a woman does not dare tell a pastor what she really feels, fears, or enjoys. She falls silent about what really moves and motivates her." Bons-Storm, *The Incredible*

Practical Theology has long drawn upon the insights of the social sciences in reflecting upon human experience and is a deeply interdisciplinary field. As Pattison and Woodward state:

Theology in itself cannot reveal all one needs to know adequately to respond to contemporary situations and issues. Thus economics, sociology, psychology and other disciplinary findings and perspectives must be utilised.⁵

It will be the concern of this chapter to explore how we might use the techniques of ethnographic research, which have developed primarily within anthropology and sociology,⁶ to make the experiences of women visible, to break their silence with speech and consider their lived experiences as a primary theological resource. Ethnographic research is one of the ways to explore the violence experienced in the daily lives of women.

The Development of Ethnography in Anthropology and Sociology

Ethnography

Ethnography can be simply defined as writing about a way of life. Ethnography is a popular research tool⁷ or a methodology.⁸ Erickson describes ethnography as “a description of people and their actions or behaviour. It describes the everyday, routine of culture.”⁹ Ethnography belongs within the field of qualitative research concerning which Jerome Kirk and Marc. L. Miller write:

Qualitative research is a particular tradition in social science that fundamentally depends on watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language, on their own terms. As identified with sociology, cultural anthropology and political science among other disciplines, qualitative research has been seen to be “naturalistic,” “ethnographic” and “participatory.”¹⁰

Ethnography involves participation and observation of the other.¹¹ Ethnographers draw their data from the fieldwork by observation.

Woman, p. 20. She argues that hierarchical relationships force people into silence. Bons-Storm, p. 26.

⁵ Pattison and Woodward, ‘Introduction to Pastoral and Practical Theology,’ p. 15.

⁶ Although ethnography is now widely used in such diverse fields as psychology, education, health studies, business studies and geography.

⁷ Letty M. Russel and J. Shannon Clarkson (eds.), *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, Mowbray: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996, p. 92.

⁸ Mary Maynard and June Purvis (eds.), *Researching Women’s Lives from a Feminist Perspective*, London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1994, p. 76.

⁹ Russel, *Dictionary*, p. 92.

¹⁰ Jerome Kirk and Marc. L. Miller, *Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research*, Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, 1986, p. 9.

¹¹ Dell Hymes, *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality: Toward an Understanding of Voice*, London: Taylor & Francis, 1996, p. 4.

The key to ethnography is the construction of knowledge¹² out of the routine interactions that constitute human existence. Perhaps because so much of cultural behaviour is taken for granted and accepted as 'normal' or 'natural,' ethnography first developed out of the fascination with 'alien' and 'strange' cultures which came about as a result of colonisation, missionary activity and international trade in the modern period.

Before the development of social sciences the letters, diaries and records of travellers, traders, missionaries and government administrators provided what information was available concerning the customs and practices of non-Western cultures. Stocking reports that most of the early British natural scientists-cum-anthropologists kept a working ethnographic relationship with missionaries and relied upon information, which they supplied.¹³ Judith Preissle Goetz describes that during the nineteenth century, researchers collected data from the descriptions of cultures written by travellers, missionaries, adventures, and natural scientists. Anthropologists and cultural theorists also derived data from diaries, memoirs, letters, interviews, and materials from questionnaires sent to colonial administrators on the behaviour of the tribes and peoples. However, these sources were inadequate to generate enough information. Thus anthropologists governed first hand field study. However, some field study also appealed to their desire for adventure, challenge, and mystery. There were disagreements between the early anthropologists on the goals and the specific investigative methods of their field.¹⁴ However, they all agreed that the major task of anthropology was to describe cultures. In order to study culture, they had to examine human behaviour, language, kinship patterns, rituals and beliefs, economic and political structures, child rearing, life stages, arts, crafts and technology. In order to gain insights into these areas they had to undertake research and study in the native language of their participants. It was not easy to become fluent in 'native' languages within the short time they spent in the field; therefore, they had to get help from interpreters and hired informants.¹⁵

Goetz argues that ethnography as practised today owes much to its roots in anthropology. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century cultural theorists wanted to know about the non-western European world.¹⁶ There were many ethnographers, who went to

¹² Hymes, *Ethnography*, p. 4.

¹³ George W. Stocking Jr., *The Ethnographers Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992, Stocking, p. 20.

¹⁴ Judith Preissle Goetz and Margaret Diane Le Compte, *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research*, Orlando: Academic Press, 1984, p. 14.

¹⁵ Goetz, *Ethnography and Qualitative Design*, p. 15.

¹⁶ Goetz, *Ethnography and Qualitative Design*, p. 14.

other countries in order to do ethnographic research. For example, William H. R. Rivers went to Nilgiri Hills in India, in 1902 and he wanted to do 'intensive study' for six months among the Todas¹⁷ who inhabited this region.¹⁸ As an outsider he set out to learn the language and culture of the researched natives. George W. Stockings Jr., argues that this ethnographic attempt to understand the world-view of Todas through participating in their lives was the 'concrete' method, which laid the foundations of the 'sound' ethnographic methodology of Bronislaw Malinowski and others.¹⁹ However, since it is a difficult task for an 'insider' ethnographer to learn any tribal language and culture within a short period, how much useful understanding Rivers was able to gain in such a short period remains open to question.²⁰

Constructing a Method

Guy Rocher states that the English anthropologist of Polish descent Bronislaw Malinowski, who conducted his research between 1915 and 1942, is often credited with the honour of being the initiator of the modern ethnographic methods of the field research. Malinowski has also achieved the status of a mythic culture hero of the anthropological method because of the significance of his contribution, and the romance associated with his life amongst so-called primitive people.²¹ His functionalism represents the first attempt to articulate a scientific method for the observation and analysis of archaic societies.²² Rocher writes:

Malinowski taught that it is necessary, first of all, to *observe* living reality in the field and perceive it as it is. And he suggested an intellectual approach, which went beyond the mere observation of facts, by making it possible to group these facts together and to seek to *explain* them in a logical way.²³

Like Rivers, Malinowski sought to share the life of the 'archaic' peoples that he studied and was passionate in his conviction that researchers should leave the verandas of the plantation owners, colonial governors and missionaries in order to engage more deeply with those whom they were studying. He was convinced that each society is characterised and distinguished from the others by an original and particular culture and that an outside

¹⁷ Todas are one of the tribal groups in South India.

¹⁸ Stocking Jr., *The Ethnographers Magic*, pp. 35, 36.

¹⁹ Stocking Jr., *The Ethnographers Magic*, p. 32.

²⁰ A systematic and technical description of the fieldwork was available only after the publication of Malinowski's work on the Trobriand Islanders. Goetz, *Ethnography and Qualitative Design*, p. 15.

²¹ Stocking Jr., *The Ethnographers Magic*, p. 17.

²² Guy Rocher, *A General Introduction to Sociology: A Theoretical Perspective*, London: Macmillan, 1972, p. 277.

²³ Rocher, *A General Introduction*, p. 277.

observer, who followed rigorous investigative procedures, could come to an expert understanding of diverse cultural forms.²⁴

In Goetz's view Malinowski's own scientific background lead him to popularise a systematic and technical approach to fieldwork through his research on the Trobriand Islanders.²⁵ He paid great attention to careful observation, systematic note taking and interpretation of the rituals that shape everyday life. Ronald P. Rohner demonstrates that like Malinowski, many of the earliest anthropologists drew upon their experience in other fields to construct their approaches to research. Franz Boas was from German background and had specialized in geography, mathematics and physics.²⁶ Malinowski was a scientist.²⁷ Alfred Cort Haddon and Walter Baldwin Spencer were zoologists, who became the ethnographers.²⁸ Thus the concern to clinically observe, dissect, codify and map cultural forms became influential in the emerging discipline of anthropology.

It can thus be seen that ethnography began as a research process to observe, record and study 'other' cultures.²⁹ Michael Agar writes:

The social research style that emphasises encountering alien worlds and making sense of them is called *ethnography*, or "folk description." Ethnographers set out to show how social action in one world makes sense from the point of view of another.³⁰

It is easy therefore to understand how the methods used by anthropologists in isolated and remote areas came to be used by social researchers to investigate those whose lives appeared unusual, deviant or strange within the dominant culture.

The Study of Social Worlds

The Chicago School of Sociology, which developed under the leadership of Robert Parks in the 1930's, used the same processes of fieldwork and participation in the life of 'alien' people to examine the complex urban society of a modern American city. Attention was paid to those on the margins of social life; members of gangs, of tightly knit ethnic organisations and those who participated in jazz and drug subcultures. The lives of these

²⁴ Rocher, *A General Introduction*, p. 275.

²⁵ Goetz, *Ethnography and Qualitative Design*, p. 15. However even in this work the primary focus remains upon the researcher's relationships with participants rather than data analysis and interpretation.

²⁶ Ronald P. Rohner, (ed.) *The Ethnography of Franz Boas*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969, p. xxiv.

²⁷ Stocking Jr., *The Ethnographers Magic*, p. 17.

²⁸ Stocking Jr., *The Ethnographers Magic*, p. 20.

²⁹ Jim Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, Newbury Park: SAGE Publications, 1993, p. 10.

³⁰ Michael H. Agar, *Speaking of Ethnography*, Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, 1986, p. 12.

peoples could not be understood otherwise than through participant observation in a naturalistic setting. Parks encourages his colleagues to follow the methods pioneered by the early anthropologists and move amongst people whose beliefs and customs were unfamiliar in order to try and see the world through their eyes.

The Chicago School produced many influential thinkers and decisively influenced the development of qualitative research within sociology. However, in recent decades it has been recognised that all forms of human behaviour are complex and significant and that as much as can be learned from observing the familiar and taken for granted as the strange and exotic. Consequently there has been renewed attention to the role of the 'outside' observer and the nature of participant observation and these are issues to which I will return. Today ethnography is an established approach to social research that is widely used in many fields of investigation. There is no denying that the development of ethnography has been shaped by perceptions concerning the nature of social reality that can no longer go uncriticised today. Nevertheless, the serious attention given by ethnographers to the attempt to understand the lived reality of those they study remains important and challenging. As Hammersly affirms ethnography has sought to offer theoretical descriptions³¹ of behaviour and the roles played by actors in social situations. Ethnographers have sought to observe the daily lives, culture, social behaviour, religion and ideology of 'alien people' and then describe it from their perspectives to the readers. Ethnographers have taught us not to regard as absurd or insignificant behaviour that appears strange to us and they have focussed much needed attention on the importance of rituals, symbols and folk narratives in cultural life.³²

The Use of Ethnography in the Practical Theology of Gerald Arbuckle

The Language of Culture

Gerald Arbuckle is an anthropologist and Catholic theologian, who seeks to use the insights of anthropology to aid the Church in its mission within contemporary society. In his famous work *Earthing the Gospel* he emphasises that effective missionary engagement requires that Christian pastoral agents and evangelists know 'what culture is' and 'how it

³¹ Martyn Hammersley, *What's Wrong with Ethnography?* London: Routledge, 1992.

³² For example, *Pratishtha* is a significant ritual for Hindus in India, where they dedicate an object like an image, a piece of stone, a picture or a pebble. Through this ritual the object becomes the permanent or temporary abode of the Divinity. The image or the symbol is then treated like an honoured guest by offering food, flower and fruits to it. Ethnography helps us to see the meaning in what could be dismissed as irrational behaviour. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, 'Contribution from Different Language-Culture Groups', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol.1, Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission, 1953, p. 82.

operates,' in its context before attempting to impose their understanding of the gospel upon others. He provides analytical instruments from cultural anthropology, which can help evangelists to listen to people's grief, hopes and joys. Arbuckle draws the definition of culture from Geertz. For Geertz culture is the "pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life."³³ Arbuckle hopes that as a result of this dialogue a new local theology that is earthed in the symbols, myths and rituals might emerge. Arbuckle writes:

Anthropology is about how people feel and communicate with one another. The best way to appreciate the power of human communication is to hear people actually speaking.³⁴

Arbuckle uses case studies that illustrate this theory. His use of people's experiences and his own experiences from different contexts helps the reader to understand his theory. Arbuckle's work provides questions for reflection and action, and it is a work in practical theology. His work provides analytical instruments to help theologians and others to grasp what is happening to cultures within the first world. Hence it is very useful tool for theologians and pastoral workers in the third world also. His work gives insights on mission via the social sciences. He sees cultural changes as an important factor to consider in mission of the Church. Arbuckle regards inculturation³⁵ as the dynamic, evaluative interaction between the Gospel/tradition and culture.

Arbuckle argues that in the richness and diversity of human life a symbolic language can be identified and analysed by the skilled ethnographer. He seeks to make the tools for interpreting this language available to the Church. Arbuckle writes:

Culture is a 'silent language.' Traditions, values, attitudes and prejudices are often silent, like the stillness of water for fish, in the sense that people are most often unconscious of their presence and influence. The unique task of cultural or social anthropologists is to unearth and articulate clearly and objectively, what is hidden from the consciousness of people about how they interact with each other. This book provides analytical instruments from cultural anthropology to help evangelisers grasp what is happening to cultures within the First World (and also within many parts of the Third World). With the aid of these instruments, evangelisers can sit down with people from all levels of society to listen, with more understanding than ever before, to their griefs, hopes and joys. As a result of this dialogue there may well emerge new local theologies that are earthed in symbols, myths and rituals of people's lives.³⁶

³³ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, London: Fontana Press, 1993, p. 89.

³⁴ Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel: An Inculturation Handbook for Pastoral Workers*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1990, p. 7.

³⁵ Inculturation is the gospel entering into very heart of a people's way of life. Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, p. 187.

³⁶ Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, pp. 1-2.

In his approach to anthropology Arbuckle is deeply indebted to the work of Clifford Geertz. Geertz's work has decisively influenced the field of contemporary anthropology. He offers a structured approach to interpreting the symbols, myths and rituals through which groups sustain their communal identities. He advocates that researchers generate 'thick' descriptions of cultural phenomenon through recognising the multilayered nature of the symbolic language of culture. To create these descriptions researchers must 'search out and analyse symbolic forms in words, images, institutions, behaviours in terms of which in each place people actually represent themselves to one another.'³⁷

Like Geertz, Arbuckle places huge emphasis upon the ways in which cultures are sustained through the symbolic work of people in the construction of myths and rituals. Culture has the power to influence what we see, hear and smell and its power enters into every fibre of our being.³⁸ Culture gives us a set of meanings to associate with things around us. We feel at home by knowing these meanings and there is a sense of identity and security.³⁹ Arbuckle analyses culture, culture's nature, power and its components: symbols,⁴⁰ myths⁴¹ and rituals.⁴² He discusses the importance of these components in detail. He considers symbols are as important to us as water is to the fish and symbols help us to think and communicate with people.⁴³ He clarifies the nature and types of myths, their function, how they change, and the importance of understanding how myths can influence us. He presents historical, psychological, functional and structural theories about how myths develop.

Arbuckle is interested in symbol, myth and ritual because an awareness of their significance is essential in any attempt to inculturate the gospel in contemporary culture. However, the work of cultural interpretation is not only undertaken in order to more effectively communicate the Christian gospel. Arbuckle believes that mission is an engagement with the world that is inspired by a longing for justice and human wholeness. In this perspective social analysis 'is an action-oriented educational process which aims to

³⁷ Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology*, New York: Basic Books, 1983, p. 58.

³⁸ Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, p. 26.

³⁹ Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, p. 27.

⁴⁰ Arbuckle writes, "A symbol is any reality that by its very dynamism or power leads to another deeper reality through a sharing in the dynamism that the symbol itself offer." Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, p. 29. For Geertz 'symbol' refers to a great variety of things, often a number of them at the same time Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 91.

⁴¹ For Arbuckle a myth is "a story or tradition that claims to reveal, in an imaginative or symbolic way a fundamental truth about the world and human life." Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, p. 35.

⁴² For Arbuckle ritual is "the repeated, symbolic behavior of people belonging to a particular culture." Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, p. 42.

help people become more critically aware of the ways in which they are responsible for the oppression of others, or are themselves oppressed by structures or institutions.’⁴⁴ This work is particularly important in the contemporary context in which social change is rapid and often leads to the dissolution of traditional cultures and the questioning of many precious beliefs and practices.⁴⁵

Cultural Change

Arbuckle uses his anthropological tools to demonstrate that what is experienced as chaotic and frightening can also be an opportunity for renewal and regeneration. In adopting this approach to analysing change Arbuckle is deeply indebted to the ritual theory of Victor Turner who focuses attention on the psychosocial phases found in this dynamic process, namely, ‘the separation, liminal and reaggregation stages.’⁴⁶ Arbuckle explores how cultural change occurs or how new life can spring up out of cultural chaos and how social movements in particular influence cultural change. He explains what happens in cultural change, how it begins, and what occurs when people try to resist it in various ways and he concludes that significant cultural change often takes place out of an experience of chaos.⁴⁷

Arbuckle’s three-stage model, which is taken from Turner helps us to understand that all process of social change must entail a movement from the security of order through the chaos of liminality to a period in which new social forms emerge. Arbuckle compares life to a journey, whereby individuals move regularly through *liminality*⁴⁸ states. Liminal experiences help us to confront fundamental questions about the meaning of life and the purpose of society.⁴⁹ Arbuckle presents the three stages of liminal experience; the exit or separation from the world of ‘ordinary living’, then the liminal experience, which is unstable, and finally the reaggregation or moving back to ‘ordinary living’ once more. Each of these stages may be short or long depending on the circumstances. This is a dangerous and challenging process but it is integral to social regeneration. Furthermore ritual

⁴³ Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, p. 29.

⁴⁴ Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, p. 59.

⁴⁵ Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, p. 211.

⁴⁶ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969, p.

⁴⁷ Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, p. 62.

⁴⁸ According to Victor Turner liminality is the state and process of mid-transition in a rite of passage. Turner writes, “rites of passage are the transitional rituals accompanying changes of place, state, social position, and age in a culture.” Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1978, p. 249.

⁴⁹ Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, p. 75.

processes are means through which the energy of change can be experienced in a way that might be less painful and distressing for individuals and groups.

In every subculture there is an element that protests against the dominant culture of which it is part. Arbuckle explains how youth subcultures have emerged and considers youth as a liminal period. In youth subculture they have their own symbols, heroes, rituals, dress symbols, and music. The pastoral needs of youth are different from those of adults. Therefore, Arbuckle writes, "inculturation requires that we pastorally respond to people at *their* point of need, not the point of need that evangelisers think they should be at."⁵⁰

He explains how different kinds of prejudices and discriminations can mislead if we are not aware of it and how it affects the inculturation process. In his view, we view unconsciously others culture as inferior, therefore such a sense of cultural and faith superiority should be confronted.⁵¹ It is essential to be aware of any cultural and ethnic prejudices in us, which makes us to feel that our ways of doing things are right and other ways of doing things are stupid, uncivilised and unreasonable. Arbuckle calls this type of prejudice as *ethnocentrism*.⁵² The assumption is that 'our way of life is *the* way of life.'⁵³ He emphasises the necessity of self-knowledge because it will help us to understand our own prejudices and the assumptions we hold against other cultures and ethnic groups.

When Christians become aware that cultural change can be a dynamic and creative process they will also be less fearful about moving beyond traditions and structures that no longer serve the gospel. They will also feel more able to engage in dialogue with others as they become more confident that the vitality of the gospel is not tied to their own customs and practices. The ability to confidently engage with others is essential in a world that is now characterised by pluralism, social diversity and the movement of people between cultures.

The final part of *Earthing the Gospel* looks forward to a Church, which is empowered by cultural understanding to undertake a profound examination of its own life and work. He presents a vision of a refounded Church, that is a Church radically reformed but true to its founding impulse in the gospel. This vision is more fully explored in his later work *Refounding the Church*.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, p. 144.

⁵¹ Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, p. 109.

⁵² Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, p. 149.

⁵³ Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, p. 150.

⁵⁴ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1993.

Religious Life as a Case Study

In this later text Arbuckle draws on the insights of cultural anthropology to explain causes of the contemporary cultural chaos within the Catholic Church in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This breakdown of the traditional catholic culture, coupled with the changes introduced by the Vatican II Council, challenged the institutional Church to its very roots.

The fundamental theme in his book is refounding.⁵⁵ Arbuckle concentrates on the role of the authority dissenters⁵⁶ in religious congregations. Arbuckle takes religious life as a case-study⁵⁷ to uncover lessons helpful for the refounding of the church and he provides case-study review of contemporary religious life. Arbuckle writes:

A case study is a detailed perception of connected processes in individual and collective experience of a particular section or group within wider society; through case study analysis we are able to see quite sharply the tensions and movements characteristic of the larger group.⁵⁸

The use of case studies is an established way of doing ethnographic research in which a larger social process is interpreted through careful examination of an indicator group. The method is particularly effective here as religious orders have experienced numerical decline, crises of vision and changes in structure in similar, but more extreme forms, than the rest of the Church. Arbuckle's ethnographic skills in analysing religious communities offer a persuasive account of the many dilemmas facing the Church today. He reflects on the reasons why religious congregations are sluggish in responding to the call for refounding and why creative religious leaders rarely experience support for their pastoral initiatives. Arbuckle emphasises the necessity for the gospel's interaction with contemporary issues such as secularism, world poverty, and ecological crises. New methods, organisations and structures of evangelising are the desperate need of the hour.

Arbuckle presents two categories of refounding persons: 'authority' dissenters and 'pathfinding' dissenters. Authority dissenters are the ones who hold official positions in the church. They have the power and authority to open and close doors to new and bold pastoral endeavours within the church. Pathfinding dissenters are carriers of another voice

⁵⁵ By refounding, Arbuckle means finding and implementing new forms of bringing faith / justice Good News to the world.

⁵⁶ Dissenter is the one who proposes alternatives. A dissenter gives birth to new ideas and ways of doing things, which never existed before.

⁵⁷ Arbuckle writes, "a case study is a detailed perception of connected processes in individual and collective experience of a particular section or group within a wider society; through case study analysis we are able to see quite sharply the tensions and movements characteristic of the larger group." Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, p. 7.

⁵⁸ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, p. 7.

in the church because they 'dream' appropriate pastoral strategies and alternative ways for bridging the gap between gospel and culture. They implement pastoral strategies. Arbuckle argues that today's church needs hope-filled dissenters at all levels, from the smallest Basic Christian Community to the highest pastoral positions in the church. Arbuckle makes chaos appear as a challenge to think about contextually appropriate ways of doing things and presenting the gospel in the contemporary world.

Three Stages of Cultural Grieving: Denial, Repression and Projection

Arbuckle, again using the framework established by Victor Turner, observes within the life of contemporary religious communities three stages of cultural/individual grieving brought about their changed circumstances. In the first stage the culture feels sadness together with the symptoms of resistance. In the second stage, the liminality phase, a culture feels both attracted by the security of the past and the call to face the future. This is a risky time because the temptation is for the culture to cling to what has been lost and simply refuse to face the future. There is a resistance to reality.⁵⁹ In the recovery or reaggregation phase, the bereaved culture is able to look with some marked detachment at what has been lost. Arbuckle stresses the necessity of acknowledging the pain of loss and the necessity of grieving because it is a psychological- cultural requirement for healthy and creative living, and it is a Gospel imperative. The reaggregation phase is important because a grieving culture or individual must realise their loss and move to face the reality of life in its new context.

Ageing Religious Congregations

In his case study of religious life, Arbuckle alludes to cultural organisations and the Church as grown up "conditioned elephants" which are unable to pull the stakes up, though they have the ability to do it. Young elephants are shackled to stakes deeply rooted in the ground to be conditioned. Cultures and organisations are once dynamic and mobile as young elephants and they later become conditioned to the status quo. Ageing cultures and organisations are conditioned and blinded by the success of the past. Many in the Church behave like conditioned elephants and unwilling to learn new ways of doing things.⁶⁰ Arbuckle presents the idea that the old ways of doing things are not applicable to the present need of the world and therefore it is necessary to revise old methods, make changes and explore new ways of doing things. Cultures and Churches which are conditioned, not

⁵⁹ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, p. 183.

willing to be flexible, unwilling to make any changes in its traditional ways of doing things are not able to meet the need of the contemporary world. Those who head the hierarchical structure of the Church need to be flexible, willing to learn new ways and they need to be open to dialogue.

The disintegration of the traditional cultures creates chaos, confusion, and tension within the church or in any organisations in transition. He points out that culture has life cycles and it passes through the normal problems accompanying each stage. The way to relate the gospel to the changing world demands a constant searching. Ageing cultures are not flexible and only leaders of vision can act to stop the ageing process of a culture.⁶¹

Loyal Dissent and Loyal Opposition are useful for Contextual Structural Changes

Arbuckle's examination of how religious orders face change has lead him to place great emphasis upon the strategies the Church uses to resist change. As in the past a threatened Church will seek to blame others for its own problems and engage in 'witch hunting.' He uses the term 'witchcraft' as a theory of causation, to pinpoint the reasons for the chaos in the church. He uses the term 'witches' to refer to people, who challenge the established order in the Church. Witches are labelled as the cause of the chaos in society, likewise persons or groups are labelled as the cause of chaos in the church. He explains why witch-hunting is so prevalent within the contemporary church. There are people on the margins of society, creative people, who challenge traditional ways of thinking or doing things, those who have little or no access to the power structures. They are considered as witches, who cause chaos in the society. Women are particularly vulnerable to witchcraft accusations.⁶² In the same way people on the margins of society are powerless and most defenceless. There is a tendency to blame people who are on the margins of society for the cause of hardship during times of cultural disintegration. This is the same in the hierarchical Church; feminists and campaigners for women's rights have been seen to be particularly dangerous by those who are bent on restoring the pre-Vatican II model of Church.⁶³ People who are dissatisfied, different or creative are considered an anathema to totalitarian systems. Nevertheless, they often generate forms of 'loyal opposition' or make structural changes necessary for the pathfinding dissenters to use their gifts within the Church. They create a space for the voices of pathfinding dissenters, who are the 'others' in the discourse.

⁶⁰ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, p. 5, 6.

⁶¹ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, pp. 55-57.

⁶² Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, p. 72.

Listening to People and their Experiences

Arbuckle states that those who head the hierarchical structures of the Church need to listen to people and their experiences in congregations. Leaders need to be open to dialogue with people on the margins. He considers that the best way to grasp the power of human communication is to record what people actually say.⁶⁴ He refers in his case studies to what people have reported concerning their experiences in the church and religious congregations. He stresses the necessity of radically different and new ways of relating the good news to the pastoral challenges of the world. Furthermore, Arbuckle's case study method is based upon valuing what people recount about their experiences in the Church and religious congregations. In these stories and personal accounts Arbuckle discerns new ways of relating the good news to the pastoral challenges of the world.

The Confident Observer

In *Earthing the Gospel* and *Refounding the Church* Arbuckle presents clear and practical guidelines for interpreting cultures in change and crisis, which are very important for those engaged in pastoral and missionary work. He popularises the work of Geertz and Turner, making their ideas accessible and comprehensible to those who have little knowledge of the social sciences. However, there are a number of significant problems in offering simple rules of interpretation, which claim to offer insight into all cultural contexts.

Arbuckle stands firmly within a research tradition, which appears to hold that an observer who stands outside the context, her/his research can offer a better and more accurate explanation of what is happening than the people whom inhabit the culture themselves. He appears to believe that the ethnographer, or cultural observer, can make rational and objective interpretations through the proper use of 'analytical instruments.' There is little mention made of the ambiguity and provisionality that marks all forms of qualitative research. Nor does he engage within the many criticisms that have been made of 'outsider' researchers who confidently 'code' forms of behaviour, which are entirely beyond their own experiences. It is very interesting that Arbuckle's work is at its most powerful and perceptive when he employs the insights of ethnography to research and reflect upon the context he knows best - the world of Catholic religious congregations.

⁶³ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, p. 93.

⁶⁴ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, p. 10.

Despite the many references Arbuckle makes to pluralism, his own faith lies in the 'common human experience' that generates archetypal patterns of behaviour, which are shared by all people. Again this is an understanding that has been challenged by many researchers. For example feminist scholars have questioned whether the three stage ritual process that Arbuckle borrows from Turner is adequate to describe the experiences of women in situations of transition.⁶⁵

Arbuckle's work is certainly important and helpful to those who are seeking skills that will make them more sensitive to the importance of culture. However, many important debates amongst ethnographers are not addressed within his texts. In the work of Don Browning we see an approach to ethnography, which is rather different and perhaps more responsive to some (if not all) of the issues raised above.

Don S. Browning's Use of Ethnography in Practical Theology

In his famous work *A Fundamental Practical Theology*,⁶⁶ Browning's central question is how communities of memory and tradition can be communities of practical reason and practical wisdom.⁶⁷ Browning considers congregational study as a return to communities of memory and his is a sociological, historical and theological analysis of the congregations.

Cultural anthropology and ethnography are extremely useful for uncovering the interplay of the narratives, signs, and symbols that make up the visional⁶⁸ and cultural dimensions of practical thinking and action.⁶⁹

Browning asks how, despite their many flaws, can very human institutions be seen as bearers of a Christian tradition which impacts upon the ways in which they structure their communal life and act in the world? Browning considers this question in the light of contemporary philosophy and hermeneutical theory. However, the dynamic quality of the text owes much to the fact that he also seeks to ground his reasoning in the reality of congregational life.

To make this a genuinely practical book and not just one about the theory of practical theology, I will illustrate my points with three rather extensive case

⁶⁵ See, for example, Caroline Walker Bynum's critique of Turner in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and Human Body in Medieval Religion*, New York: Zone Books, 1992, pp. 33-43.

⁶⁶ Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

⁶⁷ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Browning writes, "What I refer to as the visional and obligational levels of practical reason others often refer to as culture, that is, the system of narratives, signs, symbols, and rules that gives meaning and significance to the actions and practices of a group." Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 121.

⁶⁹ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 122.

studies of congregations. These churches, in various ways, are carriers of practical reason and exhibit many features of practical theological thinking.⁷⁰

Browning's emphasis upon the importance of congregations owes much to his involvement in the emerging discipline of congregational studies in the development of which he has played an important role. Browning has done three case studies of congregations. In order to answer his central question Browning studied Wiltshire Methodist church an upper middle class church, the church of Covenant, a middle class- American Presbyterian Church and the Apostolic Church of God, an African American Pentecostal Church on the South side of Chicago.

The Lilly Endowment sponsored the research on congregational studies in which the Wiltshire Methodist church and the church of Covenant had been the subject of study.⁷¹ Anthropologists and ethnographers worked together within the dominant paradigms established by Geertz and Turner and they analysed the rituals, symbols and narratives that constituted the culture of the congregations. The researchers used questionnaires and interviews for collecting data from the members of the congregations. These experts then proceeded to make their analysis of what they believed characterised the realities of congregational life. Browning got involved in this project later than the other members of the team⁷² and claims that they had already established the research procedures. Browning was aware of the special skills brought by the social scientists but he is critical of the fact that researchers had not given due significance to the theological traditions and sacred stories, which shape the lives of religious groupings. Browning writes:

Most of the scholars in that early study saw the social sciences as more or less objective and value- neutral disciplines. They did not understand how sociology, psychology, or anthropology could be seen as hermeneutic disciplines that fashion their studies on the model of a dialogue or conversation. They did not understand how their fore-understandings entered into their work as psychologists, sociologists or anthropologists. All of the scholars were Christians. They were members of churches. They had their own theological predilections. Yet they did not ask how these precommitments entered in to their social science descriptions of the Wiltshire Church.⁷³

Browning states that we have relied too much on theoretical and technical reason, blind custom and tradition and we have lacked a clear idea of how practical reason and tradition relate to one another. He is concerned with reconstructing tradition and learning to exercise our practical wisdom. In his view myth, story, legend, symbol and metaphor play an

⁷⁰ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 12.

⁷¹ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 2.

⁷² Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 17.

⁷³ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 78.

important role in the self-understanding of a particular religious tradition.⁷⁴ However, his dissatisfaction with the analytical perspectives of the teams involved in the research project on the Wiltshire Church and the Church of the Covenant lead him to search for new paradigms and he developed a structured approach to research, which he came to call 'descriptive theology.' Browning does not deny the important role the human sciences can play but argues that the investigation of Christian congregations must include an explicit focus upon what both the researchers and the researched understand to be ultimate, sacred and transcendent.

Descriptive theology can use all the human and social sciences; their special explanatory foci can add power to the insights of descriptive theology. But descriptive theology uses these special foci within an explicitly and critically grounded theological horizon.⁷⁵

Browning believes that 'psychology, sociology, ecology and cultural anthropology...[are] foci within the wider rubric of descriptive theology.'⁷⁶ Browning criticised the social scientist researchers, who analysed the Wiltshire Church and the Church of the Covenant because they failed to recognise how their own preconceptions influenced their research.⁷⁷ Browning finds that social science studies report only one side of the conversation- the side of the team, which involved in the research.⁷⁸ Browning believes that their 'objective' analysis ignored the fact that the social sciences are conversational disciplines in which meaning is produced through the relationship between the researchers and the researched. Browning celebrates the approach to ethnography and religious life found in Robert Bellah's celebrated text *Habits of the Heart*.⁷⁹ Bellah and his team, which includes four sociologists and a philosopher,⁸⁰ were explicit in their acknowledgement that the values and religious traditions, which have shaped American congregational life are also implicit in the research techniques they employ and continue to impact upon the researchers themselves. Bellah argues therefore that all interpretative frameworks have 'religious dimensions.'⁸¹ In Bellah's research both the researcher and the researched are engaged in a conversational process. Browning writes:

It is for this reason that Bellah and his associates in *Habits of the Heart* use what they call the "active interview" as their primary tool for gathering information on their subjects. It is a method designed to engage their subjects in dialogue. Bellah admits that he and his team did not come to their

⁷⁴ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 5.

⁷⁵ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 112.

⁷⁶ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 111.

⁷⁷ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 79.

⁷⁸ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 79.

⁷⁹ Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, Berkely; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1985.

⁸⁰ Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, p. xi.

⁸¹ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 89.

conversations empty-handed. “Rather,” he tells us, “we sought to bring our preconceptions and questions into the conversation and to understand the answers we were receiving not only in terms of the language but also, so far as we could discover, the lives of those we were talking with.”⁸²

In Browning’s works, ‘descriptive theology’ identifies the visional and obligational dimensions of a situation.⁸³ It describes the religious dimensions of a situation first, and then it offers a critical theological evaluation of that situation.⁸⁴ Descriptive theology helps us to understand others, their situations and their identities. Understanding individuals or groups it is necessary to build up on their strengths.⁸⁵ Browning writes, ‘Individuals and groups like to be understood’⁸⁶ and this is relevant in ethnographic research. An indigenous ethnographer can understand groups or individuals, their situations and identities in a better way than an outsider. As Browning writes, “It is difficult to maintain either an individual or group identity if people feel deeply misunderstood.”⁸⁷ Browning uses dialogue or conversation models in his study⁸⁸ and then writes, ‘description takes place within a dialogue or conversation’⁸⁹ between the consultant and the congregation. He uses questionnaires, surveys, demographic information, and interviews as tools in this dialogue.⁹⁰ Browning employs the techniques of clinical pastoral education in his ‘descriptive theology’ in order to listen to the researched. He emphasises the necessity to listen others within the larger structure of dialogue.⁹¹ He considers listening as the first part of conversation and dialogue.⁹²

Browning had to observe these three congregations in order to understand their culture and context. When he confronted the differences between his own context and those he researched it helped him to gain fresh perspectives on his agenda. He acknowledges the difference between himself and the researched Pentecostal Church in the following words: “It was black; I was white. It was Pentecostal; I was liberal, somewhat rationalistic, university-educated, and university-employed.”⁹³ In his dialogical approach to research Browning understands that there are often spiritual and cultural differences between the

⁸² Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 87.

⁸³ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 130.

⁸⁴ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 130.

⁸⁵ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 284.

⁸⁶ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 284.

⁸⁷ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 284.

⁸⁸ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 15.

⁸⁹ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 64.

⁹⁰ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 285.

⁹¹ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 286.

⁹² Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 286.

⁹³ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 65.

researcher and the researched even though the Pentecostal church was close to his residence:

It was in the confrontation with this Pentecostal Church that I experienced most directly the hermeneutical and dialogical nature that characterizes all attempts to understand and think practically about situations.⁹⁴

Browning describes the Apostolic Church and its religion as 'experience-based religion' because Christ and God are represented in highly personal terms.⁹⁵ Browning acknowledges that he is an outsider⁹⁶ to the researched but he was flattered to be accepted as fellow Christian and trusted friend. He recounts how the many conversations that constituted his research were factually informative, confirming his hermeneutical understanding of the research process, and also life changing.⁹⁷ Browning states that uncovering the personal history behind individual practices is relevant to all hermeneutic dimensions of fundamental Practical Theology.⁹⁸ Browning considers personal history or personal story as human documents, which can be collected by using ethnographic techniques in order to use them, in Practical Theology:

The interpretation of situations seldom is thought to include the personal histories that people bring to praxis. This is a significant loss to practical theology and theological education in the church, the seminary, and the university.⁹⁹

Through Browning's case study of the Apostolic Church of God he was particularly challenged to review his thinking on marriage, the family and feminism. He gained a positive appreciation of the traditional, role governed but respectful attitudes to relationships between men and women advocated by the church.

Building its family ethic on Ephesians leaves the Apostolic Church with at most with a chastened, tamed and greatly modified patriarchalism-one perhaps that does not even justify the word *patriarchalism* to describe it. It also leaves the church with a family ethic that greatly increases male responsibility, male self-worth and equal regard between husband and wife.¹⁰⁰

Browning argues that religious narratives and metaphors can function to enliven, energise, liberate, and make more effective the workings of practical reason.¹⁰¹ He emphasises the outer envelope and inner core of practical reason. He writes:

⁹⁴ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 16.

⁹⁵ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 65.

⁹⁶ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 135.

⁹⁷ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, pp. 243-277.

⁹⁸ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 62.

⁹⁹ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 59.

¹⁰⁰ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 271.

¹⁰¹ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 10.

The outer envelope of practical reason is its fund of inherited narratives and practices that tradition has delivered to us and that always surrounds our practical thinking.¹⁰²

Browning argues that practical reason always has a narrative envelope. This narrative envelope constitutes the vision that animates, informs, and provides the ontological context for practical reason.¹⁰³ In his view Christianity has an explicit narrative tradition that constitutes the envelope for a core model of practical reason.¹⁰⁴ In Browning's view Christian story informs practical reason.¹⁰⁵

Browning writes:

The narrativists believe that humans are formed by participation in communities of memory that have powerful stories to tell about their origins and destinies.¹⁰⁶

As I have mentioned earlier *A Fundamental Practical Theology* is concerned to explore how congregations exercise practical reason in communal life and how this is evidenced in the life of the world. It is the task of descriptive theology to shed light on this process not by objectifying congregations as research targets but by entering in to a mutual dialogues with real people. Browning's work has generated a profound shift within Practical Theology to take the life of congregations more seriously and to reflect upon the relationship between theological traditions and Christian practice. He has made an important contribution indeed in these ways. However Browning has a vision of ethnographic research that goes beyond Arbuckle's in a number of respects. For Browning the active participation of the researcher and the researched in conversation is important. Yet he ignores the power relations, which are at work in congregations. He does not consider which voices do not get heard in the conversations that construct descriptive theology. A feminist hermeneutics of suspicion will also cause us to question whether the 'soft patriarchalism' Browning encounters in the Apostolic Church of God really challenged him to change his views or confirmed him in a comfortable perspective he was eager to embrace. Can a Church that continues to define women in subordination to men ever be one in which women are really free to speak about the pain and violence they experience in their lives?

Browning's *A Fundamental Practical Theology* shows some evidence of important changes in the understandings of ethnography taking place at the time and which have

¹⁰² Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 11.

¹⁰³ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁴ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁵ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 193.

¹⁰⁶ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 238.

come to have great impact upon the way ethnography is understood today. There was a shift from an understanding of ethnography as an objective research tool to an understanding of ethnography as a dynamic conversation between the researcher and the researched. Practical Theologians, who use ethnography as their research tools, challenge the understandings of ethnography as objective research tools, to interpret the human behaviour and such approaches (from Malinowski to Geertz) are now being challenged.

Recent Developments in Ethnography

Critical Ethnography

One of the first challenges to traditional understandings of ethnography as an impartial research process came from 'Critical Ethnography.' Critical ethnography shares many common assumptions with conventional ethnography. Jim Thomas writes:

Critical ethnography is a type of reflection that examines culture, knowledge, and action...critical ethnography is a style of analysis and discourse embedded within conventional ethnography.¹⁰⁷

Thomas explains that there are several fundamental characteristics shared by critical and conventional ethnography. Critical and conventional ethnographers rely on qualitative interpretation of data collected 'in the field.' They rely on a set of rules of ethnographic methods and analysis. They prefer to develop a "grounded theory."¹⁰⁸ However, conventional ethnography gives importance to the tradition of cultural description and analysis¹⁰⁹ by 'academic experts' whilst critical ethnography seeks to provoke change in lived situations of those they work amongst. Thomas writes:

Conventional ethnographers generally speak for their subjects, usually to an audience of other researchers. Critical ethnographers, by contrast, accept an added research task raising their voice to speak to an audience *on behalf* of their subjects as a means of empowering them by giving more authority to the subjects' voice. As a consequence, critical ethnography proceeds from an explicit framework that, by modifying consciousness or invoking a call to action, attempts to use knowledge for social change.¹¹⁰

Critical ethnography can be seen to be more effective than conventional ethnography because it invokes a call to action. Critical ethnography gives importance to the voices of the subjects. These are positive points, but the critical ethnographer continues to speak 'on behalf of ' their subjects. In that case, the voices of the 'subjects,' 'participants' or 'others'

¹⁰⁷ Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, pp. 2, 3.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, p. 3. Grounded theory starts with detailed analysis and observation of actual situations and develops theoretical categories from these rather than *vive versa*.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, p. 3.

are not heard directly. Thus the voices of the subjects are silenced. What we hear in critical ethnography remains the voice of the 'expert' ethnographer.

Furthermore, according to Thomas, critical ethnographers have emancipatory goals. Critical ethnographers therefore focus upon oppressed and socially marginalised groups.¹¹¹ I think even though they have concern for the marginal groups and oppressed in the society, they too have failed to see 'women' as a specifically 'oppressed' group. For example, Thomas himself has written about the issue of *Unnecessary Social Domination*, but failed to mention anything against the *Unnecessary Male Domination* over women in society. In my view critical ethnography has failed to see women as its subject. However, critical ethnography's call to provoke change in the lived situation is a positive point.

Interpretive Ethnography

In order to analyse interpretive ethnography I would like to start with a quote from Norman K. Denzin:

Ethnographic texts are the primary texts given for the interpretive, ethnographic project. These texts are always dialogical- the site at which the voices of the other, alongside the voices of the author, come alive and interact with one another.¹¹²

As this quote suggests the ethnographic text always contains a constructed dialogue. However, there are other actors involved in making the ethnographic text meaningful.

Norman K. Denzin writes:

A reader-as viewer is one who is ready to hear, see, and listen to the voices, images, and sounds of a text. In so doing, the reader renders the text intelligible and meaningful. A written text becomes a montage (and a mise-en-scene)- a meeting place where "original" voices, their inscriptions (as transcribed texts), and the writers interpretations come together.¹¹³

For interpretative ethnographers the reader of the ethnographic text is an actor in this process. For them it is essential to see how the voices of researched / researcher / and the reader enter into dialogue together. As Denzin explains the reader hears and sees the sounds and consequences of other's voices and actions and the reader becomes active in this way.¹¹⁴ In Denzin's view, the modern ethnographic text can be read as a photograph.

¹¹⁰ Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, p. 4.

¹¹¹ Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, p. 4.

¹¹² Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century*, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1997, p. xiii.

¹¹³ Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography*, p. 41.

¹¹⁴ Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography*, p. 41.

Each looking or reading is a new encounter with the text.¹¹⁵ In this frame the ethnographic text is like a work of art or photograph, which can convey many meanings. This kind of encounter may illuminate the text and it might lead to further discussions and reflections.

Denzin claims that the ethnographic text has meaning through its readers. The ethnographic text changes along with the readers. He compares ethnographic reading to travel or a dream.¹¹⁶ The ethnographic reader is a novelist.¹¹⁷ A reader creates a world of experience by confronting the ethnographic text.¹¹⁸ There is a purpose for all reading. Denzin writes:

The desire is not to put words or interpretations in people's mouths but to create the spaces so their voices can be heard, to write (and read) with them, for them, and not about them.¹¹⁹

According to Norman K. Denzin this kind of reading instigates actions. Interpretive ethnographers like Denzin believe that ethnographic texts can no longer be seen as authentic representations of the researched but they still have the power to excite, challenge or stimulate the reader to take action in the same way that literature can move people and give them a greater understanding of the world without claiming objective status. This is a challenging idea but the assumption of interpretative ethnography is that the text is something we can relate to in a playful way. It does not have authority or claim upon us. This way of understanding ethnography does not do justice to the sense of urgency felt by ethnographers whose lives have been changed through an encounter with people who have suffered violence and oppression and are seeking to witness in a very direct way to pain and suffering. Nor does interpretative ethnography consider the very different impact ethnographic work might have in a culture, where many people are illiterate and the author has a very important responsibility for communicating what the researched themselves are unable to read. Interpretative ethnography does not consider how can these people be seen as interactive with ethnographic accounts.

Critical and interpretative ethnographers have frequently ignored the importance of gender in their analyses and whilst I take their challenges seriously it is to feminist ethnography that I now turn. Feminist ethnography provides the values and techniques that I will use to shape my own research into women's experience.

¹¹⁵ Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography*, p. 44.

¹¹⁶ Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography*, p. 237.

¹¹⁷ Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography*, p. 237.

¹¹⁸ Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography*, p. 238.

¹¹⁹ Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography*, p. 239.

Feminist Ethnography

Researching the Everyday World of Women

Gender-blind ethnography in the social sciences ignores the presence of the 'other' in the discourse therefore women are treated as the 'other.' Paul Atkinson reports that women are absent characters and silent figures in urban ethnographies:

Women have major roles to play in the social order but are not represented as social actors. They are '*objects*' not subjects of their own actions in their own culture.¹²⁰

This is what we can see in male-centred ethnography in anthropology and sociology and Atkinson also proves that sociological texts often use generic male terms, which imply a universality of experience:

The ethnographer- sociological or anthropological- uses other conventions too. Frequently we construct 'the-' (whatever) as the object of our discourse: 'the Nuer,' 'the drug user,' 'the gang member,' 'the race goer,' 'the Navaho' and so on. These too partake of the generic maleness of human actors in conventional texts.¹²¹

Here we can see that whether it is as subjects or objects everything is based on the 'generic male' terms in anthropology and sociology. This is neglecting, ignoring and degrading the personalities and presence of women in society. Men are represented as human actors and women are invisible in these kind of method. Atkinson writes:

The converse of the 'thereness' of women- their invisible presence- is the fact that the 'hereness' of men is so unremarkable for the majority of our ethnographic texts, however sensitive they may be to other problems and multiple- realities.¹²²

Women's experiences are often unrecorded and untold because they do not take place on the public stage but in the day-to-day world of personal, domestic and private relationships which are the taken-for-granted-background of our lives. This taken for granted background is the hardest of all to question. Thomas writes:

[The] taken-for-granted world often seems too confusing too powerful, or too mysterious to slice beneath appearances, and it is not always easy to see clearly, let alone address, the fundamental problems of social existence than we confront daily.¹²³

Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, two of the earliest feminist sociologists, realised the need to construct a feminist social science; 'a social science which starts from women's experience

¹²⁰ Paul Atkinson, *The Ethnographic Imagination: Textual Constructions of Reality*, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 144.

¹²¹ Atkinson, *The Ethnographic Imagination*, p. 146.

¹²² Atkinson, *The Ethnographic Imagination*, p. 146.

¹²³ Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, p. 3.

of women's reality.'¹²⁴ In order to develop a feminist social science female researchers would have to develop the skills to investigate women's everyday lives because it is through everyday interactions that women's lives are constrained. It is really dangerous for women to continue to exist in a taken-for-granted male world, where they are asked to function as its forgotten 'other.' Therefore, Stanley and Wise argue that in order to find out how and why women are oppressed, "we need to know *how* oppression occurs *where* it occurs: in the context of our differing everyday experiences."¹²⁵

Dorothy E. Smith, another important early feminist sociologist, found that women are the objects rather than subjects of sociological study.¹²⁶ Therefore, she seeks how we might begin to explore the everyday world from the standpoint of women.¹²⁷ Smith writes:

It is rather a method that, at the outset of inquiry, creates the space for an absent subject, and an absent experience that is to be filled with the presence and spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday world.¹²⁸

Exploring the everyday lives of women can break the bonds of their silence and invisibility. Smith also begins to articulate what will become an important feature of feminist ethnography, that is a deep concern for the power relationship between the observer and the observed.¹²⁹ The feminist sociologist must be aware of the fact that she observes things and describes them from her perspective, which may be quite different, or other, for the observed. Smith warns against the assumptions of ethnographic texts in which the observed are silenced.¹³⁰ Smith writes of the 'unaccountable' ethnographer, "Her ordinary descriptive procedures in corporate interpretations unchecked by the experience of those she describes."¹³¹

Principles of Feminist Ethnography

Until recently a distinctive feminist perspective has been missing from ethnographic debate but women researchers are now beginning to make a significant contribution and they

¹²⁴ Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, *Breaking Out Again: Feminist Ontology and Epistemology*, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 164.

¹²⁵ Stanley, *Breaking out Again*, p. 170.

¹²⁶ Dorothy E. Smith, *The Everyday World As Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*, Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987, p. 109.

¹²⁷ Smith, *The Everyday World*, p. 106.

¹²⁸ Smith, *The Everyday World*, p. 107.

¹²⁹ Kamala Visweswaran, a feminist ethnographer, argues that it is necessary for feminist ethnography to focus on the relationships and power differences between women. Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, p. 20.

¹³⁰ Smith, *The Everyday World*, p. 112.

explore the relevant principles for feminist ethnography.

Relationship between the Ethnographer and Researched Women

Beverley Skeggs has asked an important epistemological question about the relationship of the knower to the known in feminist ethnography.¹³² She concentrated on the feminist debates on ontology, epistemology and methodology.¹³³ She argues that feminist research places emphasis upon the power relations between the researcher and the researched and their relationships should be non-hierarchical,¹³⁴ which is a positive point. The 'ethnographer' is a woman and the subjects are 'women.' In this approach the relationship between the knower and the known is closer if the knower and the known are from the same country, culture and context. I agree with Skeggs that we should avoid hierarchical relationships between the researcher and the researched but how we can balance power relations between literate and illiterate women is a matter of concern to me in feminist ethnography. Any hierarchical relationship could manipulate the voices and views of the researched women. Although feminist ethnography seeks to be a respectful process where value is given to women, differences in class, status and education can still impact upon the research and these social differences can be very complex.

Focusing on Women's Experience

Beverley Skeggs tries to shed light upon how knowledge is produced, and how ethnographies are the outcome of continual theorising and research practice. Skeggs expected that it might be easy to understand the young women she studied by entering in to their 'natural context.' As she spent more time with young women she became more confused and aware of her own lack of understanding.¹³⁵ This is a very good practice to acknowledge our own failures in ethnographic research. In her view whilst ethnography is the study of 'others' and focuses on 'other' experiences and practices¹³⁶ feminist ethnography is the study of 'ourselves' and focusing on 'our' experiences and practices from the perspectives of women.

¹³¹ Smith, *The Everyday World*, p. 112.

¹³² Beverley Skeggs, 'Situating the Production of Feminist Ethnography,' in Mary Maynard and June Purvis (eds.), *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*, London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1994, p. 78.

¹³³ Skeggs in Maynard, *Researching Women's*, p. 73.

¹³⁴ Skeggs in Maynard, *Researching Women's*, p. 78.

¹³⁵ Skeggs in Maynard, *Researching Women's*, p. 75.

¹³⁶ Skeggs in Maynard, *Researching Women's*, p. 76.

In Norman K. Denzin's view a new form beyond the male way of looking, hearing and feeling must be cultivated¹³⁷ and such an approach is essential in feminist ethnography. Feminist ethnographers need to look, hear and feel beyond the ways and methods of male ethnography in order to understand women's experience from the perspectives of women.

Woman Listening to Woman

One of the most important claims made by feminist ethnography is that women talk differently to female researchers. This is partly because women use language in a different way to men in male dominated culture. Marjorie L. Devault states that 'since the words available often do not fit women to translate when they talk about their experiences' and in this way 'parts of their lives disappear.'¹³⁸ The feminist ethnography is woman listening to woman as woman talking to woman. Feminist ethnographer listens to the voices of the researched woman, where the researcher and the researched are engaged in formal or informal conversations. Diane Bell argues that feminist ethnography is 'woman talking to woman' and such ethnography is feminine and feminist. Bell starts her fieldwork with talking and listening to women about their lives.¹³⁹ Through listening to women Bell collected women's knowledge, which was based on their experiences, practices, feelings, thinking and being.¹⁴⁰ In order to listen to women Bell went to the working places of women, participated in the work of those women and a picture of her with informants in the working place demonstrates this. In this talking and listening process both researcher and the researched are empowered. The participant often finds relief and encouragement that she is able to speak about her experiences whilst the researcher is able to share in the disclosure of precious information. The feminist researcher who is recording the accounts of previously unarticulated experiences has a duty to present these in forms that are respectful of their importance and significance. For this reason Devault argues that every effort must be made to preserve the actual words spoken by women and to present them as fully and accurately as possible in the form in which they were spoken. Feminist researchers are suspicious of ethnographic accounts of women's experience in which the voices of the participants in the research are replaced by the interpretations of the researchers.

¹³⁷ Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography*, p. 46.

¹³⁸ Marjorie L. Devault, 'Talking and Listening from Women's Standpoint: Feminist Strategies for Interviewing and Analysis,' in D. Weinberg (ed.), *Qualitative Research Methods*, Oxford: Blackwells, 2002, p. 94.

¹³⁹ Diane Bell, Pat Caplan and Wazir Jahan Karim (eds.), *Gendered Fields: Women, Men and Ethnography*, London: Routledge, 1993, Reprinted in 1995, p. 30.

¹⁴⁰ Bell, *Gendered Fields*, p. 30.

Feminist Ethnography in the Indian Context

The questions of hierarchy and power addressed by Webb and Skeggs take on particular forms in the Indian context. Kamala Ganesh, who has done an ethnographic research on Kottai Pillaimar¹⁴¹ in Tirunelveli district of Tamilnadu in India,¹⁴² faced a problem in her research that in the beginning women were silent and they felt that they had nothing to share with the ethnographer. When Ganesh persisted, the women opened up and broke their silence by speaking.¹⁴³ This resulted in a close relationship between the researched women and the ethnographer in which Ganesh could even ask the more intimate questions.¹⁴⁴

In her research it becomes apparent that upper-caste women appear, behave and dress according to the norms and values created by the uppercaste men in the Indian society. Ganesh writes:

A lone ('unprotected') upper-caste woman with the appropriate behaviour is more likely to be treated by men with respect. Women from the bottom of the hierarchy would doubly have to prove their 'goodness,' and even so might be open to rough treatment.¹⁴⁵

Ganesh claims that as an uppercaste woman ethnographer in India, she gained the respect and co-operation from the researched and succeeded in her ethnographic fieldwork. She claims that even men addressed her *amma* (mother).¹⁴⁶ The word *Amma* is used to show respect to woman in Tamilnadu.¹⁴⁷ However, there is a problem in this situation. Ganesh is also likely to collude with men because of her highborn status and respect, which she gained from men in that area. A female ethnographer's caste identity, education and status might influence her to collude with men. Therefore, a female ethnographer, who is not from the same caste and educational background as the women she studies, needs to take necessary precautions not to collude with men. She must possess a clear understanding of how caste, social and educational background will effect her relations with others.

¹⁴¹ Kottai Pillaimars are from Vellala caste, which is one of the high castes in Tamilnadu. Kottai Pillaimar are landlords in Tirunelveli District of Tamilnadu State.

¹⁴² Kamala Ganesh 'Breaching the Wall of Difference: Fieldwork and a Personal Journey to Srivaikuntam, Tamilnadu' in Bell, *Gendered Fields*, p. 128.

¹⁴³ Ganesh in Bell, *Gendered Fields*, p. 136.

¹⁴⁴ Ganesh in Bell, *Gendered Fields*, p. 136.

¹⁴⁵ Ganesh in Bell, *Gendered Fields*, p. 134.

¹⁴⁶ Ganesh in Bell, *Gendered Fields*, p. 134.

¹⁴⁷ Even if the word *amma* is used to show the respect towards a woman she is not treated as equal to men. M. L. Bose writes, "The ideal of Indian womanhood, as daughter, sister, wife, even as mother, has never been depicted in terms of equality with men or independence." M. L. Bose, *Social and Cultural History of Ancient India*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1990, p. 97.

Kamala Visweswaran's ethnographic work¹⁴⁸ is from the perspective of second generation American Indian. Visweswaran went to India in 1986 for her ethnographic fieldwork in order to research on Tamil women's participation in India's freedom movement. She collected essays, fables and diary entries. She conducted some interviews in which she faced more failure than victory because women refused to be open up with Visweswaran. Therefore, she shifted her focus from 'speech' to 'silence' and gave importance to women's silences and interruptions. She considered women's silence as a tool in her feminist ethnography.

Ganesh and Visweswaran both did their ethnographic researches in India. Visweswaran could not break the silences of women, where Ganesh insisted women speak. Ganesh made very close relationships with women, where Visweswaran could not do this. Visweswaran became interested in what was being communicated through silence and refusals to speak. Her work is self-reflexive and interpretative and reveals much about the identity of a second-generation migrant in her home culture. It is interesting to reflect upon the differences between these researches undertaken in India by these two feminist ethnographers; Visweswaran learned from the silence and Ganesh insisted on breaking the silence of women and then learned from their speech. Ganesh relied upon her high caste identity and education as status, where Visweswaran claimed her Indian roots, as a second generation American Indian. Feminist ethnographers have to learn from the silences of women in certain situations, where women are tight lipped but in order to listen to the life stories of women it is essential to break the silences of women in feminist ethnographic research. Although both strategies are useful reflexive ethnography alone cannot uncover the cultural invisibility of women. I shall now examine how feminist ethnography is beginning to play an important role in the development of feminist practical theology through an examination of the work of Riet Bons-Storm.

The Use of Ethnography in the Practical Theology of Riet Bons-Storm

Riet Bons-Storm is a Dutch Academic Practical Theologian, who has been active in the grassroots, feminist 'Women and Faith Movement' for many years. Because she stood with 'one foot in the Women and Faith Movement and the other foot in the theological department' she became very aware that the issues raised by women concerning life and faith were not being addressed by Practical Theology. In Bons-Storm's groundbreaking text¹⁴⁹ she began to question why women were largely invisible in the literature on

¹⁴⁸ Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*.

¹⁴⁹ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*.

pastoral care and counselling and why their statements concerning their own experiences seemed incredible to those who were supposed to offer them Christian care.¹⁵⁰ Feminist scholars have argued that so-called traditional pastoral care is developed from the experience of the dominant group¹⁵¹ and it does not give sufficient attention to the voices and experiences of non-dominant group. Bons-Storm writes:

Restrictive, oppressive power limits the range in which another person can make choices, thus denying the other of being the subject of his or her own decisions.¹⁵²

It is alleged that gender difference and its associated relationships of power transpire in women's problems not being treated seriously by male pastors.¹⁵³ Mark Pryce writes, "To listen to women is to risk change and even transformation."¹⁵⁴ Therefore, men are uneasy about listening to and learning from women. Consequently, many women are reluctant to speak fearing men will not listen to them.

According to Bons-Storm even though pastors are trained to listen in pastoral care women are not heard and neither believed nor understood.¹⁵⁵ The fear that they will not be taken seriously can lead to women disguising their true feelings and responding in line with male expectations.¹⁵⁶ Bons-Storm writes, "Often a woman does not dare tell a pastor what she really feels, fears, or enjoys. She falls silent about what really moves and motivates her."¹⁵⁷ The reason for women's silence, Bons-Storm argues, lies far beyond their personal relationship with pastors and other men in authority. It is also a product of a dominant sociocultural narrative, which defines the roles acceptable for men and women in society. However, Bons-Storm considers the silencing of women as an act of violence by a powerful group against a less powerful one. She argues that hierarchical relationships force people into silence.¹⁵⁸ Women require a relevant pastoral care in which their voices are heard and their problems treated seriously. *The Incredible Woman* is a highly significant text in Practical Theology¹⁵⁹ in the Western tradition. It shares much with feminist ethnography as outlined below. Both share a common emphasis on articulating the concerns of women in order that changes may be made.

¹⁵⁰ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 19.

¹⁵¹ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 18.

¹⁵² Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 25.

¹⁵³ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 25.

¹⁵⁴ Mark Pryce, *Finding a Voice: Men, Women, and the Community of the Church*, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1996, p. 17.

¹⁵⁵ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 19.

¹⁵⁶ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p.19.

¹⁵⁷ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 20.

¹⁵⁸ Bons- Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 26.

Need to Counter Invisibility of Women

Bons-Storm argues that women's 'incredibility' and its causes are intertwined with dominant theories in psychology and theology and their constructions of 'woman.'¹⁶⁰ She believes this is the case, because these dominant theories are written from the perspective of men. Dominant theories and methods are predicated on the basis of the experience of the dominant group. They have ignored the voices of the 'others.'¹⁶¹ Hence women, the 'others' in the discourse are treated as 'invisible' and 'incredible.' Therefore, we need to challenge and question dominant theories and methods in order to hear the silenced. Bons-Storm emphasises the need to listen to the voices and experiences of the silenced women, when developing suitable pastoral care and counselling for women. She thus seeks to break the 'silence' of women in the Christian pastoral tradition. Her concern is to construct a feminist pastoral care that will enable women to speak of their own everyday experiences and problems.

Bons-Storm uses the techniques of ethnography to collect the voices and experiences of women. She does not take the position of the dominant ethnographer to observe, record and interpret everything from the perspective and experience of the dominant in the discourse. She seeks to maintain a balanced relationship between herself and her subjects. She tries not to treat the researched woman as 'other', 'invisible' and 'incredible'. She has done her research in her own social and political context. Bons-Storm reflects on the basis of the lived experience of women in 'Woman and Faith Movement in the Netherlands.' She is an insider ethnographer, who identifies herself as one amongst the researched women.

Research Data from Women's Lives

It is interesting that in order to collect data from the lives of women Bons-Storm listened to the stories of women, she used correspondence with women, conducted interviews and talked to women, listened to their problems and then she collected their voices.¹⁶² Her communication with Sylvia¹⁶³ did not take the form of formal interview. Bons-Storm had a very flexible method to collect the stories and voices of women and this may have allowed

¹⁵⁹ Bons- Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, In this book Storm draws upon an analysis of the experience of women in the Dutch 'women's faith group' to argue that women have been systematically silenced by pastoral practices which take male experience as normative.

¹⁶⁰ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, pp. 31, 32.

¹⁶¹ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, pp. 79, 80.

¹⁶² Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, pp. 37- 45.

¹⁶³ Sylvia is one of the six women Storm interviewed during her research.

women to share their stories without any fear. It created a healthy relationship between the researched women and the researcher. Her subjects were friends, friends of friends, or contacts generated through the Women and Faith Movement. Many of the problems associated with hierarchical power relationships between the researcher and researched were minimised because of this shared social context. Bons-Storm does not want other representations or substitute voices in her research but includes the direct voices of the researched women themselves. She brought the voices of six women directly into her research. She considered women's stories and experiences as the living documents because women spoke out of their lived experiences. Bons-Storm did not approach her subjects with a pre-determined set of questions reflecting her own agenda but she asked them to share with her their 'self narratives.' The 'life story' approach to social research is one, which is believed by many ethnographers to be an empowering form of research, and it is one that feminists have found particularly helpful. Bons-Storm writes:

A self-narrative is a way of presenting a cohesive construction - not a mechanical recording of events - of the way the self is experienced, telling stories about events that are seen as formative for the experience of the self.¹⁶⁴

Despite the fact that Bons-Storm offered confidentiality to her subjects many of the women, who spoke to her, asked her not to re-tell their stories in her published work and she respected these requests. Bons-Storm writes, "These stories I heard from the basis of my knowledge about the topic at hand, although I do not refer to many of these stories explicitly."¹⁶⁵ Those women, who did give permission for their stories to be used, are not presented from the perspective of an expert observer, who processes and translates their concern for the reader. Bons-Storm is determined that she is not speaking on behalf of the researched women:

To speak 'in the name of somebody else easily becomes an oppressive gesture of representation, by which a powerful figure reduces a dependent one to silence... The women speak for themselves. I retell the stories they told me verbatim where possible. Their stories provide a living document of the problem that is the subject of this book. These six women are survivors: they found a way out of the silence of their closets of shame. Now they are able to talk and we can listen to them and learn from them.¹⁶⁶

Values Self-narrative

Bons-Storm stresses that self-narrative plays an important role in pastoral communication. Story is a verbal construction about a particular experienced event and a self-narrative is

¹⁶⁴ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 46.

¹⁶⁵ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 37.

¹⁶⁶ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 37.

constructed in, and through, language.¹⁶⁷ Self-narrative is an account of experienced events.¹⁶⁸ Bons-Storm finds that in a patriarchal society women's self-narratives are constructed under conditions made by men.¹⁶⁹ Men define women's 'proper' roles in a patriarchal society. Women share their self-narratives in a context where the general belief system is patriarchal.¹⁷⁰ Graham also has the same opinion that dominant views of human nature, self, knowledge, action and values are constructed androcentrically and maleness and masculinity are the norm.¹⁷¹ In this case women are also treated as 'other' and 'objects.' However, it is essential to explore how to reconstruct the self-narratives of women. Therefore, women are in need of a suitable language to create new stories of women.

Bons-Storm questions the use of so-called male language in self-narratives. She asks how women can create stories of their lives by using the so-called male language and men's words that do not fit women's experiences and feelings.¹⁷² Bons-Storm writes, "The dominant group in society assumes that the dominant discourse possesses the right reasoning and language to reveal the true nature of reality."¹⁷³ Official language in any group or culture is the language of the dominant group and its sex, class, race, and ethnicity. One's own language is one of the most important tools for anyone to communicate in any culture or context. However, the language of the researched is important to develop a relevant pastoral care. Bons-Storm writes, "As long as the language of the dominant group is seen as the only discourse that can possibly render "truth," persons considered to be outside that discourse- women for instance - cannot be heard as credible persons when they speak in their own discourse."¹⁷⁴ This is a reasonable argument because a patriarchal society considers only the language and the perspective of the dominant group credible. The language and the perspective of the 'other' in the discourse are considered incredible.

Graham writes:

In women's preaching, the process of telling others' stories is an example of conversational practice: matching the personal with the collective; of inviting the hearers to place their stories alongside those of others.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁷ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 46.

¹⁶⁸ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 46.

¹⁶⁹ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 48.

¹⁷⁰ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 48.

¹⁷¹ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, p. 4.

¹⁷² Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 61.

¹⁷³ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 64.

¹⁷⁴ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 64.

¹⁷⁵ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, p. 177.

When women share their stories, out of their lived experiences, there is the opportunity to begin to speak in new ways and begin to break free from the dominant discourse. Women can create powerful new narratives by hearing each other into speech.

Socio-cultural Narrative and Its Failure

Bons-Storm asserts that socio-cultural narratives define roles for men and women. The narrator identifies himself or herself with the dominant group in a society.¹⁷⁶ In this case those who are not part of the dominant group are the 'others' or 'objects' in the treatment. Bons-Storm emphasises that "Sociocultural narratives are expressions of the reigning ideology in a culture, which in our case is patriarchal."¹⁷⁷ Women's roles in the patriarchal sociocultural narrative are always dependent upon men's. In Bons-Storm's view, when a dominant person is 'the boss,' she or he has more, appears to possess more insight, is more credible, is more rational than the other in the discourse.¹⁷⁸ The roles of the dominant and subordinate persons in the socio-cultural narrative are based on power relationships. Women are encouraged to play the roles allowed them according to the sociocultural narrative. Women's roles in the patriarchal sociocultural narratives are always dependent upon and relative to men's:

In the patriarchal sociocultural narrative a 'proper' relationship between a man and woman...is one in which the man is always a little taller, older, wiser than the woman; he also earns a higher salary and has a higher social status.¹⁷⁹

Race intertwines with gender in this binary and hierarchical system. White women may be the silenced partner in relation to men but white women can assume dominance over black people and black women are conditioned to be submissive.¹⁸⁰ When a man and woman work together man is assumed to be the boss and woman is the secretary or the assistant.¹⁸¹ Thus, sociocultural narrative that originated from the dominant perspective silences the 'other' in the discourse.

Bons-Storm argues that inhabiting the dominant sociocultural narrative is dangerous and damaging for women. For example, patriarchal society communicates the powerful messages that women must 'reshape' their bodies to be attractive to men.¹⁸² Similarly the dominant narrative encourages women to keep silent concerning the abuse they suffer at the hands of men as male domination is sanctioned by powerful cultural myths that make

¹⁷⁶ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 50.

¹⁷⁷ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 50.

¹⁷⁸ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 55.

¹⁷⁹ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, pp. 55-56.

¹⁸⁰ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 55.

¹⁸¹ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 57.

male power appear natural and necessary. Bons-Storm talks about the necessity of counter-narratives about sexuality. Women are sexual victims because of the absence of a counter-narrative about sexuality. In the dominant narratives men dominate women and men are entitled to keep women down. Women are socialised in the dominant sociocultural narrative. Women lack their own narrative to defend themselves against sexual violence.¹⁸³

A counter narrative can help women to fight against sexual violence.

Women's Space as a 'Bird and Its Golden Cage': A Narrow Space in the Sociocultural Narratives

In Bons-Storm's opinion, women are allowed to develop their identity and self-narratives from a restricted 'narrow space.'¹⁸⁴ Woman's 'nest,' 'narrow space,' is a golden cage for her. However, it is necessary to break the patriarchal golden cage and set the woman free to explore her own space. It is necessary to create enough space for women to stand, speak, experience and exercise her freedom as a human being. A narrow space always irritates, mistreats and restricts the freedom of the woman and it never allows woman to enjoy life in dignified way. Women are in need of equal space to men, in the sociocultural narratives. Hence, it is necessary to create new narratives and stories to widen the space for women in sociocultural narratives and in pastoral care and counselling.

A caged bird never sings happily and it is the same with woman in pastoral care and counselling, woman keeps silence because the male pastor does not listen to her problems. Women's silence in pastoral encounters speaks a lot about women's caged experience in traditional pastoral forms. On the other hand, as Bons-Storm remarks, that pastoral counsellor has to explore with women, what it means to be a woman in her particular situation, living with a female body in the patriarchal church and in the world. It is a hard task for a male pastor to understand the feelings of women.¹⁸⁵ Bons-Storm emphasizes women's need for new models and stories about strong women.¹⁸⁶ Hence, it is necessary for women to move from 'unstory' to 'self-narrative and to a 'counter-narrative.' The feminist ethnographic practices explored previously have a vital role to play in this work.

No Hierarchy of Knowledge

In Bons-Storm's view self-narrative can be understood by a listener, forming a bridge of

¹⁸² Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 111.

¹⁸³ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 112.

¹⁸⁴ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 134.

¹⁸⁵ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 142.

shared knowledge and generating new understandings of the self.¹⁸⁷ She envisions a process through which women share their self-narratives with other women. As they talk to each other they begin to gain a deeper understanding of their own experience. In such a dialogue there is no hierarchy of knowledge. The traditional distinction between the object and 'the other' is overcome. There is no dominating knowledge, when a woman shares from her own story and it is interesting to the listener. The one who shares the self-narrative and the one who listens are both equals in this treatment and therefore it is a kind of shared knowledge.

The Strengths of Bons-Storm's Approach

According to Bons-Storm pastoral care and counselling in feminist perspective are about women encouraging one another and giving each other strength, support, insight and vision to develop themselves and the further the development of women. The aim is to transform the individual woman and society.¹⁸⁸ This encourages women to speak so that women's voices and experiences become the primary source, out of which to develop a relevant and suitable text. The voices and experiences of the researched are very important and the primary source from which an ethnographic text is created. In the same way the voices and experiences of women are important, when developing suitable pastoral practices with women. Interaction between the researched and the researcher will lead to further reflection and it will bring some transformation in the situation of women. If feminist ethnography is 'woman talking to woman, woman listening to woman'¹⁸⁹ it is particularly applicable to the situation, where women are in need of pastoral care and counselling. Through this method a woman pastor can listen to women's experience and talk to women. In this case, there is no gender difference but it is a hard task to establish an equal power relationship between the pastor and the client. It is necessary to think of ways to avoid any hierarchical relationship between the pastor and client woman.

Bons-Storm's book represents a turning point for Practical Theology and shows how women's experience transforms traditional understandings. It is part of a larger body of writing in which the following key themes are important:

- Breaking the silence of women,
- Listening to the voices of women,
- Giving importance to the stories of women,
- Using women's experience as the main source of knowledge,

¹⁸⁶ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 147.

¹⁸⁷ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 46.

¹⁸⁸ Bons-Storm, *The Incredible Woman*, p. 27.

¹⁸⁹ Bell, *Gendered Fields*, p. 30.

Reconstructing the socio-cultural narrative from the perspective of women,
Breaking down hierarchy between the researcher and the researched.

There are strengths in Bons-Storm's approach but it is also necessary to recognise additional issues faced by marginalised women, which are not tackled in her work.

The Problems

Bons-Storm has done her work in a western context, where women are more often educated and independent. Therefore, she has not considered it relevant to discuss the power difference between the educated researcher and illiterate women, who are in need of pastoral care and counselling. Women, who are able to express their pains and grievances, can articulate their frustrations within the feminist pastoral practices of their churches. The existence of the Women and Faith Movement provided a forum for women to articulate their frustrations. Bons-Storm ignores the problem of how to listen to illiterate women, who are unable to articulate their frustrations. The majority of members in the Churches in India are women and most of them are illiterate and poor. Therefore, it is essential to explore how to listen to the frustrations of illiterate women, who are also in need of pastoral care and counselling.

The Challenges of the Indian Context

The above principles and key themes are important in doing feminist ethnographic research in the Indian context but other questions, which have not emerged as significant in the work of western writers, still need to be addressed. How to listen to the stories of the silenced and illiterate women in India? How to balance the power relations between the researcher and the illiterate researched women? Is a formal interview the best way to collect data about the lives of illiterate woman in India? If not the formal interview what other method is appropriate to collect data about the lives of illiterate women? Some of the most important issues for consideration when doing ethnographic research in India are listed below.

1. How to create a balanced relationship between illiterate women and educated researcher?

Balancing the relationship between the illiterate women, who are participants in the research, and the educated researcher is a difficult task because the illiterate woman's way of life is a different from the researcher's. Their life situation is totally different from the western context because many of them are victims of poverty, illiteracy and male violence.

They lack clean clothes, proper food, clean drinking water, and a permanent income. They live in huts, where there are no sanitary facilities and sleep on the floor at night. In such a situation a researcher needs to work hard and take care to develop a balanced relationship with the researched.

2. Is the interview context threatening and too formal for the illiterate women?

Most of the illiterate and economically poor women are fully engaged with their daily labour in the paddy field, or carrying stones and bricks at construction sites, or working in the houses of rich people. It is difficult for them to arrive on time for an appointment as planned ahead. It is frightening for illiterate women to answer questions if the researcher goes with a questionnaire and therefore the researcher must use other, less alienating, forms of data collection.

3. How to create confidentiality in conversations and recording conversations?

It is essential to keep conversations between the researcher and researched women confidential, the recorded cassettes safe and the transcribed documents confidential for safety reasons. When women talk to the researcher about the male violence they experience, a researcher needs to keep the conversations secret in order to avoid any sudden violence from a husband of the researched. For example, if a third person listens to the conversation it might lead to more violence from the violator. If a woman's husband is the violator, it is good to choose a meeting place away from her home, for the sake of confidentiality and her safety.

4. Will women be afraid to speak out because the culture does not encourage women to talk anything against their husbands even if they are survivors of violence?

Not speaking against one's own husband is considered as part of fidelity. Fidelity in married life is equivalent to the western idea of marriage and family life being regarded as 'holy.' In Indian culture, once sati¹⁹⁰ was considered the proof of a wife's fidelity to her husband. Sometimes survivors of violence might not feel free to talk about the violence they experience from their husbands because of their cultural practice of not to speaking out against husbands.

5. Will women consider themselves as persons without any power and identities?

¹⁹⁰ Sati (widow burning) was an old practice in India. The wife of the bereaved offers herself to be burned along with the dead body of her husband. This act is considered very holy and an expression of fidelity to her husband.

Until her death a woman depends upon her father, or husband or son and most of the women in India accept such male rule without any hesitation. If a stranger visits her house a woman says, 'nobody is at home' indicating she is not aware of her own identity as an individual. When a housewife in India says 'nobody is at home' it means her *husband* is not at home, or her *son* is not at home, or her *father* is not at home. She means that, 'you come and speak to the man, when the man is at home; I do not have any authority. I am not the person to make any decisions.' I remember that I myself 'sang this same chorus' in my childhood, when someone visited my home. Later I started to reason whether it was appropriate behaviour or not. This might surprise a western researcher but an insider woman can understand, what it means to feel 'invisible' and 'incredible' in one's own home. Once I confronted this traditional saying by asking a woman, "If no one is at home, who are you? Do not you belong to this home?" Hence it is essential to persuade women to accept the value of their own personalities by reconstructing the 'self- narratives' of women.

6. How to overcome the problems of the joint family system?

Many married women in India are living under the same roof with in-laws, their mother-in-law and father-in-law. The joint family system prevents women from talking freely to the researcher and women are obliged to obey all the rules, regulations, customs and traditions of the joint family system. It is not an easy task to go against joint family taboos. Mothers-in-law have great authority and power over their daughters-in-law. The researcher has to please the mother-in-law first in order to obtain permission to speak to her daughter-in-law.

7. How women learned to hide rather than reveal their true emotions?

Women are traditionally taught to hide their true feelings. Women are not allowed to sit in the living room, when a male guest is present there and many women hide themselves inside the kitchen and peep through the window to make sure if guest is away from home. Women are not allowed to sit with the males due to their subordinate status. Since women are expected to be 'behind the screen' and hide all her sufferings and emotions, women find it hard to articulate their frustrations.

8. How to deal with 'male first, then female' attitude?

Traditional families in India treat boys as first class children and girls as second-class children. After parent's death their property and land goes to sons. Girls are given a dowry at the marriage time and it does not reach girl's hands or bank account but it is given to her husband. Sons are given better education than daughters. It is a female's duty to feed the

male at home first. It is the wife's duty to eat the leftovers from her husband's plate and this is done because of her high respect and love to her male, who is considered as the head in the family. A researcher needs to persuade women to understand that they are equal to men.

9. Will it be necessary for an indigenous ethnographer to spend several months to 'observe' women?

The 'going native' process is an established pattern in ethnography. The ethnographer goes and dwells among the 'natives' for a long period of time in order to observe the participants, to learn the language and culture of the researched. It is not necessary for an indigenous ethnographer to spend such a long period with the participants because women are not mere 'objects' or 'apes' to be observed. A feminist ethnographer can listen to women's problems with great concern. When the female ethnographer and the women are the subjects of the research then a productive interaction takes place when they talk to each other and it will require less time to build up relationships of trust.

I have shown how important ethnography is for practical theology and in particular, how useful feminist ethnography is for uncovering women's experience and developing feminist practical theology. I have argued that there are particular questions that face researchers who are working amongst poor and illiterate women that are different from those faced by white 'western feminist theologians. I now turn to examine how other women theologians working amongst poor, illiterate and marginalised women from non-western cultures have sought to make women's experience visible and have emphasised its theological significance. It is my intention to discover if there are insights that I can gain from the works of these women that will help me to develop my own research on Dalit Christian women in Kerala State.

CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE

This chapter analyses how women's experience is used in developing Womanist Theology, *Mujersita* Theology and Asian Feminist Theology. Firstly, this chapter analyses how Katie G. Cannon uses literature as a source of ethnographic data to develop Black Womanist Ethics. Secondly, it examines how Ada Maria Isasi Diaz uses women's experience to develop *Mujerista* theology. Thirdly, this chapter demonstrates how the Asian feminist theologians Kwok Pui-lan and Chung Hyun Kyung use women's experience in order to develop Asian Feminist Theology.

Womanist Theology

Katie G. Cannon

Katie Cannon's *Black Womanist Ethics*¹⁹¹ is an important contribution towards Womanist¹⁹² Theology in which she uses the Black women's literary tradition as a significant source for womanist theology. Her work seeks to establish that there is link between the African American women's literature and theological traditions of the black community.

Cannon has an unusual perspective upon doing ethnographic research on women. She does not employ fieldwork to collect ethnographic data but she locates Black women's experience, through engaging with the Black woman's literary tradition. She argues that it is possible to do ethnographic research without fieldwork and work in the field need not be a requirement for ethnographic research. Cannon writes:

I come from a place where when people talk about *fieldwork* they literally mean field work- work in the fields- not ethno-graphic research. I come from a place where there isn't but one kind of doctor, the person who takes care of you when you are sick....¹⁹³

As an ethnographer and a literary interpreter, Cannon argues that a doctor's careful observation, evaluation and decision can help the doctor to treat the patient in an effective

¹⁹¹ Katie G. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988.

¹⁹² Womanist is the term used by African-American women. A womanist is a Black feminist who transmits the wisdom of Black women's cultural heritage from mother to daughter and from generation to generation. Alice Walker meant by womanist "grown up, be grown up, in charge, responsible." Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, London: The Women's Press, 1984, p. xi-xii.

¹⁹³ Katie Geneva Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*, New York: Continuum, 1996, p. 13.

way to cure the disease. Instead of employing fieldwork Cannon uses ethnographic techniques to interpret the Black women's literary tradition.

When she develops ethics for Black women, instead theories of values or norms, Cannon starts with Black women's experience. Cannon comments on her method as follows:

It starts with experience instead of with theories of values or norms. However, I believe that basic experiential themes and ethical implications can lead to norms lived out in the realities of day-to-day experience.¹⁹⁴

It is Cannon's concern to develop a relevant ethics for Black women. She challenges the relevance of ethics developed by whites and black male theologians, who exclude Black women's experience. Cannon argues that 'ethics,' which emerged from the stereotyped context of master- servant relationship, is not relevant to Black women and their practice of Christian life because it ignores black women's experience. Cannon sees a difference between the ethics and practice of Christianity among black and white. Cannon writes:

When I turned specifically to readings in theological ethics, I discovered that the assumption of the dominant ethical systems implied that the doing of Christian ethics in the black community was either immoral or amoral.¹⁹⁵

In order to use women's experience Cannon gives attention to "the real-lived texture of Black life," and in particular to the suffering of Black women. Cannon states that mental anguish, physical abuse and emotional agony are the lived-experience of Black people.¹⁹⁶ Cannon writes:

As long as the white male experience continues to be established as the ethical norm, Black women, black men and others will suffer unequivocal oppression.¹⁹⁷

Cannon states that Black women are the most vulnerable and the most exploited citizens of America because their lives are controlled and defined by white people and black men.¹⁹⁸ Cannon explains that a Black female's collections of moral counsel, is passed on from one generation to the next. Black women's moral counsel taught them how to endure the harsh,

¹⁹⁴ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 5.

¹⁹⁵ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 2.

¹⁹⁶ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 3.

¹⁹⁷ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 3. Cannon uses the ideas of Valerie Saiving. For Saiving a theology that has developed from the experience of men and ignores the experience of women's is not relevant for the need of women. Saiving draws distinction between masculine and feminine experience. Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View" in Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (eds.), *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979, p. 33. As for Saiving, a theology, which developed from the masculine experience, is not relevant to the needs of women, for Cannon an ethics, which developed from the white male experience, is irrelevant to the needs of black women.

¹⁹⁸ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 3.

cruel, inhumane exigencies of life.¹⁹⁹ Cannon analyses the historical context in which Black women became moral agents in Black female community:

The history of the black women in the United States generates the conditions for the patterns of ethical behaviour and moral wisdom, which have emerged in the Black female community.²⁰⁰

Cannon draws the body of data from the private aspects of Black life and uses the Black women's literary tradition to interpret and explain the Black community's socio-cultural patterns from which ethical values can be gleaned.²⁰¹ As an ethnographer Cannon finds moral wisdom in the Black women's literary tradition, and then she explores this with particular reference to the life and literature of Zora Neale Hurston.²⁰²

Cannon takes Hurston as a Representative of Black Women's Writings

Cannon believes that the life and literature of Hurston are paradigmatic of Black culture and black women's lives.²⁰³ Cannon finds that Black women's moral wisdom encouraged Hurston to "jump at de sun" and not to bend to the demanding will of her critics.²⁰⁴ Cannon states that Alice Walker²⁰⁵ is the one who identified Hurston as the prime symbol of "racial health."²⁰⁶ It was in the late 1970s that Walker started to search for information concerning the life and literature of Hurston. Cannon's interest in the integration of faith and ethics started in 1960s.

¹⁹⁹ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 4.

²⁰⁰ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 6.

²⁰¹ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 5.

²⁰² Zora Neale Hurston (1901-1960) was a Black novelist, journalist, folklorist, anthropologist and critic. She was the most prolific Black woman writer in America from 1920 to 1950.

²⁰³ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 8.

²⁰⁴ Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, pp. 94, 95.

²⁰⁵ Alice Walker was born in 1944. She is an American Black woman, poet, novelist and essay writer. She started to read stories and write poems from 1961. She is the author of *In Love and Trouble You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (1982), *Meridian* (1982), *The Color Purple* (1983), *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1984), *Possessing the Secrets of Joy* (1992). Walker describes Hurston as an ethnographer. Walker writes, "Zora Hurston, who went to Barnard to learn how to study what she really wanted to learn: the ways of her own people, and what ancient rituals, customs, and beliefs had made them unique." Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers'*, p.12.

²⁰⁶ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 12. In the early 1970s Alice Walker did her research for short story about voodoo, 'The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff.' She rediscovered Hurston for her work 'Zora Neale Hurston: a Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View.' While Walker wrote her essay 'Looking for Zora' she visited Hurston's burial place and marked it with a head stone proclaiming Hurston 'a genius of the South.' Walker writes, "*We are a people. A people do not throw their geniuses away. And if they are thrown away, it is our duty as artists and as witnesses for the future to collect them again for the sake of our children, and if necessary, bone by bone.*" Walker, *In Search of our Mothers'*, p. 92. Larret describes Zora Neale Hurston as Walker's literary foremother, a role model, ancestor and a legitimating presence for Walker in the African American literary tradition. Maria Lauret, *Modern Novelists: Alice Walker*, London: Macmillan Press, 2000, p. 15.

Cannon uses ethnographic technique in a different way from formal ethnographers while observing the life and literature of Hurston. Cannon surveys the literary work of Hurston²⁰⁷ and she demonstrates how important Black women's literary tradition is as a source of data on black experience:

I have found that this literary tradition is the nexus between the real-lived texture of Black life and the oral-aural cultural values implicitly passed on and received from one generation to the next. The ethical character of black folk culture is strongly and unmistakably present in Zora Neale Hurston's life and literature.²⁰⁸

Canon claims Black experience is the source of Hurston's living texts.²⁰⁹ Cannon heavily depends upon the work of Hurston, but it is a debatable point whether moral wisdom is more present in Hurston's work than in the work of black male writers. Cannon writes, "The ethical character of Black folk culture is strongly and unmistakably present in Zora Neale Hurston's life and literature."²¹⁰

Hurston's literature expresses the reality of Black women's lived-context. Cannon considers Black female writers as participant observers of their own community. Cannon demonstrates that Hurston observed the experience of the Black as the source of living texts through using black folk language, folkways and folk stories as symbols to define the intrinsic values of the Black oral-aural tradition.²¹¹ Cannon finds that the Black women's literary tradition parallels black history and the literary tradition conveys the assumed values in the black oral tradition.²¹² She states that the Black women, who engage themselves in literary compositions, are accountable to the collective values in Black history and culture.²¹³ Cannon writes:

As creators of literature these women are not formally historians, sociologists, or theologians, but the patterns and themes in their writings are reflective of historical facts, sociological realities, and religious convictions that lie behind the ethos and ethics of Black community.²¹⁴

Cannon considers Black women's literature as 'facts revealed through fiction' because their accountability to collective values in black history and culture allowed Black women to articulate their lived-reality. Through Black women's literature, she receives moral- oral wisdom from previous generations and it is her responsibility to pass such wisdom to the

²⁰⁷ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 10.

²⁰⁸ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 5.

²⁰⁹ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 11.

²¹⁰ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 5.

²¹¹ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 11.

²¹² Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 7. Cannon shows that Hurston emphasised the unique cultural heritage and wholeness of Black life. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 10.

²¹³ Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, p. 63.

next generation in her community. Cannon sees "the beauty of blackness in the common place and the greatness of Blackness in the common people"²¹⁵ and this approach has nothing to do with women in other communities. Moreover, Cannon's primary concern is intra-communal.²¹⁶ Therefore, her work secludes black feminist theological reflection as a 'frog in a well' because it is not crossing the boundary lines of intra-communal blackness. Cannon's work differentiates Black women from all other women in the world. As Walton says the work of Cannon places the issue of difference between women high on the agenda of feminist theological reflection.²¹⁷

Cannon observes that Black women writers give attention to rural traditions, language, idioms and folklore and Black women transmit it in oral form from one generation to the next. She finds that novels, short stories, love lyrics, folktales, fables, drama, non-fiction of Black women writers reveals psychic connection with the cultural tradition transmitted by the oral mode from one generation to the next. Black women writers draw heavily upon the Black oral culture.²¹⁸ Recording the oral tradition is a way of releasing the memories of mamas and grandmamas.²¹⁹ In the black community the mamas and grandmamas are storytellers, who share the oral tradition with the next generation. Oral narrative devices in the literary tradition of Black women are based on Black women's experience. Cannon considers Black women's literature as the literary counterpart of their community's oral tradition.

Cannon considers Hurston as an ethnographer who observed her own community. She finds that Hurston's work reveals the strength of Black women, and how Black women survive in a world of oppression by drawing strength from their own moral wisdom. Therefore, in Hurston's work Black women's experience becomes the major source for reflection. Cannon writes:

Black female authors emphasise life within the community, not the conflict with outside forces. In order to give faithful pictures of important and comprehensive segments of Black life, these writers tie their character's stories to the aesthetic, emotional and intellectual values of the Black community.²²⁰

²¹⁴ Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, p. 63.

²¹⁵ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. ix.

²¹⁶ Intra communal unity among the Black is expressed in the words of Michele Jacques: "Black bodies testify of our strength, endurance, love of spirituality and oneness with earth and sky." Michele Jacques, *Testimony as Embodiment: Telling the Truth and Shaming the Devil*, in Jacquelyn Grant (ed.), *Perspectives on Womanist Theology*, Georgia: The ITC Press, 1995, p. 129.

²¹⁷ Heather Elizabeth Walton, *The Threshold of the Garden: The Development of the Concept of Feminist Religious Reading with Particular Reference to the Work of Elizabeth Smart*, Ph.D. Thesis, Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1998, p. 66.

²¹⁸ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 84.

²¹⁹ Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, p. 65.

²²⁰ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 87.

Cannon thus claims Black women writers as ethnographers:

As insiders they venture into all strata of Black life. Black women writers transform the passions and sympathies, the desires and hurts, the joys and defeats, the praises and pressures, the richness and diversity of real lived communities into the stuff for art through the medium of literature.²²¹

Cannon observes that in Black women's literature heroic images are presented of ordinary women, who received great wealth of knowledge from their female community.²²² The Black women writers concentrate on black community and the human relationship within their community. The Black women's literary tradition proves how the results of slavery and their consequences forced black woman into their positions as cultural custodians.²²³

Cannon draws ethnographic data from the fiction and non-fiction of Hurston.

Uses the Fiction of Hurston

Cannon draws data from Black women's fiction because as a Black woman she realises that this fiction reflects the real lived-context of Black women in America. Cannon finds Black women's fiction as a new way to express the reality of women's lives. Cannon sees resource for a constructive ethics in the fiction of Hurston:

Hurston and her fictional counterparts are resources for a constructive ethic, wherein they serve as strong, resilient images, embodying the possible options for action open within the Black folk culture.²²⁴

Cannon states that Hurston's fictions give indication of the values the black community embraces in order to continue living despite the abusive and dehumanising restrictions imposed by the larger society.²²⁵ Cannon argues:

Her fiction bears a plausible stamp of veracity. Hurston created literary types that are both historically true and morally instructive. Her she/roes and he/roes learn to glean directives for living in the here-and-now.²²⁶

Cannon explores how Hurston's novels *Their Eyes were Watching God* (1937), *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) a series of proverbial sayings, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, (1939), *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948), describe quiet grace as truth. Cannon explains what is "quiet" grace for black people:

²²¹ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 88.

²²² Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 88. Cannon states that Hurston introduced characters, who take risks. Cannon writes, "the black community sees life as a great tree in leaf, "with things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the branches."

Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 127.

²²³ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 89.

²²⁴ Cannon, *Katie's Cannon*, p. 83.

²²⁵ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 126.

"Quiet" is the qualifying word describing grace as a virtue in the moral agency of Black women. "Quiet" acknowledges the invisibility of their moral character.²²⁷

In Hurston's fiction the second characteristic of moral agency is expressed in the "never practised delicacy," which Black women convert into quiet grace.²²⁸ Cannon uses the folk metaphors of the black community such as mule, spit cut, rut in the road, chewed-up and discarded sugarcane or sugarcane in developing her Black womanist ethics.

Cannon observes that Hurston's characters hold the quality of "quiet grace" and these characters refuse to become inwardly brutalised. Nor they are cripple by oppression.²²⁹ Cannon observes that Hurston's characters are the ones who take risk and they function with prudence.²³⁰ She points out that Hurston introduced characters that knew how to reduce the enigmas and elusive mysteries of social structures.²³¹ Cannon finds:

The themes and language in all of Hurston's fiction embrace a moral wisdom wherein grace and truth constitute each other. They are not fixed, eternal structures but dynamic and evolving qualities that force consideration of new possibilities.²³²

Hurston's work *Mules and Men*, presented the good quality of folklore in novelistic form²³³ and helped black women to recollect the stories that they had forgotten. As Alice Walker read *Mules and Men* to her relatives, she writes:

They sat around reading the book themselves, listening to me read the book, listening to each other read the book, and a kind of paradise was regained. For what Zora's book did was this: it gave them back all the stories they had forgotten or of which they had grown ashamed....²³⁴

Walker observes that Hurston immersed herself in her own culture, big old lies, or folk tales. Walker finds that Hurston and folk tales fit together in Hurston's book on folklore. Walker writes:

The authenticity of her material was verified by her familiarity with its context, and I was soothed by her assurance that she was exposing not simply an

²²⁶ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 126.

²²⁷ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 125.

²²⁸ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 125.

²²⁹ Zora Neale Hurston writes, "If you kin see de light at daybreak, you don't keer if you die at dusk. It's so many people never seen de light at all. Ah wuz fumblyin' round and God opened de door." Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1937, p. 190.

²³⁰ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 127.

²³¹ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 128.

²³² Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 128.

²³³ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 112.

²³⁴ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers'*, pp. 84, 85.

adequate culture but a superior one. That black people can be on occasion peculiar and comic was knowledge she enjoyed.²³⁵

Uses the Non-fiction of Hurston

Not only was Hurston a novelist she was also a trained anthropologist and Cannon uses the non-fiction of Hurston because it also reveals Hurston's experience as a Black woman, the experience of the black community and especially Black women's experience. Cannon takes evidence from Hurston's collection of folklores and expository discourses to demonstrate that a character of moral agency is in "unshouted courage."²³⁶ "Unshouted courage" is the quality of steadfastness in the face of oppression. "Grin and bear it" are the communal attitudes to oppression. In the Black community courage can be only understood through the development of moral character.²³⁷ The conventional notion of courage is false in the real-lived texture of Black life.²³⁸ Cannon writes:

The Black woman, in particular, is often required to give careful consideration to a will not her own. As the historical custodian in her community and in the society at large, the Black woman is held accountable for many happenings beyond her control.²³⁹

The observation of Hurston's folklore collection helps Cannon to understand that folklore records the guides of the black community. The folklore of the black people speaks of ways in which black folk have tried to answer to the wills and whims of those in power, over which they have no control.²⁴⁰

Cannon writes:

The Black community's folklore is the corporate story that enshrines the interlocking complexities of the beliefs, etiology and practices of the community, and also constitutes the community's understanding of, and response to, its own humanity. The oral stories are reappropriations of their past experiences.²⁴¹

Cannon refers to the black theological tradition and analyses whether the black male theologians Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr. include Black women's experience in their works. These black theologians are the contemporaries of Hurston and therefore Cannon looks for further resources in the works of these two men.²⁴²

²³⁵ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers'*, pp. 83, 84.

²³⁶ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 143.

²³⁷ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 144.

²³⁸ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 144.

²³⁹ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 145.

²⁴⁰ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 145.

²⁴¹ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 146.

²⁴² Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 160.

Black Women's Literary Tradition Related to Black Theology

Cannon places the works of Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr. alongside the Black women's literary tradition, as she believes that their works provide the most relevant theological resources for deepening moral wisdom in the Black community. She identifies key themes in their thinking, which correlate with the situation of oppressed people and presents the grounding for moral agency that can serve to broaden ethical adequacy in the black community. It is Cannon's thesis that these two black theologians addressed precisely the life situations of those individuals in the black community who were central to Hurston's depiction of black life and experience. Therefore, Cannon argues that the Black women's literary tradition can be seen to relate directly to theology. Cannon states that these black theologians concentrate on the nature and significance of humanity and how oppression makes a difference in the notions blacks use to see and to act in situations that confront them- exactly the same issues, which emerge in Hurston's work.²⁴³ This is because, Cannon argues, the cultural and historical support available to Hurston was the balm of the black religious heritage. Cannon believes that Hurston's life and literature and the black theological tradition both are important complementary sources in developing an ethics for Black women but in her observation she finds that:

Neither Howard Thurman nor Martin Luther King, Jr. reflect directly on the black woman's experience, but emergent in their theologies is the strong affirmation of the dignity of all black people grounded in God, precisely the starting point of Hurston's vision. This theme resonates with Zora Neale Hurston's deepest conviction and what she mirrored as a portrayer of Black life.²⁴⁴

In concluding her arguments, Cannon states that implicit in Hurston's literary vision (love of Black life, her sense of the value of community, her search for truth) is the theological vision. Furthermore, Hurston's suspicion of the black religious tradition is valid because black male theologians continue to ignore the victimisation of gender discrimination.²⁴⁵ Nevertheless, she emphasises that the theological ethics of Thurman and King continue to be important for Black women:

In order to sustain the living out of 'invisible dignity,' 'quiet grace' and 'unshouted courage' Black women today must embrace the formal features of the theological ethics of Thurman and King because they provide moral resources for the great struggle that *still lies ahead*.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 9.

²⁴⁴ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 174.

²⁴⁵ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 174.

²⁴⁶ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, p. 174.

What I have learned from Cannon

I now turn to reflect upon the challenges and insights Cannon has provided for my own work. Firstly, as Cannon uses literature a source of ethnographic data for reflection, it is possible to use Dalit²⁴⁷ literature a source of ethnographic data in my research. Dalit women's literature will be useful but Dalit women writers and Dalit literature written by Dalit women are lacking in Kerala State.

Secondly, Cannon uses fiction to understand the oppression experienced by Black women and to develop a relevant womanist ethics. Reading Dalit novels and then listening to the stories of Dalit women will help me to evaluate how far Dalit novels succeed in revealing the violence and oppression that Dalits experience. If we use fiction as a tool to explain the violence Dalit Christian women experience, it will add to our understanding and also protect their privacy. Moreover, if the survivors of male violence find it difficult to reveal their experiences, fiction can be a medium to reveal it.

Thirdly, Cannon's use of oral narrative devices like rural tradition, language, idioms, folklore, oral tradition, songs, proverbs, customs, food, medicinal remedies from the lives of Black people are useful to understand the lived-experience of Black women. Likewise, the oral traditions of Dalit women keep the folk memory alive and their stories are told again and again in the Dalit community. Oral traditions are very powerful in the Indian context and listening to the stories, and old sayings are considered important.

Fourthly, Cannon uses Black female writer ethnographers to discern a moral wisdom in Black women's experience. Similarly it will be important to discover the survival ethics of Dalit women, who survive male violence. Dalit women's life stories may reveal their survival ethics. As Cannon observes the moral wisdom of Black women is passed from one generation to the next and this is also the case amongst Dalit women. Reading social reality, the Bible and history from the perspective of Dalit Christian women, through their tears and wounds, through their struggles and hopes will help feminist practical theologian to develop a contextual feminist practical theology from their moral wisdom. As Samuel Rayan²⁴⁸ writes:

Women are persons; they are life-source both physically and psychologically; they are basic educators, and real economists in the most radical sense of the

²⁴⁷ Dalit means "broken" "downtrodden," oppressed people or low caste people in India.

²⁴⁸ Samuel Rayan is Professor of Theology in Vidya Jyoti at Delhi and he is the editor of Jeevadhara, Journal of Theology. In 1960 he received Doctorate in theology from the Gregorian University in Rome.

word. Women are the first communicators of cultures, values and the faith. They are the first, indispensable, God-appointed magisterium.²⁴⁹

Fifthly, Cannon demonstrates Black women in America are survivors of oppression and slavery. Dalit Christian women in Kerala are also survivors of oppression and their foremothers experienced slavery. Dalit women in Kerala and Black women in the West both are known as 'Blacks',²⁵⁰ because of their dark skin colour and identity. Dalit women experienced slavery under the evil caste²⁵¹ system in India. Therefore, Dalit women's slave narratives are helpful repositories for understanding the oppression they experienced.

Where I differ from Cannon

Although I have found many helpful insights in Cannon's work I differ considerably from her in a number of ways. Firstly, listening to the folk stories of Dalit women, and using their literature are both important in my ethnographic study of violence experienced in the lives of Dalit Christian women. I believe it is indispensable for a researcher to listen to women's own stories directly. Therefore, a researcher cannot avoid spending time with Dalit women to listen to their stories and here I differ from Cannon. As Michele Jacques writes, "Entering into and telling the "truths" of one's own story invites not only a communal self-revelatory experience, but a potentially transformative one."²⁵² Therefore, the process of researched woman telling her life story and the researcher listening to this story is significant in my research.

Secondly, Cannon did not go to the field to collect ethnographic data from the lives of Black women but totally relied upon Hurston's field- work and ethnographic data. Here I must differ from Cannon because prior to me no one has done an ethnographic research on violence experienced by Dalit Christian women in Kerala. Therefore, the period of fieldwork in which I listen to the stories of Dalit Christian women is vital in my research.

Thirdly, in order to draw data from Dalit literature, I also use various libraries such as Indian Social Institute at New Delhi and Bangalore. Indian Social Institute at New Delhi

²⁴⁹ Samuel Rayan, 'Third World Theology: Where Do We Go from Here?' in Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo (eds.), *Theologies of the Third World: Convergences and Differences*, Concilium, T. & T. Clark LTD, 1988, p. 136.

²⁵⁰ Dalits in Kerala are known as 'Blacks.' Bingley writes: "Brahmans were said to be *white*; Kshatriyas *ruddy*; and Vaisiyas *yellow*; on the other hand Sudras and Dasyus or aborigines are distinctly referred to in the Vedas as *black*." Captain A. H. Bingley, *Dogra's: Class Handbook for the Indian Army*, Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1910, p. 3.

²⁵¹ According to Bingley the term 'caste' is derived from the Portuguese *casta*, 'family.' The corresponding Sanskrit word is *Varna*, 'colour.' Bingley, *Dogra's*, p. 3.

²⁵² Jacques in Grant, *Perspectives on Womanist Theology*, p. 132.

has a Dalit Documentation Center. United Theological College at Bangalore holds some books and theses on Dalits. Kerala Sahitya Academy at Trichur has a few significant novels on Dalits and it holds the first novel written by a Dalit tribal. Kerala United Theological College at Trivandrum has few articles, books or theses on Dalit. Therefore, using Dalit literature from India is relevant to my research.

Fourthly, Cannon's observation and analysis of the literary tradition of Black women is useful because she is herself from this culture and she already knows the stories but her approach omits 'listening to the stories' of contemporary Black women. Cannon's approach thus excludes the reflections of the black women for whom she aims to develop a womanist ethics. I give attention to Dalit women's reflections, their voices and their life stories because I want them to talk for themselves and here I differ from Cannon. Moreover, it is the first time a female researcher from the same country, who speaks their language, who was born and brought up in a higher caste family, has gone to Dalit Christian women to listen to their life stories. Therefore, my research opens the first platform for Dalit Christian women to speak in their own words.

Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz uses ethnographic techniques in a different way from Cannon to collect data from the lives of Hispanic women in order to develop *Mujerista* Theology and it is to her work that I now turn.

Mujerista Theology

Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz

Ada Maria Isasi Diaz, a Hispanic feminist theologian has used ethnographic techniques to develop *mujerista* theology. *Mujerista* theology came into existence out of the experience of Diaz and the experiences of other Hispanic women living in the United States.²⁵³ Hispanic women's lived-experience is the source of *mujerista* theology and *mujerista* theology provides a platform for the voices of Hispanic women.²⁵⁴

Black American womanist theologians have influenced *Mujerista* theologians and therefore, Diaz writes:

²⁵³ Ada Maria Isasi Diaz, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1992, p. 105.

²⁵⁴ Ada Maria Isasi- Diaz, 'Mujerista Theology's Methods: A Liberative Praxis, A Way of Life,' in James D. Whitehead & Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*, Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995, p. 123.

I am much indebted to the work of African- American feminists who have preceded us in this struggle to name ourselves. Their use of the term *womanist* has indeed influenced me.²⁵⁵

Hispanic women are the victims of ethnic prejudice, sexism and classism²⁵⁶ and their experiences caused them to struggle to liberate themselves as the members of Hispanic community. Diaz presents the central concept of *mujerista* theology: "A *mujerista* is a Hispanic woman who struggles to liberate herself not as an individual but as a member of a Hispanic community."²⁵⁷

The central concept of *mujerista* theology is what the 'community does' because individual Hispanic woman struggle to liberate themselves not as individuals but as members of a particular community.

Diaz writes:

Mujerista theology reflects upon and articulates the religious understandings and practices of Hispanic women. *Mujerista* theology is a communal theological praxis that endeavors to Hispanic Women to be agents of our own history, to enhance our moral agency, and to design and participate in actions that are effective in our daily struggle for survival.²⁵⁸

In this method each and every Hispanic women is able to take part in the communal theological praxis and participates in actions and reflections as they articulated in *mujerista* theology. I see *Mujerista* theology as a feminist work with a great vision for the future. Hispanic women have together constructed the meaning of the term *Mujerista* as a way of working together for their liberation as Diaz makes clear: "Our hermeneutical lens is a liberative one, and this means that we have to be committed to look at all aspects of our oppression including heterosexism and anthropocentrism."²⁵⁹

Diaz uses Qualitative Research Method

I am impressed by the qualitative research methods Diaz used in order to articulate *mujerista* theology. The absence of Hispanic women's voices in the theological discourses encouraged Diaz and the Hispanic women she worked with to articulate *mujerista* theology. Moreover, Diaz's method treated Hispanic women as the subjects and the

²⁵⁵ Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Roundtable Discussion: *Mujeristas, Who We Are and What We Are About*, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 8, No.1, 1992, p. 106.

²⁵⁶ Diaz, 'Roundtable Discussion,' p. 106.

²⁵⁷ Diaz, 'Roundtable Discussion,' p. 107.

²⁵⁸ Ada Maria Isasi- Diaz, 'Mujerista Theology's Methods: A Liberative Praxis, A Way of Life,' in James. D. Whitehead and E. Whitehead (eds.), *Method in Ministry*, Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995, p. 123.

²⁵⁹ Diaz, *Journal of Feminist Studies*, 1992, p.125.

participants of her research. This method included using the direct voices of the researched Hispanic women. Therefore, Diaz writes: “Instead of attempting to present a universal voice, our attempt has been to point to the universal by being as specific as possible.”²⁶⁰

Diaz finds ethnography to be a relevant method to articulate *mujerista* theology. Her ethnographic principle is to present the voices, opinions and understandings of the informants in their own words.²⁶¹ Diaz writes:

Using ethnographic principles, *mujerista* theology presents the understandings and opinions of Hispanic Women, as much as possible, in their own words. To do this we conduct ethnographic interviews. These interviews are much more a conversation, a dialogue, than the standard survey form of questions and answers.²⁶²

Diaz draws upon the work of Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, feminist sociologists who use women’s experience, as a source for reflection in sociology. Stanley and Wise argue that existing systems of thought treat women’s daily experiences and understandings of social reality as unimportant. Feminists are recovering the *personal*, that is to say feminists are giving importance to ‘women’s experience.’ It is essential to understand women’s oppression through understanding and analysing women’s everyday life. Stanley and Wise argue that feminists should borrow, and adapt any and everything from anywhere if it is useful for our project but we have to do it *critically* and we should *never* take anything at its face value.²⁶³ Therefore, Diaz uses conversation, dialogue, and question –answers, interviews, and free story interviews, case studies and life histories to collect Hispanic women’s experiences.²⁶⁴ She conducted interviews in two different settings. One of these was a ‘retreat’ during a weekend in which women reflected in community. Women were active in challenging each other and reflecting together in this context.²⁶⁵ She also conducted individual interviews in the women’s own homes, where she recorded their life histories. Diaz and the Hispanic women engaged in praxis together and this helped Diaz to understand their religious beliefs and how those understandings motivate Hispanic women in their actions.²⁶⁶ In these ethnographic interviews Hispanic women reflected on the basis of their lived experiences and women became vehicles to develop their own voices.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁰ Diaz, ‘Mujerista Theology’s Methods’ in Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, p. 124.

²⁶¹ Diaz in Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, p. 126.

²⁶² Diaz in Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, p. 126.

²⁶³ Stanley & Wise, *Breaking Out Again*, pp. 136, 137.

²⁶⁴ Diaz in Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, pp. 126, 127.

²⁶⁵ Diaz in Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, p. 127.

²⁶⁶ Diaz in Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, p. 127.

²⁶⁷ Diaz in Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, p. 127.

Diaz used the techniques of meta-ethnography²⁶⁸ to interpret the information collected from the lives of Hispanic women. Diaz writes:

Ethnography and meta-ethnography provide understandings and techniques that make it possible to discover, organize, present, and interpret the source of *mujerista* theology: the lived-experience of Hispanic Women.²⁶⁹

Diaz demonstrates that the lived-experiences of Hispanic women constitute their common and shared reality.²⁷⁰ By using Hispanic women's lived-experience as the source for articulating a contextual theology, Hispanic women start from a place outside the dominant structures and outside traditional theology, which is itself controlled by dominant culture, class, race, and gender.²⁷¹

The process of dialogue between the researcher and the informants became a hermeneutical circle in Diaz's research method. Diaz started from what Hispanic women know about themselves, their everyday surroundings and their experiences. Diaz then used techniques of meta-ethnography to interpret the data: highlighting common and significant themes as they emerged. The use that Diaz made of the work of Stanley and Wise in her research demonstrates how feminist work in social science impacts upon Practical Theology. Not only participant observation, but also the participant's voices and their reflections are included in this method. The ethnographer is not observing 'someone' and 'someone's culture' but Diaz concentrated on her own community, her own culture and context. All these factors persuaded me that these are useful methods possible to do research on the lives of Dalit women.

A Suitable Method for the Indian Context

The methods used by Diaz in developing *mujerista* theology are transferable to my own research on the violence experienced by Dalit Christian women. The ethnographic techniques used and the practice of meta-ethnography can be effective means of drawing data from the lives of Dalit women and to interpreting this data. If I listen to the realities of Dalit women's lives, a relevant feminist practical theology can be developed from their experiences and faith.

²⁶⁸ C. Dean Pielstick writes, "Meta-ethnography is explained as a method to conduct an interpretive synthesis of qualitative research and other secondary sources as a counterpart to meta-analysis for quantitative research." C. Dean Pielstick, *The Transforming Leader: A Meta-Ethnographic Analysis*. http://www.findarticles.com/cf_0/m0HCZ/3_26/63323086/print.jht [13 June 2003] p. 1 of 14.

²⁶⁹ Diaz in Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, p. 128.

²⁷⁰ Diaz in Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, p. 130.

²⁷¹ Diaz in Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, p. 129.

It is essential to view Dalit women's experiences in the light of the culture and context of the country they live in and interpret these in a way that is empowering to them. Akiko Yamashita has written that there are minor differences between particular countries and churches in Asia.²⁷² We should expect that many experiences will be shared by all Asian women but it is a reality that Dalit Christian women's lived-experiences are different from all other women in Asia because of the caste system in India. A relevant feminist practical theology should liberate, transform and lead Dalit women to new experience that reflects their specific culture.

I shall now explore how Asian feminist theologians used ethnographic techniques in a different way from Cannon and Diaz, in order to develop Asian feminist theology. I shall be assessing whether there are common concerns emerging which will illuminate my work in the India context.

Asian Feminist Theology

In this section I will analyse how Asian feminist theologians Kwok Pui-lan and Chung Hyun Kyung draw upon research techniques from cultural anthropology to collect the life stories of women in order to develop relevant feminist theologies for Asia. First, I would like to analyse the work of Kwok Pui-lan and how she uses women's experience in her work.

Kwok Pui-lan

Kwok Pui-lan is an Asian feminist theologian, who was born in Hong-Kong. After her theological education in the West, she began to develop a contextual theology for Chinese women. Pui-lan draws insights from cultural anthropology in her labours to 'dig her own mother's garden' in Hong-Kong and find out the roots, culture, context, and the life experiences of her mothers²⁷³ in order to develop a local theology for Chinese women. I would like to explore how Pui-lan uses women's experience and storytelling in order to develop a contextual theology.

Uses Life Stories of Chinese Women

In her work 'Mothers and Daughters, Writers and Fighters,' Pui-lan starts with her own childhood experiences and shows how these enabled her to question the legitimacy of the

²⁷² Akiko Yamashita, 'A Review of Asian Women's Theology: From the Perspective of Women's Life Dialogue in Asia,' *In God's Image*, Vol.18, No.1, 1999, p. 4.

²⁷³ Kwok Pui-lan, 'Mothers and Daughters, Writers and Fighters' in Letty M. Russell, Kwok Pui-lan, Ada Maria Isasi- Diaz, Katie Geneva Cannon (eds.), *Inheriting Our Mothers' Gardens: Feminist Theology in Third World Perspective*, Louisville: The Westminster Press, 1988, pp. 21-23.

social system in China.²⁷⁴ In order to use women's experience Pui-lan draws upon the stories of her mother, mother-in-law, and 'spiritual mothers.' Pui-lan evaluates the stories of these women in her own culture and emphasises the necessity of telling the stories of Chinese women. She writes:

The stories of these women have seldom been told, and their lives easily fall into oblivion. Nonetheless, it is these women who pass the wisdom of the human race from generation to generation, and who provide the context of life for others. The stories of my mothers drive home to me a very precious lesson: as women living in a patriarchal cultural system, they are oppressed by men, but, never contented to be treated as victims, they have struggled against the forces that seek to limit them and circumscribe their power.²⁷⁵

Pui-lan values the stories, experiences and writings of her foremothers because she believes women pass on the wisdom of the human race from generation to generation. She collects the stories of women from women's testimonies in journals and pamphlets. She uses alternative resources like songs, poems and myths that reveal women's experience. In her research she registers deep respect for Chinese women²⁷⁶ some of which women have deeply influenced her life. One of them is an ordained woman priest Huang Xianyun, whom Pui-lan considers to be strong role model. The influence of Huang Xianyun encouraged Pui-lan to stand boldly for Chinese women and to fight against the social-cultural evils in her own country. Pui-lan receives mental, spiritual strength and support from the inspiration of this woman priest²⁷⁷ and other women like her. The influence of such women on Pui-lan's life has encouraged her to find out the connection between the lives of women and Christianity in Chinese culture²⁷⁸ and to examine the history of women's involvement in Churches in China.

As she gives importance to the history and life stories of Chinese Christian women she considers women's experience a major source for reflection. Pui-lan draws upon the insights of Carol P. Christ in her use of women's stories. Pui-lan is also indebted to womanist thinking as she explores how the stories and experiences of women challenge the dominant culture and she examines whether there is a specific women's culture that is marginalised by the dominant culture. She observes that women have brought their experience to bear on their interpretation of Christian faith and have dared to challenge the

²⁷⁴ Pui-lan shows that boys are given most of the attention and privileges in the family and begetting a male child is the most important responsibility of Chinese women. Pui-lan in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, p. 21. This is the same in India, boys are given more privileges and begetting a male child is the most important responsibility of a wife.

²⁷⁵ Pui-lan in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, pp. 22, 23.

²⁷⁶ Pui-lan in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, pp. 26, 27.

²⁷⁷ Pui-lan in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, p. 23.

²⁷⁸ Pui-lan in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, p. 24.

patriarchal traditions of the Church and its treatment of women as inferior to men thus challenging the dominant culture.

Pui-lan's use of her own experience, her mother's experience, other women's experience, the use of her own story, other women's stories and women's histories are relevant to develop a contextual theology for Chinese women because these elements are based on their own personal, religious and cultural experiences. According to Pui-lan, through storytelling, Asian women develop an oral hermeneutics to reclaim the gospel message for their own empowerment.²⁷⁹

Pui-lan Considers Chinese Women's Experience of Cultural and Religious Identity

Pui-lan finds that Chinese Christians constantly dialogue with their rich cultural heritage. She realises that it is difficult to maintain an identity of being Chinese and being Christian at the same time because Chinese identity is defined by participation in a complicated cultural matrix of social behaviour, rites, and human relationships whereas Christianity is considered to be a foreign religion.²⁸⁰ Therefore, Pui-lan explains, Chinese Christian women exist between two worlds: as Chinese and as Christians. This crisis of meaning and identity motivates Pui-lan to move forward through a search for her mother's gardens, in order to learn more about the cultural identity of Chinese women.

When Chinese Christians started the process of indigenizing²⁸¹ the Church in 1920 the concern of Chinese women was to see how Christianity could be indigenized into Chinese culture.²⁸² Pui-lan states that Chinese women saw the necessity of bridging the gap between Chinese culture and Christianity through integrating the two worlds. Pui-lan demonstrates that there were bold women who challenged the patriarchal tradition in Chinese culture and Christianity²⁸³ by denying some of the rites and funeral ceremonies that were based on patriarchal family ideals. They also questioned the patriarchal bias of the Bible. One of these women was Zhang Zhujun, a Chinese doctor, who preached that Paul was wrong when he prescribed that women should keep silence in the Church.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁹ Kwok Pui-lan, 'Asian Feminist Theologies,' in Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson (eds.), *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, London: Mowbray, 1996, p. 102.

²⁸⁰ Pui-lan in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, P. 25.

²⁸¹ Self-propagation, self-support, and self-government were three important mottos of indigenization in Asia. Through these mottos many Asian Churches started to fight against foreign domination over their religious and political lives. They wanted to get political and religious independence from foreign domination. They expected a Church which can stand on its own feet.

²⁸² Pui-lan in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, pp. 25, 26.

²⁸³ Pui-lan in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, p. 27.

²⁸⁴ Pui-lan in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, p. 28.

Chinese women organised themselves during the Chinese National Council of Churches in 1922, Ms. Ruth Cheng addressed the assembly and raised the issue of the ordination of women.²⁸⁵

In order to use women's experience in articulating a relevant theology, first of all, Pui-lan argues for developing Chinese women's Christian identity and creating an inclusive theology. For this purpose a shift from the Bible and Christian tradition towards women's stories is necessary for the inclusion of women's experience in theology.²⁸⁶ Secondly, Pui-lan argues for a shift from the passive reception of traditions to an active construction of Chinese feminist theology.²⁸⁷ This entails integrating Chinese culture into theology, through generating new symbols, concepts, and models that Chinese women find congenial when expressing their religious visions. She states that women can find their own way of speaking about God if they are involved in a myth and symbol making process, by learning to appreciate their own cultural roots and by rediscovering female religious images and symbolism in Chinese folk religions.²⁸⁸ Thirdly, she argues for a shift from a unified theological discourse to a plurality of voices and genuine catholicity.²⁸⁹ Pui-lan expects a unity that is more inclusive and colourful and a catholicity that is more genuine and authentic.²⁹⁰ She welcomes the plurality that will come from women's own way of doing theology when their stories can be heard and their experiences valued as inspiring theological imagination.²⁹¹

Pui-lan emphasises the necessity of doing theology from the perspective of Chinese women because a theology that is based on women's experience, stories, and cultural and religious identity²⁹² of Chinese women is relevant to their needs. She concludes her article

²⁸⁵ Pui-lan in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, p. 28. Dr. R. O. Hall, Bishop of Hongkong ordained a woman named Li Tim Oi in 1944 but this incident created lot of tension in the Church of England and Li Tim Oi had to withdraw from the priesthood due to the pressure of the Church.

²⁸⁶ This is the idea of Valerie Saiving. In her article 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View' Saiving shows that women's experience is excluded from the traditional theology and a theology based on men's experience is not adequate to human situation because it neglected feminine experience. Saiving in Christ, *Womanspirit Rising*, p. 41. It is also significant that Pui-lan uses Christ's development of Saiving's work to turn to women's own stories as a means of supplementing the tradition.

²⁸⁷ Pui-lan in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, p. 30.

²⁸⁸ Pui-lan in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, p. 31.

²⁸⁹ Pui-lan in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, p. 31.

²⁹⁰ Pui-lan in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, p. 33.

²⁹¹ Pui-lan in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, p. 33.

²⁹² Stephen B. Bevans writes, "A strong but realistic cultural identity is necessary for a theology that really speaks to a context in its particularity." Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992, p. 21. It is necessary to understand the cultural identity of Chinese woman in their own particular context. Kathryn Tanner writes, "Understanding any particular requires one to view it in its context; anthropological investigation becomes a form of contextual analysis." Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997, p. 34.

with a poem called 'we are women'²⁹³ written by her friend Mary Sung-ok Lee.²⁹⁴ Through this poem Pui-lan demonstrates the unity of Asian women, their identity as the oppressed, their claims for their stories and the necessity of doing theology from their perspective. For doing Asian contextual feminist theology, Pui-lan further argues for the inclusion of voices and stories of women in worship.

Pui-lan Conducts Worship which Include the Voices and life Stories of the Oppressed Women

Pui-lan's article²⁹⁵ on 'Worshipping with Asian Women' brings out the necessity of *listening to the stories* and voices of women in the worship services of the church. Pui-lan's liturgy and sermon can be treated as a useful theological text because in her worship she presents the voices and stories of women from different contexts, cultures and countries in Asia. Pui-lan takes a passage from the Gospel of Matthew that tells the story of Jesus healing the daughter of a Cananite woman. Then she brings the biblical story and the Asian women's stories into interaction with one another. Pui-lan allows women to tell their stories through prayer, poems and speech in the worship service. Therefore, each voice represents the story and life experience of women in their own context, culture and country.

Pui-lan's contribution of worship allows Asian women to pray according to their own contextual needs. Sadako Kurihara of Japan represented the voice of a witness of the Hiroshima tragedy that occurred on 6th August 1945.²⁹⁶ A woman from Sri Lanka, Kurinji Thennavan, contributes a prayer to the gracious Mother²⁹⁷ and describes the stories of women in Sri Lanka who suffer from poverty, hunger, and homelessness. That prayer depicts how poverty-stricken women's babies suck at the breasts of mothers without milk, women beg for food in the streets and they eat the cast-off meals from the garbage. This is the situation and context of many of the Third world developing countries in Asia. Prayer to the gracious Mother of this particular country is common in many other countries in Asia.²⁹⁸ A Philippine woman, Elizabeth Tapia's voice is a search for the identity of woman, when she asks the question *who am I*.²⁹⁹

²⁹³ This poem is a unified voice of women from Asia and it shows their Asian identity.

²⁹⁴ Pui-lan in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, p. 33.

²⁹⁵ Kwok Pui-lan, 'Worshipping with Asian Women: A Homily on Jesus Healing the Daughter of a Canaanite Woman' in Ursula King (ed.), *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, London: SPCK / Orbis, 1994, Noda Kesaya, Kim Hee Sang, Paula K. R. Arai and Kwok Pui-lan, preached this homily at the Harvard Divinity School Noon Worship on 19th February 1986, p. 236.

²⁹⁶ Pui-lan in King, *Feminist Theology*, pp. 237, 238.

²⁹⁷ Pui-lan in King, *Feminist Theology*, pp. 238, 239.

²⁹⁸ I have seen the same situation in India, women and children begging for food in the streets, having no proper clothes to wear, many times eating from garbage. Sometimes I have seen

Pui-lan tries to present a Jesus who can relate to the life situation and imagination of women in Asia by asking questions like 'Who is Jesus for Cananite women?' and 'Who is Jesus for Asian women?' Cananite and Asian women are powerless, poor and illiterate. Women need to relate to a Jesus who can be with them in their own situations and in their own ways. As the Cananite woman found the same poor, lowly, ragged Jesus, women in China, India, Korea, Sri Lanka and women in all other countries in Asia want a Jesus, who knows their situations, cultures and context. Therefore context is an important factor to consider, when we develop theology.³⁰⁰

Pui-lan acknowledges her own debt to Womanist Theology, therefore, in the last part of her homily she declares that she holds the hands of Alice Walker, who visited China and wrote a poem for women in China. Then Pui-lan emphasises the power of poems written by women.³⁰¹ Using Dalit women's poems will be relevant in developing a theology, which is useful to them.

Pui-lan highlights that worship which includes the voices, stories, experiences of women, poems written from the life experiences of women, a contextual prayer from the experience of woman, biblical passage based on the stories of women all contribute towards developing a contextual theology for Asia. In her attempt to develop a feminist theology for Asia, Pui-lan endeavours to see women's bodies as a sacred text to interpret.

Pui-lan Considers Women's bodies as a Sacred Text to Interpret

A woman experiences everything through her body therefore in Pui-lan's understanding women's bodies are a sacred text through which to interpret women's experience. In Kwok Pui-lan's article 'Reflection on Women's sacred Scriptures' she considers women's bodies a sacred text and women's stories to be read and re-read to generate liberating action and

children and dogs searching for the food from the same rubbish and fighting each other for a piece of *chapati* (Indian bread).

²⁹⁹ Pui-lan in King, *Feminist Theology*, pp. 240, 241.

³⁰⁰ As mentioned in an anonymous poem by an Indian woman,
"God comes to me
in the form of

Two hundred grams of gruel." a poor person can see Jesus in the two hundred grams of gruel, which she eats daily because this gruel is the only source for her survival in this world and if it is not available then she may die in poverty. Anonymous poem, "God as Food for the Hungry," in Ursula King, *Feminist Theology*, p. 259.

³⁰¹ Pui-lan in King, *Feminist Theology*, pp. 241, 242.

attitudes.³⁰² Women's bodies bear witness to violence and discrimination in patriarchal society. Women continue to struggle for their survival and wellbeing. Pui-lan regards slave narratives as a good depository of the memories, stories, hopes and fears of women slaves. She observes that American-African women used slave narratives as one of the sacred sources to construct womanist ethics and theology. This helped American-African women to have a sense of direction concerning where they came from and where they are going³⁰³ and Pui-lan believes that Chinese women can do the same.

Pui-lan states that the use of women's stories in dialogue with the stories of women in the Bible can enable us to re-create and re-constitute the text based on present circumstances and the needs of women. She explains that scripture can be a living cultural and religious artefact if the scripture can be seen as relevant to the religious experiences of women in their own cultural context. Pui-lan explains why women are claiming sacredness in their bodies, lives, stories, myths and legends³⁰⁴ and she considers this as their protest against the hierarchical authority in the Church.

Pui-lan explains how some oral cultures treat men as the powerful speaker and this silences women. She finds that Hinduism and Islam give importance to the oral transmission of the scripture but women have no access to authority. Pui-lan emphasises the necessity of cross-cultural studies to see how women's authority changes, when oral cultures partially change to written cultures.³⁰⁵

Pui-lan argues that it is necessary to relate the Bible to the present needs of women, their situation and considering their bodies as a sacred text. Pui-lan argues that Ivonne Gebara's work among the poor women in Brazil enables these women learn to relate the Bible to their life situation and reject the hierarchical authority of the Church and religion. Pui-lan argues that the work of Yuko Yuasa is also empowering because she brings the story of the Ameno uzume in Japan into dialogue with the story of Miriam in the Bible. Therefore, Pui-lan presents the works of different women authors who did their work in different contexts and demonstrates the relevance of relating the Bible to the needs of women.³⁰⁶

³⁰² Kwok Pui-lan, 'Reflection on Women's Sacred Scriptures' in Kwok Pui-lan and Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza (eds.), *Women's Sacred Scriptures*, *Concilium*, London: SCM Press & Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998/3, p. 106.

³⁰³ Pui-lan, 'Reflection on Women's Sacred Scriptures', *Concilium*, p. 106.

³⁰⁴ Pui-lan writes, "While those at the centre of power tend to hold on to authoritative claims of sacred texts to justify the *status quo*, many women at the margin have deconstructed such claims and located sacredness in their own bodies, lives, foundational stories, myths and legends." Pui-lan, 'Reflection on Women's Sacred Scriptures,' *Concilium*, p. 107.

³⁰⁵ Pui-lan, 'Reflection on Women's Sacred Scriptures,' p. 108.

Pui-lan Identifies Cultural and Racial Differences in the Feminist Theological Discourses between Asia and West

In her writing 'The Future of Feminist Theology: An Asian Perspective',³⁰⁷ Pui-lan identifies some of the important issues that feminist theology needs to address in the near future. She lifts up the voices of Asian women in Christian theology and focuses on the cultural and racial diversity between Asian and European women. She states that some Asian women are not happy to use the term 'feminism' because it emerged in the Western context and prefer to use the term 'Asian women's theology' instead of 'feminist theology'.³⁰⁸

Pui-lan points out that another significant issue of cultural and racial diversity in feminist theological discourse is that the Asian community is multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious. The relationship between the culture and the gospel is a crucial issue for feminist theologians in Asia.³⁰⁹ Therefore, it is necessary to do theology from this particular context that is different from the Western context but Asian women need to find out their own cultural identity 'who they are'.³¹⁰

Pui-lan acknowledges that women in Asia are forced to live in more than one culture because of their colonial experience. She agrees with Bevan's theory³¹¹ that cultures are closer in this modern world through advanced technology, mass media, intercultural exchange, and the market economy.³¹² Therefore, it is impossible to remain aloof in one's own culture apart from other cultures. As these cultures meet each other through different ways in the modern world changes takes place due to interaction.³¹³ Pui-lan states women in the developing countries and indigenous people all over the world are forced to live in more than one culture.

³⁰⁶ Pui-lan, 'Reflection on Women's Sacred Scriptures,' *Concilium*, p. 107.

³⁰⁷ Kwok Pui-lan, 'The Future of Feminist Theology: An Asian Perspective' in King, *Feminist Theology*.

³⁰⁸ Pui-lan shows that "neither Asian male theologies nor western feminist theologies provide adequate help to address the situations of Asian women." Kwok Pui-lan, 'Asian Feminist theologies,' in Russell, *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, p. 101.

³⁰⁹ Pui-lan in Russell, *Dictionary*, p. 101.

³¹⁰ Pui-lan, 'The Future of Feminist Theology', pp. 65, 66.

³¹¹ According to Bevans, cultures are always adaptive and changing. Most of the villagers in India listen to the radio. One can no longer speak of a purely Indian culture. These cultures have been changing through their contact with wider world. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 20.

³¹² Pui-lan, 'The Future of Feminist Theology', p. 66.

³¹³ Television had a great impact up on the poor in the huts and the rich in the mansions in India. Poor people in the slums of Madras, Calcutta, New Delhi and Mumbai somehow afford

However, it is very interesting to see the way Pui-lan uses Womanist Theology in her work. Pui-lan uses inclusive terms, when she talks about Asian women but she argues white women's use of 'universal' language cannot represent Asian women's cultural identities. She encourages women in Asia to develop their own language³¹⁴ for theology. She recognises that the lifting of every voice, the celebration of diversity and pluralities³¹⁵ will help us to see the grace of God in all cultures.³¹⁶

What I have learned from Pui-lan

Firstly, just as Pui-lan use the life stories of Chinese women, Dalit women telling their stories and the researcher listening to their life stories are relevant to explore the violence they experience. Telling stories and listening to stories are familiar to people in all faiths in India. In Indian villages, storytellers keep the stories alive by retelling them. As David Rubin says, "Some of the earliest (and best) storytelling known to the world had its origin in India."³¹⁷ Storytelling is not simply a rural phenomenon but hearing a *purana* (story) is a powerful substitute for the highest and most complicated rituals. *Puranic* recitations provide a path of devotion, refreshment and inspiration to the lives of busy urban people in India. There are storytellers who undertake tours, which draw thousands of Hindus to listen to the stories.³¹⁸ Storytelling is based on Hinduism but it is part of Indian culture;

televisions even if they live in huts. Watching television helps them to understand global culture and then changes take place in their way of life, dress etc.

³¹⁴ Pui-lan stresses that Asian women lack the language of the erotic because it is unusual to talk about sexuality in Asia and decent women are not supposed to talk about it in public. There are many women in Asia working as prostitutes and they are being exploited in the international flesh trade. Pui-lan states that a rereading of the Biblical text through the eyes of the prostitutes is necessary to make changes in the lives of these women. She emphasises the necessity of rethinking the connection between the language of the erotic, the control of the female body, and the power over women in its naked and symbolic forms. Pui-lan, 'The Future of Feminist Theology,' pp. 72-75. She suggests that the metaphors like 'Church as the bride of Christ,' and 'Adam and Eve as the first couple' should be taken up as a serious theological issue in our feminist reconstruction. Pui-lan, 'The Future of Feminist Theology,' p. 74.

³¹⁵ Pui-lan demonstrates that inter religious dialogue is an important matter to consider in Asian context because of religious pluralism in Asia. Pui-lan describes how Hindu feminists feel they are excluded if their issues are not given priority. Interfaith dialogue can help women in Asia to meet each other and share their religious heritage in a pluralistic world. Pui-lan believes that interfaith dialogue between women from different religions in Asia can bring changes in the world religions and women can empower each other by sharing what lies beyond patriarchy in their own traditions. The Asian women's consultation on interfaith dialogue was held in 1989. Pui-lan proposes a dialogue between Jewish-Christian women because Jewish culture is also patriarchal and it excludes Jewish women from the tradition and leadership roles. Therefore, Jewish women need to find their own identity with sensitivity to the plight of the Gentiles. Pui-lan alludes to the example of Naomi and Ruth, two women of different races and religions who exemplify the deepest commitment and solidarity between persons. She exhorts that the wisdom of Ruth is needed to guide women who suffer from religious and racial conflicts. Pui-lan 'The Future of Feminist Theology: An Asian Perspective,' pp. 69-71.

³¹⁶ Pui-lan, 'The Future of Feminist Theology,' p. 67.

³¹⁷ David Rubin, 'The Short Stories of Prem Chand,' in Barbara Stoler Miller (ed.), *Asia: Masterworks of Asian Literature in Comparative Perspective*, London: An East Gate Book, 1994, p. 167.

³¹⁸ Paul Bowen (ed.), *Themes and Issues in Hinduism*, London & Washington, Cassell, 1998, p. 109.

therefore it is part of Indian Christian culture too. During the festival season temples organise *kathaprasangam* that is story telling mixed with lyrics from the sacred texts of Hinduism like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Baghvat Gita*. Many people gather together to listen to the person, who tells *kathaprasangam*. Many Churches in India use *kathaprasangam* to tell the stories of Christian saints such as St.Thomas and Thomas of Cana.

Secondly, Pui-lan searches for the cultural and religious identity of Chinese women living between two worlds. Dalit Christian women do the same; it may help them to understand 'who they are.' Whether their cultural heritage is based on Hinduism or not, it is worth to exploring what kinds of identities it offers and what is available for Dalit Christian women in the patriarchal Church of India. It is essential to dig one's own garden to see and understand the cultural roots of identity.

Thirdly, Pui-lan places importance upon contextual worship that includes the voices and experiences of women. A prayer based on the experience of women and any biblical text that gives priority to the stories of women can bring an awareness of women's situation in the world. Pui-lan uses contextual prayer, contextual voices, contextual Biblical passage and a contextual order of service when she conducts worship and this may be helpful when doing research on Dalit women because it creates an awareness of the violence Dalit women experience in their lives.

Fourthly, as Pui-lan considers women's bodies as a sacred text to interpret their stories, the marks on Dalit women's bodies can reveal the intensity of the violence they experience.

Fifthly, as Pui-lan finds slave narratives as a powerful source used by American-African women to develop womanist ethics and womanist theology, the slave narratives of Dalit Christian women are useful resources to explore the violence they have experienced.

Finally, as Pui-lan states there is not only cultural and religious difference between the feminist theologies in Asia and West but also there is a difference in the way feminism is understood or interpreted in Asia and West. I understand that many Indian Christians, including women, who are theological graduates, are hesitant to accept the concept 'feminism,' which has emerged from the West, but like Black women Asian women also prefer to use the word 'womanism' instead of feminism. For Asian Christian women liberation means getting an equal treatment for women with men in all spheres of their lives and for Asian Christian women scripture, tradition and their culture are equally important, when they seek liberation and transformation for their lived context. Moreover,

analysing the gender and caste discrimination in Indian society can give insights in the violence Dalit Christian women experience.

Chung Hyun Kyung

I shall now explore how Chung Hyun Kyung³¹⁹ uses women's experiences in developing a contextual feminist theology for Asia and how she uses ethnographic techniques for this purpose.

Kyung's *Struggle to Be the Sun Again*³²⁰ is about an emerging Asian women's liberation theology and the rethinking of Christianity in Asian context. She seeks to develop a contextual feminist theology for Asia by concentrating on Asian women's storytelling, poems, women's experiences and theological writings. Kyung writes:

I approach Asian women's storytellings, poems, and theological writings like a painter who is witnessing the eruption of a volcano and wants to let other people know that the volcano is exploding...With shyness and trembling I share my rough sketch of the unfinished eruption with my Asian sisters and those others who can make connections between their own and Asian women's struggle in this world.³²¹

Kyung uses ethnographic techniques in her work by giving significance to storytelling and listening to the stories of women.

Kyung Listens to the Stories of Women

Kyung argues that Asian women's approach to the creation of theology is inductive, collective and inclusive. Attending to women's lived experience, social analysis and theological reflection are three important steps in this method. Kyung writes that, "It starts with women's story telling."³²² Listening to the life stories of women help us to consider women's experience as a major theological source. Kyung celebrates storytelling and makes use of her own personal narratives and recollections³²³ and in particular she draws upon her late mother's stories.

³¹⁹ Chung Hyun Kyung is a feminist theologian from Korea who was born in 1956. She is a graduate of Ewha Women's University at Seoul, Korea. Her M. Div. is from the School of Theology at Claremont, California and doctorate from Union Theological Seminary at New York. Her PhD dissertation is on "The Voices of Asian Women in the Contextualisations of Asian Theologies."

³²⁰ Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990.

³²¹ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. xi.

³²² Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 104.

³²³ Kyung was seven years old at that time. Chung Hyun Kyung, 'Following Naked Dancing and Long Dreaming,' in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, pp. 54-72.

Mom had been telling me stories from her childhood as we were walking-how she had played in the river and climbed the mountain with her sisters. So when she came to the river mother's memories came to life and she took off her clothes and started to bath in the river...She began singing a song I had never heard before. She danced while she was singing.³²⁴

In Kyung's life story two events are mentioned as particular important, her exposure to the Korean student movement and her discovery of a surrogate³²⁵ mother empowered Kyung to listen to the cries of own people. Kyung explains how the Korean student movement enabled her to develop her own self-identity and self-confidence in the midst of poverty. Through this involvement, Kyung developed a new angle of vision to her own life situation.³²⁶

In 1987 the discovery of her surrogate mother changed Kyung's perception of her personal history. Thereafter her theological desire changed from a deconstruction of theological imperialism to the reconstruction of theology; a theology based on the experience, culture and context of her own people. Listening to the stories of her surrogate mother raised an important question in her mind, "Have you really paid attention to the culture and history of the poor in the development of your theology?"³²⁷ Therefore she gave attention to the culture and history of the poor, when developing a relevant theology. She argues that the dramatic encounter with her birth mother shifted her whole theological understanding.

Encountering my mother helped me to identify my theological concerns, especially as they relate to the norm and sources of Third World women's theology.³²⁸

Kyung writes, "My sobbing mother looked like an icon of God through which I could clearly see what God was telling me about my mission."³²⁹ Listening to the story of Kyung's surrogate mother enabled her to discover how listening to the stories of oppressed women in Asia can lead to the development of a contextual theology.

³²⁴ Kyung in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers'*, p. 55.

³²⁵ Kyung writes: "My mother was a Korean version of a surrogate mother. In Korea we call these women *ci-baji*. *Ci* means seed, *baji* means receiver...my late mother couldn't conceive a child even after twenty years of marriage. My father became very anxious...He found a woman he liked, a woman who had lost her husband during the Korean War...She gave birth to me and raised me until my first birthday." Kyung in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers'*, pp. 58, 59.

³²⁶ Kyung writes "The Korean student movement opened my eyes to the reality of Third Worldness. For the first time in my life, through the movement, I felt proud of coming from an economically deprived family. Before I entered college and was introduced to the movement, I was always ashamed of the lack of money and resources in my family and the way I looked." Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 1.

³²⁷ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 4.

³²⁸ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 5.

³²⁹ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 5.

The experience of listening to her own mother encouraged Kyung to listen to the stories of other poor women. Kyung recounts a moving experience, when she visited prostitutes in Manila with two other Asian women theologians in order to learn about their lives. Kyung writes:

We sat with three prostitutes at a corner of the bar and listened to their stories: why and how they came here, what their daily lives are like, what their struggles and hopes are.³³⁰

Kyung considers the personal stories of women as an important source to develop feminist theology for Asia because personal stories connect with the socio-political and religio-cultural context of individuals.³³¹ She states that the listener feels the pain of the oppressed as they tell their life stories:

When women hear other women's stories, they cry, experience anger, and console one another. The boundaries between the storyteller and listener become softened. Listeners feel the oppressed women's pain deeply; their hearts are touched and transformed when other hearts reach out for healing on the personal and political level.³³²

Kyung observes that in many Asian countries women join in small groups and share their life stories. There are women who hold different professions like artists, poets, spiritual dancers, health workers, and farmers. They share their stories in small group settings; they are empowered by other women's support and then move away from self-hate, shame, and guilt.³³³ Kyung finds it effective and empowering, when women share their life stories in small groups.

Kyung uses ethnographic techniques, when listening to the stories of women because in this process the researcher is a keen listener and learns from her observation. When she speaks the survivor of violence realises that she is not alone but there are women to listen to her story. This approach can encourage women to share their life stories with one another and also to think, discuss and reflect on their own problems in groups. If a researcher listens to the life stories of women who experience violence, it can create self-confidence and courage in women to talk about their own experiences.

³³⁰ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 105.

³³¹ Nantawan Boonprasat Lewis shows that the number of tourists arriving in South East Asia and the number of women who enter into prostitution is increasing. Lewis, who listens to the stories of prostitutes in Asia writes, "the stories which some of these women share are astounding in terms of how much their fate is determined by 'poverty.'" Nantawan Boonprasat Lewis, 'The Connection of Uneven Development, Capitalism, and Patriarchy: A Case of Prostitution in Asia,' in Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Anne Carr (eds.), *Women, Work and Poverty, Concilium*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark LTD, 1987, p. 67.

³³² Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 105.

³³³ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 97.

When she starts to listen to the stories of her own people, Kyung realises that simply reacting against the oppressive system or protesting against the dominance of White European and North American theologies would not necessarily lead her to construct a liberating reality. Therefore, she finds a new path while she writes:

I learned the hard way that I had to get in touch with the power and the history of myself and my people in order to find and construct a new, liberating reality.³³⁴

Kyung concentrates on developing a contextual theology that is relevant to the life situation of women in Asia by listening to their stories and evaluating the broken-body experiences of Asian women.

Kyung Evaluates the Pain, Suffering, and the Broken-body Experience of Asian Women

Through listening to the stories of Asian women, Kyung came to believe that Asian woman from birth to death fight against 'death-wishes' from male dominated society. Female children are destroyed in their mother's womb after amniocentesis³³⁵ or after birth. Female children in Asia are poorly fed and less educated. Kyung points out that Asian women are the victims of classism, racism, sexism, castism and cultural imperialism.³³⁶ Kyung writes, "Asian women have become "no-body" under the body-killing structures of the powers and the principalities of this world...."³³⁷

Kyung presents the voices of oppressed women from different Asian countries like India, Philippines, Korea, and Burma because she believes that there are many similarities in the life contexts and cultures of these women. Kyung writes:

Many poor Asian women in the Philippines, Thailand, Korea, and other countries have been violated by the men from the First World and also by men from their own countries. Asian women's bodies are literally torn, choked, bruised, and killed by men.³³⁸

Kyung finds that Asian women out of their broken-body experience search for ways to survive in the midst of oppression. They became more religious because of the suffering and pain in their daily lives. Kyung describes how Asian women express their survival

³³⁴ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 3.

³³⁵ Amniocentesis is a method of ruling out about forty different abnormalities in baby. Sheila Kitzinger writes that "After a painkilling injection given in the lower part of the abdomen, a sample of the amniotic fluid in which the baby floats in pregnancy is drawn off through a needle inserted through mother's abdominal wall and in to the uterus." Sheila Kitzinger, *Birth over Thirty*, London: Sheldon Press, 1982, p. 34.

³³⁶ Kyung considers classism, the caste system and cultural imperialism as insects in her late mother's garden. Kyung in Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, p. 68.

³³⁷ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 39.

wisdom through their poems, songs and stories and demonstrate that the use of such poems, songs and stories are relevant when developing a contextual theology.

Kyung observes that women sustain their truth by telling their stories mouth to mouth:

Women's truth was generated by their *epistemology from the broken body*. Women's bodies are the most sensitive receiver for historical reality. Their bodies record what has happened in their lives. Their bodies remember what it is like to be a *no-body* and what it is like to be a *some-body*.³³⁹

This is a reality in the case of the victims of male violence because women's bodies bear the marks of violence and the survivors of violence remember what happened.³⁴⁰ Women's bodies suffer from physical, mental, psychological pain, when they experience enormous violence and oppression.

Kyung observes that how Buddhism and Hinduism can influence women in Asia to accept suffering and fate as their portion in life. These religious approaches can lead women to accept suffering and to think that what happens in their lives is something they deserve.³⁴¹

As women are considered as 'no-body' there is 'no voice' for women in patriarchal structures in Asia. Women's 'culture of silence' can be considered as one of the major oppressions of the patriarchal structures, churches and societies in Asia.

Kyung Explores Women's 'Culture of Silence' in Asia

In her explorations of Asian women as a 'culture of silence' Kyung discovers that her birth mother lived in a 'culture of silence,' in which she was 'totally invisible.' Kyung states that such silence never protected her mother but kept her in poverty and mental distress.³⁴² Kyung states that in a 'culture of silence' her mother lost her identity and voice. In the pains and struggles of Kyung's mother she sees the pains and struggles of women in Asia because Asian societies treat women as inferior to men. There is no voice, no power and no identity for women. Therefore, Kyung writes, "To choose the despised women of Asia as the primary context for my theology means to do theology that is accountable to their

³³⁸ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 46.

³³⁹ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 104.

³⁴⁰ For example, Malka Begum from Chanderi in India is bearing the marks of violence in her body and mind. Male attackers chopped off her leg and left her in a pond. One soldier from Jammu & Kashmir married her but he took away the compensation and deserted her with their two children. Kanhaiah Bhelari/ Bhagalpur, 'Festering Wounds,' *The Week*, Kottayam: 31st October 1999, p. 21.

³⁴¹ Some women in India accept it as their Karma or fate to suffer. They believe that it is written on their forehead even before their birth.

³⁴² Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 5.

experience.”³⁴³ Kyung stresses every-day lived-experience of women that must serve as the final test of feminist theology for Asia.³⁴⁴ Kyung writes:

Only when we Asian women start to consider our everyday concrete life experiences as the most important source for building the religious meaning structures for ourselves shall we be free from all imposed religious authority.³⁴⁵

Kyung emphasises the necessity to create theological language, theological paradigms and theological questions from the life- experiences of Asian women. If women can create women's culture by speaking out, telling their stories and breaking the 'culture of silence,' it is useful in developing contextual theological language, theological paradigms and theological questions from the lived- experience of women. Kyung states that women in Asia are tired of experiencing a 'culture of silence' and they are looking forward to a women's culture.

Kyung Evaluates the Liminal Stage- Asian Women's Exodus from 'Culture of Silence' to 'Women's Culture'

Kyung's analysis of Asian women's 'culture of silence' demonstrates that Asian women are carriers of a culture defined by men in power.³⁴⁶ When Asian women begin to look at their cultures and traditions, they realise that their male dominated cultures and traditions are suffocating them.³⁴⁷ Asian women's struggle for a 'women's culture' and tradition which is visible emerges from this tension. Asian women need to develop a culture of their own that is different from the patriarchal culture. Asian women's cultures of silence keep them as victims of patriarchal culture. They need to speak out to break the culture of silence that has kept them under age-old bondage. Asian feminist theologians are creating an environment in which Asian women can speak out concerning what they experience and share their stories of oppression. At present Asian women are in a liminal stage that can be described as a 'culture of cry.' Many women do not know how to share their stories, they lack words to tell their stories, and some women might keep silence forever because of fear and there might be some, who just burst out in tears instead of speaking. They cannot remain within this position for a long time and there is no security and identity for them if they do so. Therefore, it is essential to move forward to face the future by creating

³⁴³ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 5.

³⁴⁴ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 6.

³⁴⁵ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 5. Diaz also has the same opinion and as Kyung gives importance to the stories and lived experience of women in Asia, Diaz gives importance to the lived experience of Hispanic women to develop a Mujresta theology for them. Kyung and Diaz studied in the same place in USA, they are friends and they both share the same idea in this aspect.

³⁴⁶ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 32.

³⁴⁷ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 33.

women's culture. If the women of each country in Asia can evaluate their own cultures, their own positions, their own oppressions, the social, religious and political aspects of their lives, then they can identify the present oppressing structures within their own countries. This can create awareness among Asian women to question the present evils of oppressing structures and help them to think about creating a new culture, which will do justice to all women in Asia. Literature written by Asian women is an important resource in this process of cultural transformation.

Kyung Uses Poems written by Women in Asia

Kyung uses poems written by women in Asia and she employs a poem of Gabriele Dietrich, a theologian in India, who explored a female image of Jesus Christ through a poem. This poem emphasises the experience of women under patriarchal society and the church. Each stanza of this poem starts as follows "I am a woman."³⁴⁸ Kyung's use of this poem is contextual because Dietrich is a theologian from Europe, who teaches theology in India and her ministerial experience there enables her to understand the situation of women in India. Kyung also uses a contextual poem written by an unknown woman in India that explains the poverty of women and how poor people experience the presence of Christ in the small amount of food that they receive in their poverty.

Kyung Uses Literature

Kyung makes an extensive survey of secular and theological documents on Asian women's theology from the 1980s. She finds that, "Since Asian women's liberation theologies are in the making, most of their materials are more descriptive or storytelling than analytical."³⁴⁹ She uses articles and books written by Asian women. Kyung focuses on three major sources of theological thinking: The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA),³⁵⁰ the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), and the Asian women's

³⁴⁸ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, pp. 67 - 70.

³⁴⁹ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 8.

³⁵⁰ The East Asia Christian Conference's first meeting was at Kuala Lumpur in 1959. In the 1960s its main concern was to develop a theology out of the culture and religious heritage of Asia. In 1973 its name changed to the Christian Conference of Asia. Contextualization became an important aspect in an Asian theological approach. Asian theologians became more sensitive to their Asian identity. Kyung writes, "the most articulate voice at this historical stage was M. M. Thomas." Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p.12. M. M. Thomas was a Syrian Christian and a prominent Indian Christian theologian from Kerala state, South India. Later he became the governor for North East India. Kyung shows that until 1970s CCA didn't consider women's issues a central issue. CCA hired Elizabeth Tapia in 1980-1981 to establish a women's desk. Under Tapia's leadership there were two conferences held one in January 1981 at Subabumi, Indonesia and another The Asian Women's Forum in May 1981 at Bangalore, India. Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p, 13.

theological journal *In God's Image* (IGI) because these concentrate upon the theological issues in Asia. Kyung also uses major ecumenical magazines from Asia like the CTC Bulletin and East Asia Journal of Theology. She uses two doctoral dissertations, Kwok Pui-lan's dissertation as a historical study that aims to reconstruct Chinese women's history during the dawn of 20th century. She also refers to Elizabeth Tapia's, the professor of social ethics at Harris Memorial College in Manila, "The Contribution of Philippine Christian Women to Asian Women's Theology."

Besides her own experience Kyung uses documents produced by the Korean Association of Women Theologians (KAWT). She draws on the wisdom of the theological writings created through All India Council of Christian Women and the Centre for Society and Religion in Sri Lanka. Her approach to the materials is historical and analytical.

Kyung collects the oral histories of twelve Asian women through interviews. She interviewed fourteen Asian men and other men in EATWOT, CCA and related associations. In this work she examines the historical context of the origin of Asian women's theological consciousness and the contribution of CCA, EATWOT and IGI towards the development of Asian women's liberation theology. She examines the social context of Asian women's theology by using the works that originated from an Asian context.

Kyung Gives Importance to the Workplaces of Women

Kyung demonstrates how women in Asia experience Christ in their contexts and emphasises the necessity of challenging the traditional images of Jesus. Kyung urges that a factory worker³⁵¹ experiences Christ in her context, a poor woman who works in the market experiences Christ in her context and a poor woman, who does not have anything to eat except two hundred grams of gruel, experiences Christ in her own context.³⁵² Kyung writes:

Asian women think emerging Asian women's spirituality is "Lived theology, theology in context," which touches the concrete lives of people"....They think men have *reasoned* about the true meaning of spirituality throughout history but women have *lived* it.³⁵³

³⁵¹ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, pp. 71, 72.

³⁵² Kyung states, "when starving people eat the food, they experience God "in every grain." Kyung includes the poem written by an Indian woman. Kyung states that poor in their poverty and hunger experience Christ and salvation through the food, which they receive from others.

Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, pp. 72, 73.

³⁵³ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 89.

Kyung presents the story of one Indian Catholic woman, Mercy Mathew, a social worker's, spiritual journey and explains how Asian women develop their spirituality in the midst of Asia's struggle for full humanity.³⁵⁴

Kyung expresses the necessity of considering women's political, economical, cultural and psychological situations, when we develop theology for women. She demonstrates the necessity of considering the total person or 'body and soul in the context of a social milieu,'³⁵⁵ when we develop theology. Considering the total person is essential when we do research on women, especially, when we do research on violence against women.

Kyung Considers Asian Women's Spirituality and Life Situations

Kyung states that Asian women draw upon sacred sources in their lives to survive their difficult life situations. Kyung explains how Philippino women use the term *Ina*³⁵⁶ for Mary, which is adopted from folk religions in their country. Kyung presents the story of a Korean mother who draws on all the survival resources around her when her boy died in an accident that was the fault of a politician. She did not get justice, when the politician sued her and imprisoned her through a corrupt trial. Kyung narrates that this woman drew portraits of the politician, police chief, judge, and politician's lawyer and every morning she prayed in front of a bowl of pure water. She asked for help from the supreme Korean deities *Ha-neu-nim*, *Kwan-Woon-Chang-Nim*, and *Ye-Su-Nim*. After prayer this woman shot each portrait with a bow and arrow. The men, who hurt her became frightened by this and released her from prison and gave compensation for the boy's death.³⁵⁷

She writes, "Everyday struggle to survive is the most powerful manifestation of emerging Asian women's spirituality."³⁵⁸ Kyung states that the collective dimension of Asian women's spirituality is important because it puts their energies together for social changes in Asia. She explains three prominent features in the collective manifestations of emerging Asian women's spirituality. They are the emergence of women's consciousness-raising

³⁵⁴ Mercy Mathew wanted to be a missionary to the poor. She tried to do it through a convent but she couldn't relate to the poor, as she wanted. Then she left the convent and started her own spiritual journey. She found a refugee camp, where she could do this work according to her vision and desire. She spent two years there and then her vision was to work and reach out the oppressed people in her own country. Mathew gained confidence through her work with the poor. Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, pp. 89 - 91.

³⁵⁵ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 92.

³⁵⁶ *Ina* is the divine mother and Philippines worshipped her. The Divine mother is the ruler of the world and she is the world. Kyung writes, "This Divine Mother, who has been transposed with Mary, the mother of Jesus, has been worshipped widely among many people in the Philippines." Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again*, p. 96.

³⁵⁷ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 95.

³⁵⁸ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 96.

groups, the growing women's movement within the context of the liberation movement and the sharpening of women's intellectual reflections within the Asian context.³⁵⁹

Kyung emphasises that following Jesus is a collective enterprise for Asian women and because of it women's movements are strong in Asia. Kyung writes, "Asian women join together in solidarity within the wider context of the people's movement to fight for their survival right."³⁶⁰ Kyung writes:

The sharpening of women's intellectual reflections is also powerful aspect of Asian women's spirituality. They begin to exercise women's intellectual critique of the religious, cultural political, and economic teachings and theories of their respective dominant cultures.³⁶¹

Kyung explains how her mother's spirituality linked with traditional Korean religiosity. Her mothers drew spiritual strength from traditional Korean religiosity. Her mother went to temple on Buddha's birthday and celebrated with her women friends by drinking and dancing.³⁶² Kyung writes that, "My birth mother also visited fortune-tellers in order to check on my well-being."³⁶³ Kyung writes:

My mothers made "chemical changes" in traditional religions by infusing them with the liberative thrusts of already existing religions. Since women were excluded from the public process of determining the meaning of religion, they were free to carve out a religion on their own, without the constraints of orthodoxy.³⁶⁴

Kyung's studies in Shamanism demonstrate that the women-centered popular religiosity continues to be practised among the poor people in Korea. Kyung observes that many women in women's liberation movement in Korea turn to Shamanism as a source of power.³⁶⁵ She adopted the ritual *Kut*³⁶⁶ from Shamanism when she addressed the seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1991 at Canberra. She invited participants to remove their shoes and participate in a dance, which invoked the Holy Spirit and the spirit of people who died on earth unjustly.³⁶⁷ Kyung writes:

³⁵⁹ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 96.

³⁶⁰ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 97.

³⁶¹ Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun*, p. 97.

³⁶² Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, p. 66.

³⁶³ Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, p. 66.

³⁶⁴ Russell, *Inheriting Our Mothers*, p. 67.

³⁶⁵ Hyun Kyung Chung, 'Opium or the Seed for Revolution?' Shamanism: Women Centered Popular Religiosity in Korea' in Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo (eds.), *Convergences and Differences*, Concilium, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark LTD, 1988, pp. 96 - 104.

³⁶⁶ In Shamanic ritual *Kut*, Shamans call upon the spirit of people who died from sickness or were killed unjustly in the liberation movement. Shamans allow the spirit to speak about the unjust treatment they received in this world. Shamans make people cry, laugh, dance and sing through *Kut*. Kyung, 'Opium or the Seed for Revolution?' *Concilium*, p. 103.

³⁶⁷ Chung Hyun Kyung, 'Come, Holy Spirit - Break Down the Walls with Wisdom and Compassion' in King, *Feminist Theology*, pp. 392 - 394.

As a Korean woman who feels compelled to do theology in the context of the Korean people's movement, I have naturally nurtured my interest in Korean Shamanism.³⁶⁸

Kyung writes:

I can be a "healthy" and "functioning" Christian only when I honour my ancestors' spiritual roots which are embodied in my language, culture, and the very core of my being. When I am cutting off from my multiple spiritual roots, I lose my identity and eventually my power.³⁶⁹

What I have learned from Kyung

As Kyung gives importance to storytelling and listens to the stories of women in developing a contextual theology, allowing Dalit women to tell their life stories and listening to their stories can help to develop a relevant theology for Dalit Christian women. Storytelling and listening to the stories in the traditional setting are familiar to people in India. It is the spoken word that is sacred and eternal, and the oral tradition in India made it possible for millions of illiterate villagers to be deeply familiar with their own classics.³⁷⁰

There are different ways of storytelling in India. An individual myth is recreated, when a story is retold to a child. Hindus call it *param-para* or unbroken lineage of transmission.³⁷¹ Storytelling to children is part of oral tradition in India and children are the keys to the preservation of the world of myth. As O'Flaherty points out the contexts for storytelling are fast dying out as people move from village to cities but there is no change for the context for storytelling to children. He states that children are the safeguard against the loss of context because there is a moment to tell stories, when children are washed and made ready for bed. According to O'Flaherty children in India as in America, ask, "Tell me a story."³⁷² Telling the stories from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*³⁷³ are important in India and villagers throng to listen to stories from these epics.

As Kyung's use of *Kut* from Shamanism, *Kathakali*,³⁷⁴ which includes dance, song and body language, is a way of preserving stories in India. In *Kathakali*, storytelling is an act performed by a man. Arundhati Roy writes, "Kathakali discovered long ago that the secret

³⁶⁸ Kyung, 'Opium or the seed for Revolution?' *Concilium*, p. 97.

³⁶⁹ Chung Hyung Kyung, 'Asian Christologies and People's Religions,' in K. C. Abraham (ed.), *Voices From the Third World*, Vol. XIX, No. 1, June 1996, p. 217.

³⁷⁰ Wendy Doniger O' Flaherty, *Other Peoples' Myths: The Cave of Echoes*, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 63.

³⁷¹ O'Flaherty, *Other Peoples' Myths*, p. 55.

³⁷² O'Flaherty, *Other Peoples' Myths*, p. 56.

³⁷³ *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are two great epics of Hindus in India.

³⁷⁴ *Katha* means story and *Kali* means play. These are Malayalam words use by people in Kerala State, South India. *One man performs Kathakali* by telling the story through body language and song.

of the great stories is that they *have* no secrets. The great stories are the ones you have heard and want to hear again."³⁷⁵ Roy writes about the Kathakali man as follows:

The Kathakali Man is the most beautiful of men. Because his body *is* his soul. His only instrument. He hawks the only thing he owns. The stories that his body can tell.³⁷⁶

Marggam Kali, the wedding dance of the Syrian Christians is another way of preserving storytelling among Syrian Christians in Kerala State. In *marggam kali* participants tell the story of St. Thomas and how he preached the Gospel in Malabar. All Syrian Christians are familiar with this story from their childhood onwards.³⁷⁷ There is a wedding custom among the Syrian Christians in Kerala, where a *panan* or a Dalit arrives at the end of wedding feast, greets people and sings songs about Mar Thoma, the Apostle. That traditional song is known as 'Veradian Pattu.' Man, who sings, receives money, cloth and double portion of food as a reward for his work.³⁷⁸ Storytelling, listening to stories and dancing are prominent in India among Hindus and Christians therefore listening to the stories of women can help the researcher to develop a contextual theology for India.

As Kyung uses poems written by women in Asia, poems and novels written by Dalit women in India can help the researcher to understand their life situation and stories but as I mentioned earlier such sources are lacking from Kerala State. As Robin Jared Lewis analyses Anita Desai's novel *Fire on the Mountain*, and explains the plight of an Indian widow Nanda Kaul,³⁷⁹ it is useful to analyse poems on Dalit³⁸⁰ women because it can help the researcher to understand the struggles of Dalit women for their survival. Dalit women are the most oppressed, unprivileged, illiterate and poor human beings who do not have any access to express their needs and voices. A research beginning with them, listening to their stories, using their poems, can help the researcher to understand women's struggle and oppression in the bottom of hierarchical structures in India and it can give insights to develop a relevant Practical Theology.

³⁷⁵ Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, London: Flamingo, 1997, p. 229.

³⁷⁶ Roy, *The God of Small Things*, p. 230.

³⁷⁷ L. W. Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas: An Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar*, Cambridge: At the University press, 1956, p. 197. Brown worked as the former principal of Kerala United Theological Seminary at Trivandrum, Kerala State, South India.

³⁷⁸ Brown, *The Indian Christians*, pp. 195, 196.

³⁷⁹ Robin Jared Lewis, 'Anita Desai: Fire on the Mountain and Games at Twilight' in Miller (ed.), *Asia*, pp. 149, 150.

³⁸⁰ M. E. Prabhakar, a lecturer at United Theological College, Bangalore, includes in his work, poems on Dalit women. M. E. Prabhakar (ed.), *Toward a Dalit Theology*, Delhi: SPCK, 1989. Dalits are the downtrodden and the oppressed people in India. The Dalit movement started in India in 1980s as a liberation movement of the downtrodden people. Dalit women in India are the 'Dalits of the Dalits' or the most oppressed people in the world. Poems on Dalit women can help the researcher to understand their struggles for survival.

Kyung's evaluation of the broken-body experience of Asian women, their spirituality and their life situation and the same methods are relevant when we do research on women in India because illiteracy, unemployment, poverty, lack of resources for survival, degradation of females, male domination, patriarchal structures and patriarchal culture are contributing to women's oppression in India. In most of the religious gatherings in the Churches and Temples in India, the majority of participants are women, who have much religious devotion and seek God's help in their struggles for survival. It is necessary to evaluate how their life situation and struggles create their spirituality.

As Kyung explores the 'culture of silence', it is useful to evaluate how the 'culture of silence' renders dumb the survivors of violence and constructs women as 'invisible,' 'no-body,' and 'no-voice,' human beings.

Conclusion

My analysis of ethnographic techniques used in developing Womanist Theology, Mujerista Theology and Asian Feminist Theology enabled me to learn from theologians Cannon, Diaz, Pui-lan and Kyung. Though I have learned many significant lessons from these theologians I am choosing the most significant key theme to do my research in India. I observe one common element in all these four theologians' works that they all use ethnographic data as a major source for reflection. Pui-lan and Kyung collect such data by listening to the life stories of women. Cannon collects such data from the literary tradition of black women and depends heavily upon the work of Hurston, who did ethnographic research in her own community. Diaz collected her data from the lived-experience of Hispanic women. All these four theologians use the experiences of women as a major source in their works even if they used ethnographic techniques in various ways.

I prefer to highlight one significant key theme *listening to the life stories of Dalit Christian women* because it can reveal the violence experienced in the lives of Dalit Christian women. As Pui-lan and Kyung give importance to listen to the stories of women I would like to listen to the life stories of women. Moreover story telling and listening to the stories, is a cultural phenomenon in India and casting women in the role of storyteller and story- maker is common.

Story-telling through *Kathakali*, *Kathaprasangam*, recitals of poetry are some other ways of storytelling. As Scott writes:

The position of storyteller, however, is a privileged one. The “voice” the teller adopts influences what is emphasised within a setting, who is heard from a community, and correspondingly what themes are silenced or neglected...The ethnographer often seeks to represent the worldview of his or her informants while writing for an audience that is, for the most part, composed of those outside the community studied.³⁸¹

Engaging in informal talk with Dalit Christian woman in order to listen to her life story can help me to understand the violence she experiences. Listening to the life stories of Dalit Christian women can help me to collect their life stories and to present it to the readers in the voices of the researched. Their life stories can reveal the violence and oppressions they experience in their daily lives as ‘women’ and as *low caste human beings*. Engaging in an informal conversation with Dalit Christian woman will be more relevant than conducting formal interviews because illiterate Dalit women feel free to talk in an informal conversation. Listening to their stories and observing their facial and body languages, giving attention to the words they use in the conversation are important. It is useful if the researcher records the conversations first and then transcribes and translates them later. As the researcher listens to the recorded voice of the participant again and again she can experience the strong bond between her and the researched. As far as possible I would like to present the life stories of Dalit Christian women in their own words because their voices are important in making changes in their lives. Therefore I do not want to distort their words. The following chapters will prove that how far these lessons I learned from various sources were useful, when I was among Dalit Christian women.

³⁸¹ Scott, *Doing Ethnographic Research*, p. 199.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH SETTING

Firstly, this chapter explains the context of my ethnographic research on violence experienced by Dalit Christian women in Kerala State. In order to explain the context of this research, I would like to start with the following questions: - Who are Dalits and in particular who are Cheramar or Pulayas? Where is Parippu and why did I choose this location for my research? Who are the particular Dalit Christian women I studied and what is their religious affiliation? I shall then outline the reasons why I chose to focus upon the violence experienced by Dalit Christian women and why I believe that they articulate important challenges for Christians in India today. Secondly, this chapter presents myself as an ethnographer. Thirdly, it describes the research strategies I used in my research.

Context of the Research

Dalits

The word Dalit literally means “broken” people at the bottom of India’s caste system.³⁸² Dalits are people, who are ‘broken to pieces.’³⁸³ The word Dalit means ground down, downtrodden, and oppressed. The people at the bottom of the caste hierarchy of India, in a spirit of pride and militancy, use the term Dalit. Eleanor Zelliot writes:

The name Dalit is not only a rejection of the very idea of pollution or impurity or “untouchability,” it reveals a sense of a unified class, of a movement toward equality. It is an inclusive term that can draw in any who feel they have been harmed by caste or gender barriers.³⁸⁴

N. K. Jose states that Brahminical supremacy is the cause for the imbalance of power between Dalits and non-Dalits in Kerala:

Two powers were/are opposed to the Dalits in Kerala. The first one was / is the Brahminical supremacy. No other state in India has been affected so much as Kerala has been by the introduction of the Brahmin culture. Though the Aryans who entered Kerala were very small in number, their ideology soon spread far and wide and they became a sovereign power.³⁸⁵

³⁸² Human Rights Watch, *Broken People: Caste Violence Against India’s “Untouchable,”* Bangalore: Books for Change, 1999, p. 2.

³⁸³ Women Worldwide, ‘Dalit women - Broken to Pieces,’ in *Catholic Woman*, Quarterly newspaper of the National Board of Catholic women, Issue No. 22, Winter 2001 / 2002, p. 2.

³⁸⁴ Eleanor Zelliot, ‘The Dalit Movement’ in *Dalit*, International Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 1, Waterford: February 1996, p. 1.

³⁸⁵ N. K. Jose, ‘The Punnappra-Vayalar Struggle and the Dalits,’ in A. M. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel (ed.), *The Dalit Desiyata: The Kerala Experience in Development and Class Struggle*, Delhi: I. S. P. C. K., 1990, p. 32.

Jose states that Aryans, who were powerful, destroyed the Indus Valley culture, which belonged to Dalits.³⁸⁶

The destruction of the Indus-Valley culture made many people scatter hither and thither. The Dalits are the descendants of these men who were made to run away and scatter.³⁸⁷

The invasion of the Aryans and the destruction of the Indus valley culture made Dalits powerless and the Aryans powerful therefore Indian society started to function on the basis of such hierarchy. Padmanaban explains how Dalits became the victims of systemic oppression of the Brahmanic religion:

Before the Aryanisation of India, i.e. up to about 600 BC the Dalits appear to have lived a normal communal existence like any other people in India. The Brahminic interpretation of Varnashrama Dharma and the Manu Smriti changed all that. They were progressively marginalized and denied access even to the barest minimum conditions of a civilized existence. Full of hope, over the centuries they successively converted to Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Sikhism and Christianity. But Casteism had spread its roots even among those religious systems, and whatever their respective doctrine and theologies may have asserted, the practice did not match any doctrine or the claim.³⁸⁸

Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya highlights that caste has had its origin in Brahmanical legislation.³⁸⁹ The Black Paper³⁹⁰ states:

The ingenious character of untouchability as a control mechanism receives sanction from Brahminic religion whose purity-impurity polarity serves to exclude, alienate, discriminate and subjugate the Dalits to the vested interests of the dominant castes. In fact, the 260 million Dalits are the only people in the world whose discrimination, going beyond the boundaries of race, colour and region, is legitimised by religion.³⁹¹

P. S. Sridhara Murthy explains how Dalits are treated in India:

Dalits and BCs [Backward Castes] are not Hindu for the purpose of becoming pontiffs or priests and even to exercise the right to enter temples or mutts or ashrams. When the oppressed people are killed and burnt they are Dalits and when they are about to embrace Islam or Christianity they are Hindus.³⁹²

³⁸⁶ Jose in Ayrookuzhiel, *The Dalit Desiyata*, p. 31.

³⁸⁷ Jose in Ayrookuzhiel, *The Dalit Desiyata*, p. 31.

³⁸⁸ A. Padmanaban, *Dalits at the Cross Roads: Their Struggle-Past and Present*, Madras: Poompugar Pathippagam, 1996, p. 32. Padmanabhan is a well-known poet, versatile writer and the president of the Authors Guild of India at New Delhi and The People's Educational, Social and Cultural Society at Madras. He is the author of "Untouchable's Journey," "Saint Nandanar," and some other books.

³⁸⁹ Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya, *Hindu Castes and Sects*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1896, p. 4.

³⁹⁰ The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) released the Black Paper on 8th December 1999. It is the first document prepared by Dalits that point out in detail the human rights that have been denied to the Dalits. Black paper folder contains Campaign Manifesto, six Demands Sheets and Campaign closing events.

³⁹¹ Dalit Right to Life and Security, *Black Paper: Broken Promises & Dalits Betrayed*, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, Secunderabad: 1998, p. 02.

³⁹² P. S. Sridhara Murthy, 'Wanted a Counter-Culture to de-hinduise Dalits & Backward Castes,' in *Dalit Voice*, Vol. 19, No. 21, Bangalore: October 16-31, 2000, p. 12.

Ambedkar³⁹³ writes about India, Hinduism and Dalits:

How can I call this land my own homeland and this religion my own wherein we are treated worse than cats and dogs, wherein we cannot get water to drink?³⁹⁴

Ambedkar's statement is relevant today to the situation of the Dalits in India.³⁹⁵ For example, Kavitha Johnson one of the participants in my research, describes how Dalits had to be careful not to pollute the high caste people while they walked on the road:

As it happened in the olden days, there was a broom tied on the backside [of the Dalit], the spit should not fall out of the mouth while talking. There was a vessel tied in front, when [the Dalit was] talking the spit should fall only in the vessel and it should not fall on the floor. The broom is tied behind because while walking the marks of the foot- steps should not remain on the soil, the broom sweeps it as the person goes by. It is not just simply said, that India is the seat of superstitions and wrong rituals.³⁹⁶ Ma. Victoria Cabrera-Balleza confirms how Dalits are discriminated: Higher caste Hindus avoid Dalits like plague. They will avoid having a Dalit prepare their food, gather their water or even enter their homes lest they become "polluted."...In upper caste households, family members sprinkle "holy" water to purify anything that has been touched by their Dalit servant's hands.³⁹⁷

Dalits are not only subjected to discrimination based on their caste but also they are subjected to poverty and material deprivation. Economically poor Dalit women get into

³⁹³ Ambedkar is known as 'Babasaheb'; he was a hero, guide and guru to the oppressed class people in India. Ambedkar's motto was to "educate, agitate, and organise." He gained BA from the University of Bombay, PhD from Columbia University at New York, DDS from the London School of Economics. He passed the bar and earned the title of barrister. He died on 6th December, 1956 at Delhi. A statue of Ambedkar has been erected at New Delhi facing the Indian Parliament building. Eleanor Zelliot, 'The Dalit Movement' in *Dalit*, International Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 1, Waterford: February, 1996, pp. 8-12.

³⁹⁴ 'Dr. Ambedkar's Thoughts on Human Rights' in *Thamukku*, Newsletter of the Dalit Resource Center, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2, September- December 2000, p. 5.

³⁹⁵ Mariamma Abraham, an eighty-two years old Dalit Christian woman is a retired Head Teacher. In her youth, when Mariamma went to a high caste family for work, they served food in a pit for her. In the morning when the Dalits went for work they had to dig a pit in the courtyard and then they had to cut and keep a plantain leaf in the warm sunshine. When they returned for lunch, they had to take that plantain leaf, which became tender and put it inside the pit. Then high caste people served food in the leaf in the pit for Dalits and Dalits were not served food in the plates. High caste people in Kerala State keep plates for their dogs but they are hesitant to provide food on plates for Dalits. Mariamma Abraham remembers how she was treated in the school as a Dalit student. She received her seat right at the back of the class and there were separate sticks to beat Dalit students and high caste students. If teachers used the same stick to beat the high caste students and Dalit students high caste people believed that it could pollute the high caste children. I tape-recorded Mariamma's conversation but it is not transcribed because Mariamma did not attend one-day seminar or Bible study groups I conducted. Mariamma Abraham's daughter Resli has done her BD & MTh studies in United Theological College at Bangalore. Resli rejected Christianity because of the caste discriminations she experienced within the Church of South India in Kerala. Cassett of Informal Conversation between Mariamma Abraham and Sara Abraham in her daughter Resli Abraham's Residence at Mavelikkara on 4th December, 2001.

³⁹⁶ Transcript of Conversation between Sara Abraham and Kavitha Johnson, 27th November 2001, New India Bible Church, Parippu.

prostitution in order to provide daily bread for their children. The National Commission for Women reported, “Almost all women in prostitution in the country are from either dalit communities or the tribal groups.”³⁹⁸

Veena Poonacha states that majority of the prostitutes chose prostitution because they are the survivors of rape:

According to a survey conducted by the Indian Housewives Federation 80% prostitutes came into the profession in the first instance as victims of rape. The rape victim loses her social respectability forever—if single no one is likely to marry her, if married she is likely to be disowned by her family.³⁹⁹

V. Gopalakrishnan Asari highlights a basic reason for the poverty of Dalits:

For centuries, the scheduled caste population have been worked in lands, which are not owned by them, and this has created a sense of alienation from land and social environment.⁴⁰⁰

M. Gangadharan finds that 92.1 percentage of Dalit Christians in 1968 and 1969 were people who did not have their own land.⁴⁰¹ Many Dalits in Kerala do not have their own land and this is a major cause for the grinding poverty among them. This situation has not yet changed and now also many Dalits are landless people, who work in oppressor’s land. Gail Omvedt is right in her observation:

Dalits in Kerala are apparently more limited to the agricultural sector and are more landless than elsewhere in India...77 percent of dalits in agriculture in Kerala were landless, compared to 63 percent at an all-India level.⁴⁰²

Caste

Varna (colour) and *jati*⁴⁰³ are two words usually used in India for caste. The Brahmins, who are considered as the highest caste, were called upon to give the community its priests, thinkers, men of letters, legislators, scholars, religious leaders and guides.⁴⁰⁴ People, who believe in the caste system and its hierarchy, believe that Brahmins, who are

³⁹⁷ Ma. Victoria Cabrera-Balleza, *Unveiling India’s “Hidden Apartheid”*. <http://www.isiswomen.org/pub/wia/wiawcar/India.htm> [14 February 2003]

³⁹⁸ National Commission for Women 1995-96, *Societal Violence on Women and Children: A Report*, New Delhi: Government of India, 1996, p.12.

³⁹⁹ Poonacha, *Understanding Violence*, p. 92.

⁴⁰⁰ V. Gopalakrishnan Asari, ‘Labour Force Participation of Scheduled Caste Population in Kerala,’ in B. B. Mathur, *Women and Depressed Caste Population in India*, Allahabad: Chugh Publications, 1994, p. 282.

⁴⁰¹ M. Gangadharan (ed.), *Jathivyavastha: Padanangal* (Caste System: Studies), Trichur: Jankeeya Prasidheekarana Kendram, 1986, p. 108.

⁴⁰² Gail Omvedt, *Disturbing Aspects of Kerala Society*. <http://csf.colorado.edu/bcas/kerala/ker-omv.htm> [28 February 2003]

⁴⁰³ *Jati*, which means birth group, James Heitzman and Robert L. Worden (eds.), *India: A Country Study*, Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1996, p. 790.

⁴⁰⁴ M. L. Bose, *Social and Cultural History of Ancient India*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1990, p. 50.

priestly caste, are created from the mouth of Brahma (Supreme Being). Kshatriyas, who are warriors and rulers, were created from the arms of Brahma, Vaishyas, who are merchants, derived from the thighs of Brahma, and Sudras, who are servants and artisans, derived from the feet of Brahma.⁴⁰⁵ Cabrera-Balleza writes, “Those who fall outside the four categories are the Dalits or the untouchables, the most oppressed and exploited social group.”⁴⁰⁶ The fifth category, ‘untouchable’ are the people, who are expected to do menial and polluting work related to bodily decay and dirt⁴⁰⁷ and they are in the bottom of caste ‘hierarchical society’⁴⁰⁸ of India, and ‘untouchables’ named themselves Dalits. Cabrera-Balleza writes:

The Dalits are not considered to be part of human society. As such, the most menial jobs are given to them, such as cleaning latrines and sewers, handling carcasses, butchering meat and acting as couriers of bad news such as the death of a villager. Moving out of these preordained jobs does not guarantee a change in the Dalit’s status.⁴⁰⁹

Touching these human beings, who are involved in these categorised jobs, might pollute the high caste people. This is the traditional understanding of the high caste people. Therefore James Heitzman writes:

With every drink of water, with every meal, and with every contact with another person, people must ratify the social hierarchy of which they are a part and within which their every act is carried out...eating, drinking, bathing, touching, talking-and that transgressions of these rules, whether deliberate or accidental, are seen as having immediately polluting effects on the person of the transgressor....⁴¹⁰

Caste in the Churches in Kerala

The privileged people in the high caste maintain the caste system in order to dominate over the ‘other,’ who are underprivileged, Dalits. Syrian Christians in Kerala too collude with the high caste Hindus in their attitude towards caste.

Among the high caste people and Syrian Christians in Kerala, Dalits are known as *karuthavar* (Black) or *mattavar* (other). Bandu states that the one who face sun and moon and lives in harmony with nature becomes black. Women are involved in agriculture, they work under the sun, and their skin gets dark. Nature has given that Black colour to them.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁵ Heitzman, *India*, p. 267.

⁴⁰⁶ *Unveiling India’s “Hidden Apartheid”* <http://www.isiswomen.org/pub/wia/wiawcar/india.htm> [14 February 2003]

⁴⁰⁷ Heitzman, *India*, p. 267.

⁴⁰⁸ Heitzman, *India*, p. 234.

⁴⁰⁹ *Unveiling India’s “Hidden Apartheid”* <http://www.isiswomen.org/pub/wia/wiawcar/india.htm> [14 February 2003]

⁴¹⁰ Heitzman, *India*, p. 239.

⁴¹¹ Bandhu, *Dalit Daivasasthram*, pp. 20, 21.

High caste people and Syrian Christians are known as *veluthavar* (white). Syrian Christians use the word *putuchristani*⁴¹² for referring to Dalits, who converted to Christianity. K. C. Alexander writes:

Even though the Mar Thoma Church and the Church of South India do not officially discriminate between their Syrian and Pulaya members, such segregation is actually prevalent. It was found that the Syrian and Pulaya members of the same Church conduct religious rituals in separate buildings.⁴¹³

Alexander states that Dalit Christians address Syrian Christians as *thampuran* (lord):

The Pulaya Christians have to address the Syrian Christians by such honorific titles as *Tampuran* and *Panikke*, whereas Syrian Christians add the suffix Pulaya when addressing a Pulaya Christian. For example, a man named Thoma is called Thoma-Pulayan and a woman named Maria is addressed as Maria-Pulakalli.⁴¹⁴

John C. B. Webster too confirms that caste system is strongest in rural Roman Catholic or Syrian congregations in the South India.⁴¹⁵

Even though some Pentecostal denominations in Kerala accepted Dalit Christians as their members the caste system is predominant there too and Syrian Christians hold all leadership positions in the Church, Christian institutions and organisations. The members of such Pentecostal denominations do not use the word Pulaya when they address a Dalit Christian by name but they use the word *sahodaran* (brother) or *sahodari* (sister) along with the name of low caste, for example, Daniel-*sahodaran*. The word *sahodaran* is used not because of the intimate brotherhood between the high caste Christian and Dalit Christian but they use it purposely to acknowledge that Daniel-*sahodaran* is a Dalit Christian. Padmanaban's evaluation is right in relation between the touchable and untouchable Christians:

The Christian community is a composite community. In some places it is divided into touchables and untouchables. In all places it is divided into high class and low class. This educated class being detached from the lower or the untouchable class of Christians is not charged with the wants, the pains, cravings, desires, aspirations of the latter and does not care for their interest.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹² The word *putuchristani* means literally the one who is a new convert to Christianity. Even if many Dalits were converted to Christianity many generations ago, their descendents are called *putuchristani*. The word *putuchristani* is not used to refer any recent high caste people who converted to Christianity. Syrian Christians in Kerala purposely use this word to degrade the Dalit converts. The Syrian Orthodox Jacobite Church at Meenangadi in Wayanad District, which is my mother Church from the time of my birth till 1979, does not have any Dalits as its members.

⁴¹³ K. C. Alexander, 'The Neo-Christians of Kerala,' in J. Michael Mahar (ed.), *The Untouchables in Contemporary India*, Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1998, p.155.

⁴¹⁴ Alexander in Mahar, *The Untouchables*, p. 155.

⁴¹⁵ John C. B. Webster, 'Who is a Dalit?' in S. M. Michael (ed.), *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1999, p. 74.

I expected Dalit Christian women from all communities to participate in my research therefore, I did not select any particular community but when I was with them for the research I understood that Dalit Christian women who participated in my research are from Pulaya caste. This particular community of Dalits are known as Pulayas, Cheramar or Cherumakkal.

Pulayas, Cheramar or Cherumakkal

My informants are Dalit Christian women, who were converted to Christianity from the Cheramar caste.⁴¹⁷ According to Kaviyoor Murali,⁴¹⁸ one of the Dalit writers, Pulayas are also known as *Kuziyan*, *Mulayan* and *Thudiyan*.⁴¹⁹ The word *Pulam* means the paddy field and *Pulaya* means man of the field. *Pula* means pollution, therefore, *Pulaya* means polluted. Pulayas are known as *Cherumakkal*, *cher* means mud and *makkal* means sons. The word *Cherumakkal* has two meanings, little children and the sons of mud.⁴²⁰ Pulayas were not allowed to use the word “I” but instead of it they had to use the word *adiyan*, which means “your slave,” when they spoke to high caste people in Kerala State. I noticed that Annamma Devasya, one of the participants in my research used the same word *adiyan*, when she referred to Dalits. Pulayas had to keep their hands on their mouths while speaking to high caste people, in order that their breath shouldn’t pollute them.⁴²¹ Pulayas had to plough the land, sow the seed, transplant the seedlings, regulate the flow of water in the field, and remove the weeds. It was the duty of the Pulayas to cut the crops, carry them to the barn, separate the corn from the stalk and winnow it.⁴²² Pulayas worked in the field day and night, during the rainy season and in wintertime and as they worked under the hot

⁴¹⁶ Padmanaban, *Dalits*, p. 49.

⁴¹⁷ Registration Forms in a one-day seminar on “Women’s Suffering,” conducted on 19th November 2001 in New India Bible Church at Parippu indicates that they converted to Christianity from Cheramar caste.

⁴¹⁸ Kaviyoor Murali, who was a Dalit, studied in Trivandrum Intermediate College at Thiruvananthapuram and Mar Thoma College at Tiruvalla. In 1953 he became an activist in the Communist party. He started his profession as a teacher and retired as the Superintendent of Public Work Department. Murali received Bharatiya Sahitya Academy fellowship from New Delhi. Murali’s recent work, *Dalit Sahityam* has been written in Malayalam language and is one of the best literatures of the Dalits. Murali died on 19th October 2001 while I was in India for my research.

⁴¹⁹ Kaviyoor Murali, *Dalit Sahityam*, Kottayam: Current Books, 2001, p. 113.

⁴²⁰ Pallath, J. J., *Theyyam: An Analytical study of the Folk Culture Wisdom and Personality*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1995, pp. 35-37.

⁴²¹ Ben Gladston, B., *Awakening of the Dalits in South Travancore through the Work of Protestant Missionaries 1806 to 1948*, *M.Th Thesis*, Senate of Serampore, 1995, p. 16.

⁴²² Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Volume II, Madras: Government Press, 1909, p. 54.

sun their skin turned black.⁴²³ Some of my informants are women, who work in high caste people's paddy fields at Parippu in Kottayam District and a few of them sweep the houses or wash vessels in the houses of the high caste people.

Parippu Village: Ethnographer's Observation

My intention was to gather a group of Dalit Christian women to do my ethnographic research in order to explore the violence they experience. I did not aim at a particular Dalit community, when I started my research work at Parippu. I was informed that there were Dalit Christians at Parippu but I did not know any of them and their cultural background. The meaning of the word Parippu is lentil. Parippu is a village in the Kottayam District of the Kerala State in South India and it is situated in the west of Kottayam town about ten kilometres away from the town itself. I selected New India Bible Church, which is situated in the interior part of the Parippu village as a location to conduct a one-day seminar and Bible studies for Dalit Christian women because I came to know that many Dalit Christian families lived in that location. In order to reach the New India Bible Church, I walked from the Parippu village bus stop along the muddy narrow path on the banks of the deep canal.

Parippu is an under developed village at present and many of its inhabitants are Dalits, who are poor, illiterate and unemployed. Parippu is the adjacent village of Olassa and every half an hour a private bus leaves from Kottayam town to Parippu village. When I was doing my research at Parippu, I travelled through Olassa, which is eight kilometres away in the west of Kottayam town and there I saw a CMS High school established by CMS missionaries in 1870. Rev. Henry Baker, a missionary from Essex in England, who arrived in India in 1817, worked as a priest in Olassa Church from 1844-1857. As he was working at Olassa, he opened a school for the Dalit slaves at Kottayam in 1845. Baker Memorial Girls High School in Baker Junction at Kottayam is an English medium school. Baker worked hard to stop slavery in Kerala State. He died at Kottayam, when he was seventy-three years old. His eldest son Henry Baker, who arrived in Kerala in 1843, continued the ministry of his father.⁴²⁴

⁴²³ Murali, *Dalit Sahityam*, p. 114.

⁴²⁴ Abraham C. Prakash, *Olassa Idavakayude Charithravum Nooteyanmbathu Varshangalelude lee Edavaka Janagalil Ondakkiya Swadheenavum*, (History of the Olassa Church and Its Impact on People through out Hundred and Fifty Years), *B. D. Thesis*, Kannammoola: Kerala United Theological Seminary, 1993, pp. 14-25.

Dalits in Parippu walk miles in order to reach their destinations in interior parts of the village. If anyone wants to travel further to the interior part of the Parippu village three wheeler vehicle autorikshaws are available from the Parippu village bus stop. Dalits cannot afford to pay for autorikshaws and therefore they have to walk. Whenever I had to catch a bus from Parippu for travelling to Kottayam, I was much relieved, I did not have to experience the push from the crowd because students in blue and white uniforms stood in the queue and allowed the older population to get inside the bus first. Later students got inside the bus calmly and I have not seen it in any other parts of the country, where students or people standing in queue to get inside the bus but usually they push each other and go forward in order to secure seats inside the crowded bus. Crossing the narrow and deep canal is a problem to Dalits and there is no bridge over the canal near the Church. One of my informants Mary Babu, who lives near the Church but on the other banks of the canal, waited an hour to get a canoe to cross over the canal and come to the church. As I waited for her and she waited for a canoe, we were both standing opposite each other on two banks of the same canal and talking to each other. Later a Dalit teenage boy, who is her neighbour came rowing a canoe. Mary got inside it, crossed the canal and came to me. This particular canal is the only means in that location for Dalit women to wash their clothes and I saw Dalit women having their bath in the same canal. Dalit children and Dalit women are skilled at swimming in the canal.

As I walked from the New India Bible Church to its left side along the muddy path on the banks of a deep canal, I observed huts belonging to Dalits and in the opposite side of the canal there are constructed houses belonging to high caste people. When the canal overflows, during the rainy season, water floods inside the Dalit huts. Their huts are very fragile because those huts were made with hay or coconut leaf, bamboo, timber or clay. They do not have toilets or bathrooms in their huts. In front of huts naked Dalit kids were playing in the mud. Dalits keep chickens, hens, cats and dogs as pets in their huts.

When I first visited the interior part of the village an old Dalit man, who was only half-dressed came opposite to me with a small cane basket in his hand in which he stored two fishes caught that day and tried to sell these in order to get few coins. None bought them. I saw Dalit women and men rowing in a canoe, I saw a big canoe filled with hay and a few Dalit men and women were in it. I saw a man canoeing with a basketful of duck's eggs and I understood that he was taking it to the Kottayam town for a sale. Another day I found a man with a small stationary shop in a canoe travelling through the canal. Occasionally, I heard the horn sound and it was a man travelling on the bicycle to sell sea fishes to villagers. One day when a postman was walking through the muddy path in front of the

Church, one of my informants, Annamma Yohannan, who is an elderly woman, and myself were sitting on the floor in front of the Church, talking to each other and waiting for the Church to be opened. She told the postman, “Sir, we are sitting here.” I observed and understood that what she meant was that she wished to stand up as her respect to the postman, who is from a high caste, but since she was sitting and talking to me it was impossible for her to stand. After two minutes, I found another Dalit woman canoeing the postman across the canal. There are huge fields on two sides of the canal but they belong to people from a high caste and the Dalit women are labourers in it. While I was doing my research work at Parippu, a day’s harvesting work was available to Dalit women.

Dalits at Parippu are economically poor and they live below the poverty line. When I visited the Dalit huts, I understood their huts are basically bare and they live in severe poverty. They lack basic essential items such as food, proper clothes, vessels and plates, sheets, beds. They sleep on the floor in a piece of cloth or on thin mattress made out of a certain reed leaves. They do not have any drinking water facility in their huts. They have to fetch drinking water from the wells or pipes, which are away from their huts. Their only means of survival is by the daily wage labour, which is available in the paddy field, during the seasons of seeding or harvest.

New India Bible Church at Parippu: A Cheramar Church

I selected New India Bible Church at Parippu as a venue for conducting the seminar and Bible studies. Rev. Thomas Philip,⁴²⁵ is the founder of the New India Bible Church denomination, which has many local Churches in Kerala State. The New India Bible Churches and the New India Bible College (NIBC)⁴²⁶ are closely associated in their functioning. The building site for the Church at Parippu was a gift from one high caste family in Parippu, who belong to the Catholic Church. Philip contributed money to constructing the Church building as a memorial for his late daughter. The members of New India Bible Church at Parippu are converts from Cheramar caste.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁵ Rev. Thomas Philip is the President of New India Bible Church, a denomination, which has its headquarters at Paippad, Changanacherry, Kerala State. He is the vice Principal of New India Bible College at Paippad. He is a committed person who works to uplift Dalit Christians in Kerala State. He is not a Dalit but his ministry is among the Dalits.

⁴²⁶ Late Dr. Abraham Philip was the founder of New India Bible College. NIBC trains young men and women for Christian ministry. Rev. Thomas Philip is the younger brother of late Dr. Abraham Philip.

⁴²⁷ V. C. Yohannan a convert from Cheramar caste, who holds MA & BD degrees, is the Pastor of the Church.

Dalit Christian Women: Invisible and Silent

Thirty-two women participated in the one-day seminar.⁴²⁸ They came from thirteen Churches and they belong to various Christian denominations. Fifteen women were from New India Bible Church at Parippu, which is a local Church. Four women were from the same New India Bible Church at Tiruvanjoor. Five women belong to five local Churches of the New India Bible Church denomination at Kottayam town, Manganam, Parampuzha, Kavanattinkara and Kozhimala. One woman belongs to Calvary Baptist Church at Manarkadu, two belong to Church of God Full Gospel India at Gandinagar, another woman belongs to Church of South India, two belong to Assemblies of God at Olassa, one belongs to Akilendya Daivasabha, and another woman is a member of Indian Pentecostal Church of God at Kumbanad. I asked in the registration form their 'Background before conversion to Christianity.' Thirty-two women filled in the registration forms for attending the seminar and twenty-two of them were courageous to answer directly, that they are converted to Christianity from the Cheramar caste. All the other women answered indirectly because three women did not mention their caste, one answered that she is a nominal Christian, another answered she is a Christian from the time of her birth, two women answered that they are from Catholic background and another has written Brethren. One woman answered she is from Jacobite Church background and one woman from Syrian Christian background. However twenty-two women confirmed that they are converted to Christianity from Cheramar caste and among them nine go for daily labour *kuulippane*.⁴²⁹ One does *kuulippani* and sowing, another woman does sowing, three do not have any work, five of them are housewives, one woman does Christian ministry, another answered Gospel work and one woman's husband is pastor therefore by mistake or not she has written her job as Pastor. Among these twenty-two Dalit Christian women, nine of them do not know their date of birth. None of these Dalit Christian women came to the level of graduate studies. Twelve out of twenty-two Dalit Christian women could not even complete their school education. Ten Dalit women came up to the level of Secondary School Leaving Certificate, two among these ten women passed SSLC and one among these two joined for Pre-Degree Course but did not mention whether she passed or failed in the course. Among these twenty-two Dalit Christian women one is a divorcee and another is a widow, two are unmarried and eighteen are married.⁴³⁰ These Dalit Christian women were silent and invisible in the past. My research strategies were intended to break Dalit

⁴²⁸ More information about the one-day seminar is given in this chapter and the following chapter.

⁴²⁹ *Kuulippane* is the seasonal work Dalit women get during harvest or seeding time and they are paid daily for their work.

⁴³⁰ All these information are based on the registration forms, which are filled by women who participated in the seminar.

Christian women's life long silences and allow their voices to begin to enter the mainstream discourse of theology in India. Mary Daly writes:

Overcoming the silencing of women is an extreme act, a sequence of extreme acts. Breaking our silence means living in existential courage. It means discovering our deep sources, our spring. It means finding our native resiliency, springing in to life, speech, action.⁴³¹

Dalit Christian Women: Survivors of Oppression by Caste, Colour, Gender and Religion

Dalit Christian women, who participated in my research, are the survivors of violence and oppressions based on their caste, colour, gender and religion. Socially, Dalit women are considered as a low caste. Caste is considered as a social mark in Indian society. Dalit Christian women are the converts from the lowest castes and they are considered as untouchables because of their caste status. The marriage between a low caste Christian and a high caste Christian is unusual in any of the Churches in India. If a high caste Christian marries a low caste Christian, it is viewed as unsuitable and both are treated as 'low' even in the Church. It is unusual for high caste Christians to eat or drink in the house of any low caste Christian.

Culturally, Dalit Christian women are considered inferior to men and they experience cultural degradation, which started long ago. Male domination took shape when Dalits, blacks and women were defeated. Dalits were defeated from B. C.1500 onwards.⁴³² Ruth Manorama, the founder President of National Dalit Women's Federation at Bangalore explains that Dalit woman experienced more freedom and less dependence. They had physical might and capability for hard work. There was no dowry system, child marriage and sati among Dalits. No one discouraged divorce or remarriages among Dalits. Dalit women's previous position was destroyed by the influence of Hinduism.⁴³³ Later, Dalit Christian women experienced cultural oppression due to their caste identities, for example, the "Breast cloth controversy"⁴³⁴ proves that high caste people resisted, when Dalit Christian women started wearing small jackets to cover their breasts.

⁴³¹ Mary Daly, *Gyn / Ecology*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1978, p. 1.

⁴³² Dalit Bandhu, *Dalit Daivasasthram*, (Dalit Theology) Vaikam: Hobby Publishers, 1993, pp.12, 13.

⁴³³ Ruth Manorama, 'Marthidharil Marthidhar (Oppressed of the oppressed)' in T. M. Yesudhasan (ed.), *Dalit Swathavum Adhikarathinte Prasnavum*, Changanacherry: Almond Books, 1997, p. 61.

⁴³⁴ In 1817 Rev. Charles Mead arrived in Mailady in South India. In 1822, upper-caste Hindus demanded that Christian converts obey the old caste law by wearing the upper cloth above waist but Christian women started to wear small jackets to cover their breasts. Rev. Mead secured a decree from a magistrate supporting the claim of the Christians and allowing Dalit Christian women to wear jackets but after few years Mead was attacked, many Christians were

The patriarchal structures always consider men as people who have power, authority, and freedom to do anything they like. Catherine A. MacKinnon states how men exercise their power over women:

It's hierarchical, it's dominant, it's authoritative. You're listening, I'm talking; I'm active, you're passive. I'm expressing myself; you're taking notes. Women are supposed to be seen and not heard.⁴³⁵

The patriarchal system empowers men to give command and women to obey men's command. Therefore it is unpleasant for males to listen to the ideas of Dalit Christian women and accept or approve their ideas.

Religiously, Christianity demands Dalit Christian women to be submissive to men in all situations. The apostle Paul's teachings are a problem within the Christian churches in Kerala State because Christian men from Kerala expect Christian women to obey and to be submissive to men in the public, private and religious spheres and Christian leaders and churches are imposing this teaching on Dalit Christian women. If a woman questions it, she is considered an atheist or a non-Christian because she questions the authority of the word of God. The Biblical understanding of women's position in the Indian church is to be submissive and to be ruled by men. This is the same in family life between a husband and wife because the wife is expected to stay at home taking care of home affairs, taking care of children, washing clothes, preparing food, fetching water, bringing fire-wood, cleaning the house and meeting the needs of family members. When it comes to major decision making it is husband's duty and she has to abide within his rules and his decisions whether these are good or bad. In the Church, men are treated as higher human beings and women are treated as lower human beings. Men are appointed as the leaders in most of the Christian theological institutions and Christian mission organisations in India and such institutions and organisations are deprived of the leadership of educated and capable women. Therefore all Christian women including Dalit Christian women in India live in the context of male dominated Christianity. Men's voices are the norm and they are heard in the Church but women's voices are silenced. There are many Christian leaders, who

beaten and imprisoned. The earlier decree allowing Dalit Christian women to wear upper clothes was cancelled and then Christians were ordered to obey all the old caste laws. The same issue arose again in 1858 and a persecution continued until July 1859. However, in July 1859, Sir Charles Trevelyan, who was the governor of Madras, declared a proclamation, allowing members of the lower castes to wear clothes over their breasts and shoulders. There followed a large ingathering of converts. J. Waskom Pickett, *Christian Mass Movements in India: A Study with Recommendation*, New York: The Abingdon Press, 1933, pp. 41, 42.

⁴³⁵ Catharine A. Mackinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 52.

treat women as weak vessels and fragile personalities. All these views have a great impact upon the lives of Dalit Christian women, who are at the bottom of all kinds of hierarchy.

Dalit Christian women are born as women and therefore they experience violence oppression on the basis of their gender. Dalit Bandhu states that all women in India including Brahmin women are Dalits because they experience oppression and they are the slaves to men because of their gender. A female is the slave of her father until her marriage, she is the slave of her husband after her marriage, when she becomes a widow, then she is the slave of her son, this is what the canon of the Brahmin or Manusmriti declares.⁴³⁶ Therefore, power imbalances based on gender can invoke violence against Dalit Christian women. Kumari writes:

Violence usually accompanies power and is used to maintain power. The aim is always to induce the subordinate group or individual to comply with the wishes of the stronger.⁴³⁷

The power imbalance based on the caste hierarchy and the power imbalances based on the inequality of gender affect the daily lives and practices of Dalit Christian women therefore, they are more vulnerable to various forms of violence and they are silent survivors of violence. Dalit femaleness is a form of powerlessness in the higher caste dominated society in India. MacKinnon is right in pointing out that maleness is considered as a form of power:

Looking at the facts of the abuses of women all at once, you see that a woman is socially defined as a person who, whether or not she is or has been, can be treated in these ways by men at any time, and little, if anything, will be done about it. This is what it means when feminists say that maleness is a form of power and femaleness is a form of powerlessness.⁴³⁸

When the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) released the Black Paper⁴³⁹ on 8th December 1999, it uncovered what rights are denied to Dalits in India.

The National Campaign Manifesto states, “Every hour 2 Dalits are assaulted; everyday 3 Dalit women are raped; everyday 2 Dalits are murdered; everyday 2 Dalit houses are burnt

⁴³⁶ Bandhu, *Dalit Daivasasthram*, pp. 11, 12.

⁴³⁷ Radha Kumari, ‘Crime Against Women- Role of NGOS’ in O. C. Sharma (ed.), *Crime Against Women*, New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1994, p. 146.

⁴³⁸ MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, pp. 170, 171.

⁴³⁹ In his greetings to ‘Friends in Solidarity with Dalits’ N. Paul Divakar, the National Convenor for National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights writes, “This Black paper is a collective expression of Dalit rights and a critique of the Indian State for failing to adequately fulfil these rights.” N. Paul Divakar, Greetings from the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, Secunderabad, 1998. Black paper folder contains Campaign Manifesto, six Demands Sheets and Campaign closing events.

down.”⁴⁴⁰ These kinds of violence may be recorded but how many Dalit women are discriminated against or verbally abused daily on the basis of their caste, skin colour and gender are yet to be documented.

Gail Omvedt writes about the social violence against the lower caste women: “They are more subject to social violence (or “social patriarchy”)- molestation, rape, murder by local goondas, landlords, contractors, political bosses, and so on.”⁴⁴¹

Dalit women experience inequality of power through the sexual violence they experience from the high caste men. G.S. Bhargava⁴⁴² and R. M. Pal⁴⁴³ write:

Sexual violence may be a general problem from which women in general suffer; in the case of Dalit women, it is far more intense and widespread. Because of lower social attitude towards Dalit women and their economic dependence, they become victims of the high caste sexual violence, on a scale far greater than that of the non-Dalit women. Between 1981 and 1986 about 4000 Dalit women became victims of rape. In 1993 and 1994 this figure rose to 798 and 992 respectively. This means annually about seven hundred Dalit women fall prey to the sexual assault by high caste people.⁴⁴⁴

Carol J. Adams argues that threats of violence are common experiences in women’s lives⁴⁴⁵ regardless of their social context. However, I learned that the threats of violence are more common in the lives of Dalit Christian women. They are the survivors of violence in their own families because of their low economic status, illiteracy and the joint family system. They are the silent sufferers in Christianity because of the teaching of the church to ‘suffer’ in silence and to ‘forgive’ the violators. They are the survivors of discrimination within the Church because of the domination by Syrian Christians and other high caste Christians.

Dalit Christian Women’s Experience

It can be noticed that the so-called traditional Christian theology in India has been formulated from the perspectives of high caste Christian men, and it does not consider Dalit Christian women’s experience a source for reflection. Even Dalit Theology focuses

⁴⁴⁰ *National Campaign Manifesto: Dalit Human Rights* 10th Dec. 1998-15th Aug. 1999, Secunderabad: 1998, p. 26.

⁴⁴¹ Gail Omvedt, *Violence Against Women: New Movements and New Theories in India*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1990, p. 7.

⁴⁴² G. S. Bhargava is a senior columnist. He has written widely on human rights issues.

⁴⁴³ Dr. R. M. Pal is Hon. Editor of *PULL Bulletin*, published by the People’s Union for Civil Liberties. He was Hon. Managing editor of *The Radical Humanists*, a journal.

⁴⁴⁴ G. S. Bhargava & R. M. Pal, *Human Rights of Dalits: Societal Violation*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1999, p. 165.

on the perspectives of Dalit Christian men and it ignores the experiences of the Dalit Christian women. Therefore, it can be argued that the Dalit Christian women's experiences are excluded by theologies in India. Moreover their stories are untold and ignored by the so-called orthodox Christian theology in India.

Stories Have Not Been Told

For the Dalit Christian women who participated in my research, their stories were untold stories. One reason why Dalit women's stories are 'untold' stories is because there was no one to listen to their stories. *Shame* prevents Dalit Christian women from being open about their experiences in tightly knit communities and there was no one from outside demonstrating an interest in listening to their stories. The fear of *social isolation* within the community and the *threat* from in and outside the community too prevents Dalit Christian women from telling their stories. Their space was constricted, their mouths were shut, their life stories were unrecorded, and their voices were not heard in the dominant discourse. My research among Dalit Christian women and the strategies I used for the ethnographic research created a platform for Dalit Christian women, a space, where they told their untold stories.

Hearing into Speech

Carol J. Adams emphasises the importance of hearing women into speech, "Hearing women into speech shifts the episteme and intersects with a basic feminist theological tenet of starting with women's experience."⁴⁴⁵

In my research listening carefully to the speeches of Dalit women was important because it gave space for their voices to emerge. I gave full attention to the person who spoke, observed the person and listened to the speech and because I wanted to learn from them by hearing into speech. When I listened to their speeches and their life stories, I learned from their lived experiences and their 'theories' constructed out of situated knowledge. My listening gave them the courage to talk, reflect and share their life experiences because they realised that there was someone showing an interest in their voices and their life-stories.

⁴⁴⁵ Carol J. Adams & Marie M. Fortune (eds.), *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, New York: Continuum, 1995, 1998, p. 13.

⁴⁴⁶ Adams, *Violence Against Women*, p. 29.

Giving Significance to Experience and Recording it

Dalit Christian women's experiences are a significant source to construct a contextual Practical Theology. Therefore, I tape-recorded their speeches in the one-day seminar, two Bible Study groups and their informal conversations with me. All those speeches were in Malayalam language. I transcribed all speeches after my arrival in Glasgow and later translated it to English.

What is a Dalit Christian Woman's Story: The Shape it gives to Experience

Dalit Christian women's life stories are based on their lived-experiences and their experiences are an essential source to construct feminist practical theology. The informal conversation with my informants helped me to collect their life stories.

A Dalit woman's story is based on her daily experience; space and time have shaped experience. For example, in the case of a Dalit woman, who is a survivor of rape, we need to understand where the rape took place, when and how, and the significance she gives to it in her own 'self narrative.' The context of the experience shapes a Dalit woman's story. I observed that Dalit Christian women are eager to tell their life stories, to tell the stories they have lived, as Atkinson states:

Most people are eager to tell of their experience, to tell the stories they have lived, because they are what they know best and are also what are of most interest to them.⁴⁴⁷

Dalit women's life stories are personal documents and they can be considered texts as Atkinson emphasises:

As a personal document, a life story is a text like any other document or story in any other field. It can stand on its own because, like a novel or poem, it automatically and immediately evokes certain individual responses based on the experience it describes or the perspective of the reader.⁴⁴⁸

Dalit Christian women's life stories are a fresh text constructed through my ethnographic research through a listening and transcribing process.

The Way the Narrator Transforms the Story

The way the researcher may transform stories is an important issue in ethnographic

⁴⁴⁷ Robert Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1998, p. 22.

⁴⁴⁸ R. Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, p. 70

research on violence experienced by Dalit Christian women. Since a life story is a personal oral testimony, the researcher needs to be very careful not to make any changes in the words of the informant. When the researcher carefully transcribes and translates the story it is as if the voice of the researched is heard through the words and sentences constructed by the researcher. Therefore, if the researcher narrates the life stories of Dalit Christian women in their own words, such an approach can allow Dalit women to speak for themselves. Therefore, I tape-recorded the conversation, when I listened to their life stories. My informants and I spoke in the Malayalam language, which is our vernacular. When my informants started to tell their stories, they introduced themselves and then shared their stories. I listened to the tape-recorded conversations each evening, when I returned to my room. Later I transcribed them, when I returned to Glasgow. It took months for me to listen to the cassettes and transcribe all the conversations of my informants. I wrote it down in the same Malayalam language of the informants. Some bits of the conversations are lost; where the words or sentences of the conversations were not clear to me then I had to leave a blank in the text. I did not seek the help of third person to record it because I wanted to protect the privacy of the informants and wanted to keep the conversation confidential. When I translated the conversations from Malayalam language to English language I took extra efforts not to make any changes in the words and sentences of my informants because I wanted my informants to speak to the readers through the text. When I translated the conversations into English in certain places I had to add my own words in order to make sense to the reader and I put my words and my sentences in square brackets. This difficult, painstaking process of transcription took over half a year.

The Reasons for the Ethnographic Research among the Dalit Christian Women

The first reason I did an ethnographic research among Dalit Christian women is because they are the most oppressed, invisible, silent and marginalised women of the caste based society and Churches in India. Secondly, I wanted to explore how much violence the Dalit Christian women experience in their lives and how they cope with this 'violence.' Thirdly from the knowledge gained I would like to challenge the Church to develop alternative responses to the needs of Dalit Christian women in India. Fourthly, no one has previously done research on the violence experienced by Dalit Christian women in Kerala State.

Lastly, I hope that a contextual feminist practical theology relevant to Dalit Christian women can be constructed through this research. Dalit Christian women's experience, their life stories, and their slave narratives are the best available repositories for understanding

violence against women. A research beginning at the bottom of the hierarchy, and *listening to the life stories* of Dalit Christian women will reveal the violence Dalit Christian women experience and value their experiences as a basic source for developing Dalit Feminist Practical Theology. My research demonstrates that Dalit Christian women experience extreme forms of violence in their lived context, and theological forms which do not acknowledge this are irrelevant to their needs.

Myself as an Ethnographer

My First Contact with My Informants

My first contact with my informants was on 14th November 2001 in a meeting in the New India Bible Church at Parippu. The Rev. Thomas Philip introduced me to the audience as a former lecturer of New India Bible College, who is doing PhD research at the University of Glasgow. I was given time to preach in the meeting and I preached on Hagar's *experience* based upon Gen.21: 14-16, and then referred to *women's experience*. At the end of the meeting I was asked to announce about the forthcoming seminar, which was on 19th November 2001. After the announcement, when I asked those women who were willing to attend the seminar to raise their hands, four women raised their hands. Philip announced the same with an addition, "There is no registration fee for the seminar on 19th November, no offering will be taken in the seminar, there is no need to pay for the food and there will be delicious food given free."⁴⁴⁹ After his announcement there were thirty-seven women, who raised their hands⁴⁵⁰ and they gave their names to Ramani Yohannan, who is the wife of the local Pastor. This was my first contact with my informants. The next section analyses the role of the researcher as an ethnographer to Dalit Christian women.

Insider and Outsider Ethnographer

My social research style was different from early ethnographers because I did not encounter alien worlds but my research took place in my own cultural context that shaped my own subjectivity. However, when I explored the violence experienced by Dalit women in Kerala State I was both an 'outsider and an insider,' ethnographer within the research setting. I am not a Dalit by birth therefore I was an outsider ethnographer to the Dalit Christian women. Dalit women do not accept me as one amongst them because my skin

⁴⁴⁹ Rev. Thomas Philip, Meeting on 14th November 2001, New India Bible Church, Parippu. Providing free lunch helped Dalit Christian women to relax. Most of them are very poor and they enjoyed eating delicious food at lunch break. During the lunchtime all women sat on the floor in two rows face to face. It was a nice time for Dalit women to talk to one another and enjoy a lunch together.

colour and my caste differences made them to consider me as an 'outsider' to their caste. However, I was also considered as an insider because I am a Christian and I speak the same language Malayalam, as my informants. I felt like an 'insider,' whenever Dalit Christian women spoke about their experience as women, in bus journeys. For example, I remember two of them shared their experiences of how male passengers behaved indecently to them in the bus. Since I was born and brought up in Kerala, I too sometimes experienced the indecent behaviour of some men in the crowded buses, while I travelled there.

Power Differentials

I wanted to minimise the power differentials between my informants and myself but I knew that it is impossible to eliminate these altogether because of my status as a high caste, educated and married woman. In order to curtail domination by myself, I planned new strategies for exploring the violence experienced in the lives of Dalit Christian women. I was very cautious not to dominate over my informants. I tried to reduce power differentials between my informants and myself, by being with them, sitting on the floor with them, or asked them to sit on a higher seat whilst I took a lower place. I patted on their shoulders as an expression to comfort them, when some Dalit women cried and told their life stories. When I visited their houses to listen to their stories, I ate the food offered by them, drank the tea prepared by them, sat in the same seat in the bus and travelled with my informants; thus I broke the taboo of caste rules.⁴⁵¹ One important way I reduced power differentials between my informants and myself was by working with groups of Dalit Christian women rather than always with individuals. I addressed Dalit Christian women as *Ammama* (elder sister) or *Ammachi* (mother) to show my respect to them. I received a kiss from a Dalit child and gave a kiss to her in return even with these significant gestures power differences continued to exist between my informants and myself because it is not easy to break the boundary lines of caste, colour and educational differences. For example, Kavitha, a Dalit Christian woman, who participated in my research, told me that she cursed her skin colour and questioned God why he had given her a black colour. She told me that even a stranger could realise that she is a Dalit by looking

⁴⁵⁰ Sara Abraham, *Diary*, 14th November 2001.

⁴⁵¹ These two aspects, eating the food offered by Dalits and touching them are necessary to break the traditional taboo of caste rule. I was prepared for this break-through even before my travel to India because I expected that I would come across such contexts when I was there among Dalits. I did not mind in risking my own status as high caste person because when I do these things high caste society might degrade me. My father's forefathers converted to Christianity from Karthakkals, which is one of the high castes in Kerala, my mother is from Syrian Christian community in Kerala State and in this case I am not a born-Dalit but a made-Dalit by being with

to her skin colour. She thought that brown coloured skin was better than her black colour and that black coloured skin is ugly. I tried to create self-confidence in her by appreciating her beauty and advised her to see her own colour as healthy. But power differences are linked to colour differences as Kavitha thinks that her colour is not the norm in the caste-based society. Clearly I cannot change my skin colour or eradicate the distinctions that are made on this basis.

When Kavitha became a close friend, she told me about a conversation, which took place prior to my arrival at Parippu. When they heard that a lady was coming to their Church with Rev. Thomas Philip, the Dalit women commented, “He will come with white skinned [Syrian Christian] ladies.”⁴⁵² When they saw me, they understood that I was not a Dalit and they realised my caste status by looking at my skin colour, which is a bit different from theirs. There were questions in their minds about why I had an interest in the dark-skinned Dalit Christians who are deprived, and degraded by Syrian Christians in Kerala. When the Dalit Christian women understood that my research could expose the violence they experience, most of them expected that my research could bring some practical changes in the lives of their future generations. They co-operated well when they understood that why I was there among them but they constructed their own narratives of me that I must be economically rich enough to study in the West. Some of them even expressed their expectation to get financial or material help from me but I was unable to provide any such assistance.

Ethnographic Settings

I am hesitant to use the word “fieldwork” because my “ethnographic research” is different from the fieldwork. My informants are my “settings.” Most of my informants are from Parippu and five informants are from other places in the Kottayam district. Most of them belong to New India Bible Church at Parippu and a few belong to other denominations but all of them gathered together in New India Bible Church at Parippu. My full concentration was on my informants, no matter wherever they stayed or whichever local Churches they belonged to. I did not have to spend time learning the language of the researched because I could communicate in my own mother tongue Malayalam and my informants are Malayalees.⁴⁵³ I did not have to learn the culture of the Kerala State since I was born and

the Dalits, touching them and eating the food offered by them. When I did these things, I detached myself from our age-old family tradition and caste rules.

⁴⁵² Transcript of Conversation between Sara Abraham and Kavitha Johnson, 27th November 2001, New India Bible Church, Parippu.

⁴⁵³ Malayalees are people of Kerala State and whose vernacular is Malayalam language.

brought up in the same State. For these reasons there was no need for me to spend several months or years with my informants but I spent a short span of time with my informants.

My role as an ethnographer was as a listener, learner and observer of Dalit Christian women. I listened to the life stories of the researched, observed their facial expressions, and recorded their speeches and life stories. When I listened to the life stories of the Dalit Christian women, I learned from them. I listened to them when they interpreted the scripture from their own perspective and co-related the scripture with their slave narratives. When my informants constructed narratives of me 'Why am I there among them,' I made it clear to the informants with regard to 'Why am I there,' and 'Who am I.'

Personal Relationships

Dalit Christian women trusted me within a very short span of time and they were confident to share with me the secrets of their lives. When I listened to their stories and problems, they received relief and healing through that process. They sought guidance and counselling from me and I was asked to pray for them. They believed that prayer changes things and God answers prayer. One of my participants, who was the wife of a Pastor, gained very special strength through my ethnographic research work. She told me, "This is the first time in thirty-three years I am sharing my experience.... I could have received some peace if I had shared my experience but there was nobody [to listen to me]."⁴⁵⁴ Alice Mathai another participant in the research told me, "I have been looking for a person with whom I can share my painful experience confidentially."⁴⁵⁵ My ethnographic work amongst them created friendships between the Dalit Christian women and myself.

When I went to India for my ethnographic research there were questions in my mind "Would Dalit Christian women share their stories with me? What will I do if they do not break their silence or if they are afraid to share their life experiences? Would it be possible for me to win their confidence?" There were sleepless nights while I was doing my ethnographic research among the Dalit Christian women because their stories made me to think all night and kept me awake. When I returned to Glasgow, I could not return to my normal life for few weeks because what I had heard from Dalit Christian women was still ringing in my ears. It took some time for me to cope with my own family life because the stories I heard from the Dalit Christian women were fresh in my mind, it has had a great

⁴⁵⁴ Transcript of Conversation between Leela and Sara Abraham in Leela's Residence at Kottayam, on 28th November 2001.

⁴⁵⁵ Transcript of Conversation between Alice Mathai and Sara Abraham in Alice Mathai's Residence at Kalatheppadi, on 26th November 2001.

impact upon my life as a researcher. Dalit Christian women were pouring their grievances from their hearts while they spoke about the violence and discriminations they experienced. My listening to the stories of Dalit Christian women helped me to understand the violence they experience in their lives as Dalit women.

The next section deals with my research strategies.

My Research Strategies

My research is distinct from other research projects in Practical Theology because my concern was to prepare the space for Dalit Christian women to speak. Firstly, I would like to explain why I used a one-day seminar as one of my strategies to create space for communication.

Why One-day Seminar on “Women’s Suffering”?

I would like to point out why I conducted a one-day seminar on “Women’s suffering.” The one-day seminar on “women’s suffering” has created an awareness of how women suffer in their lives and it was a tool for generating information concerned the violence Dalit women experience in their lives. It was the first forum for the Dalit Christian women to talk about the violence they experienced.

The one-day seminar enabled me to make contact with Dalit Christian women and raise issues of concern with them. It was an eye-opener for Dalit Christian women enabling them to think about their own suffering, analyse their own lives, reflect and raise issues related to their own lives. It provided time for them to explore issues together through group discussions and informal chat.

The seminar also functioned as a means of gaining information about Dalit Christian women and their informed consent to participate in my research. There was no registration fee for thirty-two women, who were present in the one-day seminar conducted on 19th November 2001, at New India Bible Church in Parippu. They could not attend the seminar if there had been a registration fee. Not only that when they came for the seminar they lost one day’s work and wage. All the participants were asked to fill in the registration forms for two reasons. First, filling in the registration forms was to get an initial understanding about the participants in my research. Second, when the participants were asked to sign in the registration forms, their signatures on the forms gave me permission to use the information they provided for my research. Those who were unable to read or write were

given explanations and assistance to fill in forms and they signed the forms. The one-day seminar also helped me to identify a few survivors of violence, who became participants in my later research.

This important day event was intended to start a group process of allowing Dalit Christian women to gain strength and insight. I circulated questions for group discussions, divided the participants into three groups, and requested three Dalit women to lead their own groups in discussion. I divided my time listening to each group's discussion and their reflections. I visited the three groups and cleared their doubts and explained the questions I was asking. They discussed all the questions, explored issues related to their lives, and then wrote down their answers on the sheets provided. They evaluated their own life experiences on the basis of the questions provided. The group discussions encouraged them to speak out with self-esteem and courage. When Dalit women discussed questions and answers in groups, such group discussions gave them strength and insights. When I read through the question and answer sheets filled by participants, I found that some of them wanted a private talk with me. Therefore, I could identify a few more survivors of violence. I did not record the discussions of three groups but I kept my tape-recorder in one group to record their discussions.

The seminar was conducted with the purpose of enabling Dalit women to share their experiences voluntarily in public. While I spoke on "women's sufferings" I referred to the experiences of women, who survived violence and this gave them courage to share their experiences voluntarily in public. In the afternoon session seven women shared their experiences voluntarily. I sat in a corner on the floor opposite to the women to observe them, to listen to their speeches and to record their speeches. Finally, six women reflected by sharing their opinions about the one-day seminar.

My second strategy was conducting participatory Bible studies amongst Dalit women.

Why Bible Studies?

Conducting Bible studies for Dalit women helped me to focus my research on Christians.

In order to explore the violence Dalit Christian women experience, I started the Bible study groups with two selected Biblical passages, which centred upon the violence against two women. I expected that these particular scripture portions might provoke the thoughts and reflections of Dalit Christian women and could encourage them to interpret the scripture,

co-relate it to their own lives and lead them to talk about the violence they experience. I expected Dalit Christian women to interpret the scripture from their own perspectives and to evaluate their lives on the basis of the scripture studied. My other purpose was to encourage them to talk about violence against Dalit Christian women and to make them courageous to unfold their own experiences of violence.

I conducted two Bible studies in New India Bible Church at Parippu on 21st and 23rd November 2001. Nineteen women participated in the first Bible study and the text was taken from 2 Samuel 13:1-19, about the rape of Tamar. None of them expected a Bible study based on 2 Samuel 13: 1-19 and few of them mentioned that it was the first time they used this scripture portion for a Bible study. The questions given for their reflection were “If you were in the place of Tamar what would have been your response? What do you think about this story?”

I refrained from sharing my ideas with them in order to listen to their imaginations and responses that are contextual. Literate women participated in reading the scripture, illiterate women and women who could not read without using spectacles listened to the reading. Dalit Christian women broke their silences by interpreting the scripture, reflecting, sharing their imaginations, thoughts, and experiences. Thirteen women participated in the second Bible study conducted on 23rd November 2001 and the scripture portion was taken from Judges 19:1-30, which was based on a Levite and his concubine. After reading the scripture, Dalit Christian women interpreted the scripture from their perspective.

Bible studies were conducted to uncover the violence Dalit Christian women experience. The use of scripture gave Dalit Christian women authority, power, confidence and courage to uncover the violence they experienced. It is unusual and indecent in Kerala to talk in public about sex or sexual violence but scripture enabled them to talk about the sexual violence, cultural violence and domestic violence they experienced. These thought-provoking passages encouraged them to share their views and to talk about their lived experiences. Their memories went back to their childhood, youth and present experiences and recalled the discriminations and violence they had experienced in their private and public lives.

The process of Bible study was understood in Dalit Christian culture. Singing is part of the Dalit culture and Dalit Christian women are good singers. They use their singing talents, when they gather together in the Church. They clap their hands according to the rhythm.

Singing is part of the Dalit culture and it is part of their Christian practice. They release their tensions and agonies through singing. Elsamma Babychen a survivor of domestic violence comforts herself by singing Christian songs.⁴⁵⁶ Annamma Devasya interpreted the scripture by singing a song that emphasises the desires of women.⁴⁵⁷ Kavitha Johnson sang a seedling song that emphasises the wisdom of a Dalit girl Neele, who escapes from her young landlord. Dalit women are capable of communicating through songs.

Those present at the Bible studies interpreted the scripture from their perspective. Kavitha, one of the informants, emphasised the necessity of understanding the meanings of words and phrases when we study the scripture.⁴⁵⁸ She interpreted word by word and asked questions, for example, “What does it mean in that context?” They interpreted the scripture, shared their imaginations and thoughts on the basis of the scripture read in the group. Their daily ‘Christian practice’ is their biblical commentary and this helps them to interpret scripture in contextual ways.

The two Bible studies opened up a forum for Dalit women to talk in public of the violence they experienced and proved that Dalit women have immense knowledge and resources for survival. Their knowledge and survival resources are based on their daily experiences and their theories come out of their lived experiences. Illiterate Dalit women also had something to share from their life experiences and they used their wisdom when they spoke. It is a usual practice for Dalit Christian women to refer to the Bible as they talk with Christians. They evaluate their own lives and actions, in the light of the scripture they know.

My third research strategy was to engage in informal conversations with Dalit Christian women.

Why Informal Conversations between the Researcher and the Informants?

These informal conversations were private talks between my informant and myself. I preferred to use informal conversations instead of formal interviews because if I set out with questionnaires, it would have threatened the Dalit women and made them resistant to talking because of their lack of education. When I used informal questions in between our

⁴⁵⁶ Transcript of Conversation between Elsamma Babychen and S. Abraham, 27/11/2001.

⁴⁵⁷ Annamma Devasya, Bible Study conducted at New India Bible Church, Parippu on 23rd November 2001.

conversations, it did not threaten them and they were courageous to answer my informal questions. Each informal conversation lasted at least one hour. I kept the tape-recorder close to the informant to record the conversation and gave my full attention to the person, who spoke. Neither my informant nor myself bothered about the presence of the tape recorder and our conversations were very genuine.

Two informants requested me not to mention their name or address when I referring to their experiences and it is essential to protect their privacy for safety reasons. These informal conversations with Dalit Christian women were simple and straightforward. For example, when Annamma Devasya approached me in the Church for an informal conversation, I asked her, “How did you come today? Did you tell a lie today also?” When I switched on the tape, Annamma started to answer my question, which was informal and straightforward. She stated, “If I tell the truth, they will not send me to attend this Bible study.”⁴⁵⁹ She told me that she came for the first Bible study by telling a lie to her master. Her work is washing vessels in the house of a high caste family.

Of course I could not witness or observe my informants as they experienced violence. Nevertheless I came to understand the depth of the violence they had suffered. For example, when Elsamma spoke to me when she her eyes were overflowing with tears and I could see two shiny lines through her cheeks from the beginning to the end of an hour’s conversation.

Annamma Devasya’s body bears the deep scars of what has happened in her life. In between our conversations she showed me a scar on her leg and explained how her husband had attacked her. Although I could not witness the violence she experienced I realised the depth of domestic violence she went through by observing her scar. Annamma tried to commit suicide twice because of the violence she suffered. In one instance, she hung herself by using a borrowed sari and in another instance, she poured kerosene oil on her body and tried to set fire to herself but she was saved.

Susamma James was silent for a long time in between our informal conversations and I could learn from her silence that she was holding an unbearable burden. She was very keen to listen to each footstep outside and when she was sure that there was no one listening to

⁴⁵⁸ Kavitha Johnson explains the necessity of knowing the meanings of word like “concubine” and phrase such as “there was no king in Israel.” Kavitha Johnson, Bible Study conducted at New India Bible Church, Parippu on 23rd November 2001.

⁴⁵⁹ Transcript of Conversation between Annamma Devasya and Sara Abraham at New India Bible Church, Parippu, on 23rd November 2001.

her from outside then she spoke about the violence she experienced and about the rape her teenage daughter had experienced.⁴⁶⁰

I preferred to go to Dalit Christian women's houses for informal conversations because of the following reasons. First, if I did not visit some of their houses they might think that I am a person, who keeps the caste-distinction. Second, I wanted to break the traditional caste taboo by being with Dalit Christian women, visiting them at their houses, and sitting in their houses to listen to their stories. There were four Dalit women, who did not want me to visit them at their houses and who preferred to come to the Church for informal conversations. Three of them wanted to be away from their husbands in order to have privacy for their talks with me and the fourth woman wanted privacy away from her own daughter. Another Dalit woman came to the Church for conversation and then as her hospitality she wanted to offer a free lunch to me. She asked me to wait in the Church until she could bring food from her hut. She did not want me to see her hut. However, I pleaded with her to allow me to visit her hut and then she welcomed me in to her home. There I ate the lunch she offered and she knew that this was contrary to the usual practice among the high caste people in Kerala.

The informal conversations with Dalit women were to enable them to share their life stories. Robert Atkinson explains why the life story is so important:

The life story as a narrative form has evolved from the oral history, life history, and other ethnographic and field approaches. It is a qualitative research method for gathering information on the subjective essence of one person's entire life. It begins as a recorded interview, is transcribed, and ends up as a flowing narrative, completely in the words of the person telling the story. It uses a methodology that is transferable across disciplines and from one researcher to another.⁴⁶¹

Listening to the life stories of Dalit Christian women is very important in the Dalit context because allowing them to tell their life stories enables them to be heard, recognised and acknowledged by the researcher and readers.

As Atkinson writes, "A life story is the essence of what has happened to a person."⁴⁶² Listening to the life story of a Dalit woman is important in my research because she tells what has happened to her in the past, what is happening to her at present and what she is expecting to happen in the future. When a Dalit woman tells her life story, her every

⁴⁶⁰ Transcript of Conversation between Susamma James and Sara Abraham in her Residence at Olassa, on 28th November 2001.

⁴⁶¹ R. Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, p. 3.

⁴⁶² R. Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, p. 8.

experience is shaped in a particular time and space but it is often difficult for her to remember the exact date and year when things happened. For example, when I asked my informant Annamma Devasya when she got married, she replied, “I am not remembering which year.” Although marriage is part of her life story and part of her life history she is unable to remember the date of her marriage. It is impossible to draw a line between life story, life history or oral history of a Dalit woman because what she remembers is her ‘experience.’ A Dalit woman’s life story or life history is not a written source but it is oral history and the researcher gains access to this through informal conversations.

Listening to the life stories of Dalit women is also to recognise that these provide a major source for reflection in Practical Theology. When the researcher listens to her life story, a Dalit woman has broken the silence and the researcher can learn from illiterate Dalit Christian women. In order to articulate a theology based on the experiences of the Dalit Christian women it is important to listen to their life stories.

As Stephen L. Schensul writes:

Narratives and storytelling permit interviewees to speak from experience about situations that illustrate points important for the researcher’s study. Researchers use narratives to obtain information from the informant’s perspective about episodes from beginning to end.⁴⁶³

Conclusion

The strategies I used in my ethnographic research were very effective in uncovering the violence Dalit Christian women experience in their lives. However, when I used these strategies for my ethnographic research, I am not merely observing but also intervening in their context. My ethnographic research was a call for Dalit Christian women’s action and they started to break their silences by speaking out in the seminar, Bible study groups and then sharing their life stories with me. In the next two chapters Dalit Christian women speak for themselves, interpret the scripture from their perspective, explore issues related to their lives and talk about the violence they have experienced and how their faith has sustained them and enabled them to survive.

⁴⁶³ Stephen L. Schensul, Jean J. Schensul, Margaret D. LeCompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods: Observations, Interviews, and Questionnaires*, Walnut Creek, London, New Delhi: Alta Mira Press, 1999, p. 138.

PART II: RESEARCH

CHAPTER FOUR

ONE-DAY SEMINAR AND TWO BIBLE STUDIES

This chapter will present the data generated when Dalit Christian women broke their silence by participating in the one-day seminar and Bible studies.

“Women’s Suffering”: Meta-ethnography at a One-day Seminar

The one-day seminar (described previously) was conducted on 19th November 2001 at the New India Bible Church at Parippu. When the Dalit Christian women gathered for the seminar they covered their heads with the edges of their saris and sat demonstrating their devotion as if they were sitting in church at a traditional Sunday service. As my intention was to develop an informal and participative atmosphere I tried to reassure them about the nature of the day said, “You do not have to cover your head, sit freely: you do not have to sit with fear.”⁴⁶⁴

I began the seminar by speaking about the authority of women’s knowledge and experience and referring to the life-stories of some women who had experienced violence. In the concluding part of this address I said:

Some of you, those who are here might have gone through different kinds of experiences from your childhood onwards. I do not know what kinds of stories and experience you have only you know it. Now, some of you might have a kind of fear in your mind. ‘How can I share my experience in front of these many women? Is it not bad?’ You do not have to be afraid, I will give my ears secretly for you [listen to you], and whatever you share will be in confidence. If you want I will not let another person know your name, place, and where you are from; I will use it only for my research purposes. If you have such experiences, if you share it, and I listen to it, it is a great help for my research.⁴⁶⁵

After my brief introductory talk, the participants were divided into three groups. Three Dalit women were asked to lead these groups and questionnaires for the group discussions were provided for all participants. I divided my time moving between groups and listening to their conversations. Illiteracy was a problem. Therefore Kavitha, one participant, asked,

⁴⁶⁴ One-Day Seminar on “Women’s Suffering,” at New India Bible Church, Parippu on 19th November 2001.

⁴⁶⁵ One-Day Seminar, 19th November 2001.

“Auntie, those who do not know how to write, could we write for them?”⁴⁶⁶ I encouraged illiterate women to seek the help of women who could read and write.

In one group, I heard the wife of the local pastor giving traditional instructions to a woman on how to please her husband: “Prepare the curry that *Achayan*⁴⁶⁷ likes and prepare the food he likes.”⁴⁶⁸ Traditionally, like all other women in India, Dalit Christian women are taught to obey and please their husbands and these conventions are practiced in all spheres of our society. Gradually, however, Dalit women began to move beyond these traditional roles and silence in sufferings and began to speak about the violence and abuse they had experienced.

Every Day Experience of Abuse

Dalit Christian women had been frightened to speak before about the experience which, as Kavitha stated:

We are unable to open up, about what we experienced from [the time of] our childhood because [I] experienced sexual violence in the childhood itself. We do not have the courage to tell it to others.⁴⁶⁹

Alice Mathai, who does not have her own house, described the violence she experienced from her brother-in-law, when she stayed with her married sister:

[I experienced] my elder sister’s husband’s violence and there were many days I could not sleep [because of the fear that he would attack me]. How can [I] tell it in the Church? How can [I] tell it in the society? How can [I] tell it to friends? How can [I] tell it to [my] parents? [I am unable to talk about the violence to my friends, parents or any one in the Church or society] If I tell [my family members] there will be fighting between my siblings. [Their attitude is] “You forgive” [it].⁴⁷⁰

She recalled how she stayed awake for many nights, while others slept at night, because of her fear of violence:

This experience [physical abuses happened] in many nights, [so] while others sleep, I am awake. “Are you reading books?”[they] ask. I read books. I read books and lay down [so that] no one should touch my body until my mother, brother or other sisters arrange a marriage for me and give me to a man. It is my responsibility [to protect my body from the attack of my brother-in-law], that is why I do not sleep at night. I sleep while others sing and pray. [My

⁴⁶⁶ Kavitha Johnson, One-Day Seminar, 19th Nov. 2001.

⁴⁶⁷ *Achayan* is an affectionate term used for calling husband or elder males, who are dear.

⁴⁶⁸ Remani Yohannan, One-Day Seminar, 19th November 2001.

⁴⁶⁹ Kavitha, One-Day Seminar.

⁴⁷⁰ Alice Mathai, One-Day Seminar, 19th Nov. 2001.

family members] threaten me [and blame] “Oh, the child, who has to study sleeps until 9. a. m.” but I am unable to talk about my situation to the family.⁴⁷¹

Dalit women experience various kinds of violence from their childhood onwards. For example, a bus conductor from a high caste molested Kavitha, when she was travelling by bus to her school:

While I was standing behind everybody, the conductor came; there was a pencil in his hand and I still remember it. He poked [on my breast] with that pencil (showing action on her breast). If I say the truth [now, I was ashamed at that time because] all students those who were sitting behind me saw it [what the conductor has done]. I am unable to tell [explain], what difficulty I had [experienced] at that time. I hit him with the box I had in my hand, I gave him one [slap] because of that sorrow.⁴⁷²

Kavitha took courage to beat the conductor, who abused her by poking her breast with a pencil. In response to Kavitha’s story, Alice Mathai, another participant in the research group, also described how she fought back against male abuse in the bus:

Often, in different situations [I experienced] poking and touching [on breasts or buttocks], [but] I am unable to tell it openly; therefore, I go backward or go forward [in order] to avoid it [the disturbance by men]. Why do women not talk [about] the [abuse they experience in the bus]? [Women are afraid because] people might comment ‘She is not good [her character is not good] that is why [men poke or touch her], we are travelling in the bus [but] why do men not poke or touch us?’ When they ask [this question], [women] those who tell it openly do not have space in the society and that is [what] today’s situation. When we talk about [the abuse we experience], when we talk about the society, they think [society consider] that, ‘That is our life style [allowing men to poke or touch in the body].’ When I travel in the bus, I stock a safety pin on my *churidhar*,⁴⁷³ skirt or sari. It was before my coming to [Christian] faith. There is a reason to tell [keep] it [safety pin], they [men who are standing in the bus] lean on [women] and stand [near women] but when the different parts of man’s body is [purposely] touching our body, it is an allergy for us and in such situations, we [get irritated]. [Once] I poked on the *kundi* [buttocks] of a man, even blood came out [from his buttocks] and I did it. I did it because these kinds of experiences [man touches or pokes woman] are [there] in our lives.⁴⁷⁴

The Violence of Discrimination

Kavitha shared how Dalits are discriminated against on the basis of their skin colour:

When I was studying in class 8 [S1] in Sreekumaramangalam High School at Kumarakam, even if many of us are going together I was the most black in colour and a non-beautiful person in the group. Other children did not love me

⁴⁷¹ Alice Mathai, One-Day Seminar, 19th Nov. 2001.

⁴⁷² Kavitha Johnson, One-Day Seminar.

⁴⁷³ Churidhar is a dress, girls and women in North India wear and it includes a loose trouser with a rope around the waist, loose top and a piece of long scarf.

⁴⁷⁴ Alice Mathai, One-Day Seminar, 19th Nov. 2001.

or did not make friendship with me [because of my skin colour and Dalit identity].⁴⁷⁵

Kavitha argues that discrimination on the basis of the skin colour is the greatest violence in the society. Physical violence is visible through the scars in the body but psychological violence is not visible although it causes confusion, mental agony, sadness and loss of self worth. High caste people treat Dalits according to skin colour and if a Dalit woman has fair skin she might get better treatment than the darker Dalit women. Kavitha states:

Ramani Ammama, our Pastor's wife, these are our caste [Cheramar or Pulaya], but she is white [light skin colour], and I experience that difference [discrimination], when we get [together] in to the bus. Those who are born-again from Syrian Christian background, they won't show it to her and in that place they will not look caste [but] there they look [skin] colour. That is one of the biggest violence in today's society. If we can challenge it with this small [one-day] seminar, or by my Holy Spirit's testimony, I am grateful to God.⁴⁷⁶

Kavitha complains that high caste Christian women do not respond well to her, when she greets them:

When I go to Kottayam in a bus if I see spiritual people [Christians] I say *sthothrum* or smile but many times I murmur to God [when they do not respond well] "Why did you [God] give [me] this [black skin] colour? But from opposite side they might say *sthothrum* or anything else."⁴⁷⁷

Abuse within the Christian Community

As the day progressed the women became more confident, when talking about the abuse they suffer not only at home or in public places but also in Church. Alice Mathai explained that she is scared, when male pastors keep their hands on her head and pray for her:

I am scared when [male] pastors keep their hands on head and pray [for me]. Some pastors close their eyes [and some keep them open]. When I worship, I keep my eyes open and sit [because] we [I] do not know through which direction the attack would come. Once a pastor, I am not humiliating or ridiculing him, [when] I [looked and] said *sthothram* to a *sahodari*,⁴⁷⁸ [a male] pastor [was] pampering her from bottom to top. I have seen it by my own eyes, and [he was] speaking [praying] in the midst of the congregation [while others closed their eyes and praying]. [When I saw the pastor pampering her] I changed my place and moved to the back because I am scared [if he comes and put his hands on me for such a prayer]. How to tell this kind of topics? How to tell it to others? The women, who speak openly, they do not have space in the society. There are many women here, who experience violence [but they are afraid to tell because if they tell, then they will not have a space in the society].⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁵ Kavitha Johnson, One-Day Seminar.

⁴⁷⁶ Kavitha Johnson, One-Day Seminar, 19th Nov. 2001.

⁴⁷⁷ Kavitha Johnson, One-Day Seminar.

⁴⁷⁸ *Sahodari* is a Malayalam word, which means sister or a lady.

The Effect of Abuse

The personal impact of socially sanctioned abuse can be devastating for women. Women, who are childless, are often humiliated by insults and this is another cultural problem women face in India. Babykutty explained how she was terrified, when she was unable to produce a child after her marriage:

I lived in my [married] life for four years without [having] any children. In those days I faced many difficulties from my husband's people. I had much oppositions, pains and despairs in my life and often [others used] different kinds of words [to] hurt me. I was grieving much [inside] and there was a time I could not bear it anymore.⁴⁸⁰

If a married woman in India is unable to produce a child, it is seen as a curse or lack of blessings on her. Then people use the word *machi*⁴⁸¹ in order to hurt the woman.

Annamma Devasya was so devastated by her experiences that she tried to take her own life:

My brother purchased [a land for me at Thiruvananthapuram]. Then my husband and I were living there as a family. Even if we lived [together], it was not a good life [because] there was no happiness and peace. There were beatings, wrestling, everyday [we] quarreled and [then] I thought not to live [anymore]. One day when he went somewhere I told a neighbor sister [lady] that 'I don't want to live in this world.' She told me that 'Peace is not from here, God will give it [if you] come with us for prayer.' I went with them to pray for two or three days but I did not get any peace. I said, 'I do not want to live in this world, I want to die.' There was not even an old cloth for me to wear (crying) I used to cry and request [my husband to] buy a *kailee*⁴⁸² and I used to quarrel for it because no one bought anything for me (crying). I went to a Christian house nearby, borrowed a sari and I told them that it is [I need a sari] to [wear and] go for prayer. I [used it, when I] went for prayer for two days. After two days there was quarrel [between my husband and me]. I said that I do not want to live again. When he went outside somewhere [I tried to hang myself] on the roof of that house, it was a small house, and its doors were made out of coconut leaves. I sent my child outside. I closed both doors [and then] I tied that sari [on the roof] and hanged myself. When I hanged myself, my child was running around the house outside. A sister in the neighborhood heard [child's] call '*amme, amme*.'⁴⁸³ She ran and came but could not open the door, [then] she cut it, pulled it, I do not know how she [managed to] pull and open it. Then she caught my both legs and lifted me up, I do not know how [she did it], and then she untied me. I was unconscious by that time [and then] she gave me water and helped. Later I recovered from it.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁷⁹ Alice Mathai, One-Day Seminar, 19th November 2001.

⁴⁸⁰ Babykutty, One-Day Seminar.

⁴⁸¹ *Machi* is a derogative term used in the Malayalam language for a woman, who is unable to give birth to a child.

⁴⁸² *Kailee* is a piece of cotton cloth with stripes to wrap around the waist.

⁴⁸³ *Amma* is a word in Malayalam, which means mother. When a child calls mom the word *Amme* is used in Malayalam.

⁴⁸⁴ Annamma Devasya, One-Day Seminar, 19th November 2001.

I was encouraged by the courage of Dalit women beginning to share together their experiences and how their confidence developed during the day. The one-day seminar made me acutely aware of the various forms of violence they had experienced and how these were related. This knowledge was very helpful to me, as I planned two Bible studies, which were also important occasions enabling me to know the women better and hear how they reconciled their everyday experiences of violence with their Christian faith.

Violence against Women: Meta-ethnography at Two Bible Study Groups

Bible Study One: Rape of Tamar⁴⁸⁵

This study was conducted on 21st November 2001. I reached the church at Parippu at 9.30 a.m. I saw Kavitha in a dirty nightgown sweeping the church, her husband was dusting the mats and their little girl was crying for her mother's attention. At 10.00 a.m. Kavitha's husband left the church with the child but Kavitha was still walking around in the nightgown. I expected her to get dressed and be ready for the Bible study therefore; I reminded her that it was time for the Bible study. She understood what I meant and replied that she had brought her sari and then she went inside the toilet, which is without roof and door. There she managed to put on her five and half metre white colored sari and came out within a few seconds.

When I had met Kavitha for the first time at the one-day seminar, her manner and behaviour revealed her to be a brave, smart and powerful lady. I therefore requested her to help me prepare for the bible study by purchasing some milk and tea powder. I gave her the money to buy it. When she returned the remaining coins to me she confessed, "Auntie, I did not buy milk for a long time, when my baby saw me boiling milk, she started to cry for getting it. [Then] I took a glass of milk from that because of my child's crying."⁴⁸⁶ I remained silent in appreciation of her honesty and my realization of the great struggle of Dalit mother to buy a glass of milk for her little girl.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁵ II Samuel 13: 1-19.

⁴⁸⁶ Kavitha Johnson in her personal conversation with Sara Abraham on 21st November 2001 at New India Bible Church Parippu. I have not recorded this conversation since it was a personal talk but I wrote it down in my note.

⁴⁸⁷ Later, when I visited Kavitha's one room hut, I understood how poor she was. The hut was almost barren except for two earthen pots and one cracked full plate in which they serve food, two small bowls, two spoons and a glass. There were few old cloths folded and kept on a rope tied from one edge to the other edge inside of the hut. A small bench and one desk was all the furniture and I do not know whether they borrowed it from some one in order to give a seat for me inside the hut.

The Bible study was programmed to start at 10.00 a.m. but the women were late and by 10.45 a.m. only twelve women were present in the Church. A few more women arrived by 11.10. a. m. and altogether there were 19 women, who attended the Bible study. I reflected that a researcher need to be highly flexible, when doing research among poor and illiterate Dalit Christian women in Kerala State. Rescheduling meant a later start time and eventually Annamma Devasya shared reflections with this moving prayer:

Lord, we pray for the blessing. *Sthothrum*, hallelujah. Lord, we thank you for bringing this sister [Sara] in our midst. Hallelujah. God, we pray to give strength and health to this sister. Lord, we praise you. God thank you for giving [her] the grace to tell many things to us and helping us to rejoice. Lord, we pray for making this meeting a blessing to us. Lord, hallelujah. God we pray to [you to] bring immediately those who are coming. Lord, we praise you, hallelujah. God, we praise you with gratitude, hallelujah. God, more than our happiness, make it [this Bible study] a blessing. Lord, give us different [scripture] verses, and we pray for it. Lord, we praise you, hallelujah. We praise God with gratitude, hallelujah. Lord, *sthothrum*...everything [we ask] in the name of Jesus.⁴⁸⁸

When Devasya stopped the prayer, all participants said together *Amen* and then they sang a Malayalam song *Anugrahathin adhipadiye, ananthakripa perumnathiye*.⁴⁸⁹ Praying and singing are customary practices in the Church but I did not want to follow the traditional patterns of Bible study.

A Different Kind of Bible Study

Dalit Christian women are used to hearing devotional reflections on the Bible after which they are asked to apply the word of God to their lives by making a personal commitment or decision. I did not expect my participants to make any traditional commitments or decisions but I wanted them to talk, reflect and interpret the scripture from their perspective and explore their own experiences. Therefore, I said in my introduction:

Today's Bible study is a very special kind of Bible study. All of us will read a scripture portion; we read it in a very different way because I selected a scripture portion, which was an incident. Therefore, we are not going to read it as if we read the scripture on Sundays. We need to read it in the same way that we read a story that happened.⁴⁹⁰

I did not want my participants to follow the traditional way of reading the Bible because such readings are with much devotion and fear. Women cover their heads, when they read the Bible in the Church on Sundays. I asked them to read the selected scripture portion as they would read a story or an incident. I was looking forward to learn from Dalit women

⁴⁸⁸ Annamma Devasya, Bible Study at New India Bible Church, Parippu on 21st November.

⁴⁸⁹ God is the source of all blessings and grace is flowing like a big river.

how they interpret and relate the scripture to their own context and how they would uncover the violence they experience in their own lives.

I made it clear that it was their turn to talk about the particular scripture portion: "I am not going to teach anything today. You need to talk about the concepts and thoughts in your heart that relate to this scripture portion."⁴⁹¹

I informed my informant that I had come to share with them through listening to them and learning from them: "I came to learn from you. I came to listen to every one of you" and "I am using more time to listen to you."⁴⁹²

I had chosen a scripture portion that vividly describes women's experience and which had been neglected by male pastors and preachers in India.⁴⁹³ I said:

We selected a scripture portion, which has not been used by pastors or priests. As I mentioned earlier, this Bible study is only for ladies. Our Bible study and seminar are related to a very special topic that is why such a special scripture portion is selected for today's Bible study. So we have to concentrate fully on that scripture portion. When you tell your opinion it is better not to go to any other area. This is not the time for evangelization. Therefore, we have to concentrate fully on this scripture portion.⁴⁹⁴

When I announced the text for the Bible study, "Today's scripture portion is taken from II Samuel chapter 13 verses from 1-19,"⁴⁹⁵ some of them immediately realized that a neglected scripture portion had been chosen for Bible study. All the participants were asked to read the scripture portion in rotation as we read a story.

Reading the Life-story of Tamar

All participants except two women took part in reading the scripture. When the readings

⁴⁹⁰ Sara Abraham, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁴⁹¹ If the participants tell their names before they share their views, it can be convenient for the researcher to tape record the talk and later transcribe it with the knowledge of who is speaking. Therefore, I asked them to introduce themselves, when they share their views and concepts: "There is time for you to speak about your thoughts and what special things you have to tell in relation to that scripture portion. Therefore, there is time for everybody. When you share your thoughts and opinions in relation to today's scripture portion, first of all you tell your name. The reason is that by listening to the tape-recorded voice, I will not be able to recognize who is speaking. You introduce yourself, tell your name, and then share your opinion. All of you will have time to talk." Sara Abraham, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁴⁹² Sara Abraham, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁴⁹³ I observed that Dalit women came for the Bible study with their Bibles and I did not ask them to bring it. They expected to have a traditional Bible study, where they listen to the male pastor or male priest, who conducts it.

⁴⁹⁴ Sara Abraham, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁴⁹⁵ Sara Abraham, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

by the two participants were over, then there was a murmur between two women. I did not understand why they were talking but later I understood that the next woman had difficulty with reading. After the scripture reading I asked them to close their Bibles and requested them to think for a while in five minutes silence. Later I found some of the women still looking at their Bibles and reading the story. I requested them to listen to my reading. As I read a story to another person, I read clearly and loudly the same scripture portion in the Malayalam language, and I did it especially for the sake of women, who were unable to read. There was silence again. In order to listen to the imaginations of Dalit women, I asked them to put their feet into the shoes of Tamar when they talked.

Dalit Women Reflect

With reference to the sexual relations between relatives in the story of Tamar Remani Yohannan, the wife of the local pastor, pointed out that even brothers are also men with feelings:

In my imagination, if I tell my opinion, men, and even if it is my brother he is a man...I can share the experience from my life about my children. I make them to sit and study and when it is time to sleep, my daughter says, 'I will sleep with *achachen* [my brother],' [then I said] 'no daughter you sleep with me.'⁴⁹⁶

Remani emphasizes that when men are emotional they do not think about the identity of their victim:

[I think] in my heart suddenly, that these men always have feelings immediately. For women it is, I do not know how to tell, yes they [women] have controlling power, but men do not have it. Therefore, man will not think whether it is mother or sister in that situation, when his feeling is up [higher].⁴⁹⁷

Ramani tells that a girl needs to be very careful, when she mingles with men or male relatives:

It may be [their] own uncles, [who are] mother's brothers, even if it is near uncles, sister's daughters should not mingle, sit together, talk, or get involved [with them] in food matters more than a certain limit.⁴⁹⁸

Ramani suggests that a daughter must be careful, when she goes to her father's room, when he is alone:

Beside a husband [she can go to her husband without permission], [but] a girl should not go to a room without permission, when [her] father is alone, or any men [alone], father or brothers [when any of them are alone in a room].⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁶ Remani Yohannan, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁴⁹⁷ R. Yohannan, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁴⁹⁸ R. Yohannan, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

Ramani's advice is not to go to any male's room, when he is alone, but it is impossible to practise this in an educational and working set up or even within the family environment. If a daughter avoids going to her father's room, it might damage the trust and harmonious relationship between the father and daughter.

Ramani describes how men get attracted to women:

If we wear a nice dress it is pleasing for their eyes. Some words are to deceive [and it is] sweet words for women. Ladies words make men to melt, our moving, talks, and our behaviours [also melts them], these are the experiences of women or sisters to attract men.⁵⁰⁰

Ramani finds women's words and their dealings are the causes to attract men. However, it is impossible for women to be dumb and lifeless objects in order to avoid the attraction of men.

Ramani states how important it is for a woman to use her insight in her daily life:

One Pastor comes and asks [you] 'Sister, how are you?' At that time there is no one [no male] at home. Then [the woman replies], 'Brother [husband] is not here.' [In that situation] there will be change for [male's attitude] and woman must have the insight to see it, therefore, she can avoid such traps. [For example] I am telling something about my daughter, I listen to the fourteen or fifteen years old girl's talks, her make-ups and her walk. If brother and sister talk a lot, I listen to [their conversations]. Few months ago my elder sister's son was with us. One day my two children and sister's son, three of them stayed [in our house] for one night, [when] we were conducting a service [in the Church]. We returned on the same night after the service. I was worried because both are sons, and sister's son is [as] my son but I had something in my mind. I thought, 'if there is an immediate feeling in his mind, my child, my daughter [becomes a prey for it].' Therefore, I did not stay anywhere [but] we returned. Therefore, women must have abilities to understand this kind of movements. If we understand it then we can find ways to escape [from such traps].⁵⁰¹

There is nothing wrong if an unmarried girl talks to a male but it might be worth it to understand what kind of personality he is; and, then a woman can decide whether it is safe for her to talk much to him.

Annamma Devasya told a story of how a brother became attracted to his own sister:

All [of you] are saying that they are brother and sister [Amnon and Tamar], it is right [they are] brother and sister but he does not think in his mind that it is [his] 'sister,' [but] he sees her as a prostitute. If you ask 'why,' he asked [her] to make a cake but he was not hungry for the cake, his hunger was for her; I

⁴⁹⁹ R. Yohannan, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁵⁰⁰ R. Yohannan, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁵⁰¹ R. Yohannan, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

see it in that way. Or if he were given the cakes on that day, would there be an end for his hunger? No. His hunger was for [getting] her, [it was there] everyday, that hunger was developed not within a day. [The hunger was there] whenever he saw her, as she grows [from] ten or sixteen years old. When [his] own sister grows from the age of thirteen, both the brother and sister see [notice] each other from that time onwards. The relationship between the brother and sister continues always. Now a sister there [she points out to the canal near the church], taking bath on the side of this canal, [it is] attraction, and her brother is coming [through that way]. *Eda*, how do [woman] take bath in the side of this canal, [when she takes bath] what [she] wore is removed, bracer [bra], even bracer, and there may not be a bracer [on her breast]. There are brothers who look, when [sister] wears a bracer. Even if it is inside a room, [when a girl] changes her dress, brothers continue to see. That time [there is] other [sexual] attraction, [because] her brother sees it [breasts]. I would like to talk openly, when wearing a bracer; brothers continue to see the chest and breasts (laughter by participants). It is only because of 'this' [desire] brother [is attracted] (laughter continues). It is not the cake made by sister that attracted [him] but it was the attraction to take [her] as his wife. [Some of you said that] she should have bitten him, or beat him, [but] it is not possible. 'Why' always this sister [Tamar] is blamed [in your talks], 'she should have bitten or beat or pinched,' but it is not possible. If we say 'he is my brother [therefore,] he will not do anything,' and 'he will pamper me,' it is wrong [if] we think it. Always we [have to see own brother as] man. Let me say [one example], last year we three- four ladies were working in a house. There are three boys and two girls in that house. We reach there for the work at 8.00 in the morning. We changed our dress and got ready [put on working dress] to carry the baskets of mud in the courtyard. I was asked to stand at last [in the queue] to put this mud. I discover the *kallakali* [hidden- play] of children. When we were working, that girl [their] second daughter, [who] goes to college [was] in a room. She suddenly had a bath and got ready to go to college, [at that time] that brother should have gone out from [the room]. I am ashamed to tell [what] I saw one day. She removed her bracer [bra], and pulled another bracer, but brother was not moving, why was he not moving from there? He got closer [to her] because he saw this 'attraction' [bare-breast].⁵⁰²

As Devasya explains, a bare-breasted sister might be an attraction for her brother. If a woman's bare-breast is an attraction for men and it might be due to such attraction, high caste women protected themselves by covering their breasts, whereas Dalit women were forced to be bare-breasted.

An Educated Dalit Girl's Reflection

A graduate and unmarried Dalit girl Omana reflected:

Here [in this incident] a brother and sister [Tamar and Amnon are involved]. If we say in our ordinary language, if it [such relationship] happened to me, there is no meaning in living after that because we do not see our brother in that way. If we think in an ordinary stage, one woman related to a man [had sex with another man] who is not a relative, if such danger happened then there is no

⁵⁰² Annamma Devasya, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

desire [for woman] to live after it. Then if it [rape] is by her brother certainly either [she becomes] a mental patient or there will not be any desire [for her] to live thereafter. All of you said that 'Tamar could do 'this' or she could do 'that.' It does not mean that Tamar did not do anything and if we read one more verse we will understand it. "My brother do not do it, do not humiliate me, do not do this wickedness, this is not suitable in Israel." Then at last it [is written], he was [physically] stronger than her, therefore, he did *balalsangam* [rape] by *balalkkaram* [force]. It is not told outside clearly, whether she kicked, beat or punched him, but it is said briefly.⁵⁰³

Omana states, "We do not know how she [Tamar] reacted to [Amnon]. Could we think that she said happily 'no problem let us have it [sex]'?" Omana meant that the survivor of rape would not tell everything in detail and no woman gives consent for rape. For example, a survivor of sexual violence might not explain what she did to prevent the rape but usually tells the incident briefly because she is upset and ashamed due to the rape she experienced. Therefore, survivors of rape or sexual violence do not like to reveal every detail of the incident to others.

Omana explained how frustrating was the situation of Tamar after the rape:

[When] he [Amnon] hated her later young men sent her out and locked the door [behind her]. Tamar put ashes on her head and she tore her robes then she kept her hands on her head, cried and walked. [It was the practice] in Israel to put ash on head, when there was deep sorrow, and when a person keeps hands on head, that time itself we know it.⁵⁰⁴

Keeping the hands on head proves that the person is in deep sorrow or danger.

Omana gave the Dalit version of the incident:

He [Amnon] has fever and he wants to drink some water. *Achayan* [father] told that 'Darling you take it [water] and give it [to him]. He is [your] brother.' [Then do we respond to father that] '[No] he will rape me therefore I am not going [to give water]' then brother could be such a wicked person [to rape a sister]. It is not said [written] here that he was a wicked man or he should be such a [wicked] person. It does not mean that such kinds of people are not there [there might be wicked people, who rape their own sisters].⁵⁰⁵

Omana's view made it clear that Tamar never expected that her brother Amnon would rape her if she prepares food for him.

⁵⁰³ Omana, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁵⁰⁴ Omana, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁵⁰⁵ Omana, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

Dalit Woman Evaluates the Feelings of Amnon

Amnon's weakness was desire for the female body and he was determined to get Tamar's body to satisfy his sexual desire. A man might use any kinds of plans, when he desires a particular female or when he is unable to control his sexual desires. Remani explained the feelings of Amnon:

[Amnon] became weak not because of mental sickness, she uses a word for that, what is that verse? Yes '*mal*' he became sick because of *mal*. He had feelings about his sex life [therefore], even if it is wife, mother or sister he wanted to experience the pleasure in his body. When he did not get a person for that purpose, then he became sick and his body started to become weak. That time he said the fact, 'it is like this for me,' [Amnon explains his desire for Tamar], when he said 'it is like this,' then that person [Amnon's friend] gives an advice, 'You do one thing, this is a suitable way for it, you pretend as if you are sick, when you are pretending sick all will come to see you. That time you will get the food you like, when the person comes with the food you like, [take] little from that.' [Usually] it is woman, who makes food; therefore, when she comes with food it is a suitable time [for sex]. We understood this many things. We have to understand that this is the life experience of Amnon.⁵⁰⁶

King David did not understand the trap behind his son's request to ask Tamar to come and cook the food for him.

Where Does Blame Lie?

Kavitha Johnson argues that even David was mistaken, when he sent Tamar to prepare food for Amnon:

When he asked for food from the hands of a young girl, ten or eighteen years old Tamar, we need to understand the bad thoughts [behind] it. Not only that even David was mistaken; he could have saved his daughter. Saving means that father could have asked [him], 'Son what is your sickness? Why do you need Tamar to come here? Why do not you tell [ask] it to the young men [to prepare the cake]?' If [David had asked these questions] such portions might have been included in [the scripture] but David without [asking questions] sent his daughter for [Amnon's] deceiving, that is my opinion.⁵⁰⁷

Kavitha explains that Tamar did not use her reasoning, when she was asked to go to Amnon's house for preparing food:

When the king told her, she could have thought that 'Why should I go to Amnon's house?' Or she should have prepared the food and send it through the young men [instead of going to his house], 'Why should I go or stay?' Tamar did not think it.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁶ R. Yohannan, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁵⁰⁷ Kavitha Johnson, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

Kavitha stated that Amnon deceived Tamar, “[When he] asked [her] to bring the food to the inner chamber and [he] sent all workers outside [but] Tamar could not understand the deceiving in it.”⁵⁰⁹ Kavitha adds a reason why Tamar became a survivor of Amnon’s violence: “We can understand that there was no possibility for escaping from it because he was [physically] stronger than her.”⁵¹⁰ As Amnon used his physical strength a male uses his physical might, when he wants to rape a woman and in such a situation the woman becomes vulnerable to male violence.

Shame and secrecy are associated with rape or any kind of sexual violence.

Shame and Secret

Survivors of rape keep the incident as a secret because of the shame, therefore, Kavitha declares:

Submitting herself means it is not by [her] own will, but a woman submits to [man because of his] might [force]. Certainly if such situation happened, I would keep it as a secret even without letting my brother Absalom know it. God knows the heart, but I would not tell it in front of others because of the shame. If I were stronger than him I could have escaped from his hands [by my physical strength]. If I got involved in it by force, I could have kept it as a secret; this is what I could have done if I were Tamar.⁵¹¹

Sisly too thought she would keep silent if she were raped as Tamar was:

If such an incident happened I would not tell it to anyone. If our brother did it we would not tell it to anyone. We would tell it briefly to our mother [but] we would not tell everything.⁵¹²

Shame is the cause for secrecy in the lives of the survivors of sexual violence because society or the one who listens to the survivor’s story might degrade her or insult her later. Sometimes it is difficult for the survivors of sexual violence to produce the proof of the violence they experienced. Even if they produce any proof, the survivor is still blamed for the incident and she does not get proper justice. Therefore, a Dalit Christian woman sees prayer as a solution or comfort for the mental agony she experiences due to rape. If a brother rapes a Dalit woman, she might keep it secret because she considers the security of the family.

⁵⁰⁸ Johnson, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁵⁰⁹ Johnson, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁵¹⁰ Johnson, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁵¹¹ Johnson, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁵¹² Sisly, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

Security of the Family

Leela (not her real name) explained how important it is to secure the family status by keeping the incident a secret if a brother raped a sister:

If Tamar's situation were in my life, I would try my best not to tell it to others. As *ammama* [points out to Remani] said, men have more feelings. She [Tamar] went to her brother, when there was no one around. When he comes to know the feelings [sexual pleasure] from sister instead of knowing it from another woman, then he had more hatred towards her. Sister also hated him. Then such an incident will not be repeated [because they hate each other after their sexual relationship]. [This is what] I am thinking. I would not tell it to others because I think of the society and think of our family.⁵¹³

When Leela spoke, I saw her facial expressions and that her eyes were filled with tears. Therefore, later I made an appointment to speak to her personally and to listen to her life story.

Sheeba explained how she would react if she were in the place of Tamar:

If I was in the place of Tamar and I was asked to make cakes, I would think [first] it is my brother and I would make cakes for him. After making the cake, when he asks [me] to bring it inside the chamber, I would think, [then] I would go and give it inside. When I would be asked to lie down, [then] suddenly I would think, 'Why is he telling it, asking [me] to lay down?' 'He is my brother, I did not see him in that way until this time,' 'what is he telling? Why he talks like this? 'I am not like that, I saw him as my brother.' I would tell [him] 'It is not possible [I am not willing to lay down with him].' If he tries to defeat me, I am unable to escape and there is no way to escape. If he defeats me and destroys my life whom can I tell it openly too? What can I do? My life is destroyed in this way. Then I hate my brother, and then I would come back to my house and sit sadly. My family members would ask 'what is the matter?' but I would not tell the matter to anyone. I would take some decisions in my heart and I would not desire for a married life because my life is destroyed and I would not deceive any man [by marrying him because my brother raped me and I lost virginity]. Therefore, I would not marry, and if there were marriage proposal for me I would tell that I do not need a marriage. I would tell my brother that my life is destroyed now [hereafter] we will not have any more relation between us [even as brother and sister]. [Prior to that incident] I considered [him] as my brother, [but] why this kind of behavior to me [why did he rape me]? Therefore, I do not need a marriage, but I would not tell to anyone what my brother did to me, if I tell others it would become a trouble for [his] life and [my life].⁵¹⁴

Sheeba tells that she would try to keep her experience a secret and protect her brother if he raped her. This shows that Dalit women are hesitant to reveal rape within the family circle because they are afraid of how the society would treat the survivor and the violator, both of

⁵¹³ Leela, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁵¹⁴ Sheeba, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

whom are within the same family. Sheeba says that she would remain unmarried all her life if her brother raped her; there could be Dalit girls who are unmarried because of the rape which happened within the family circles.

If a woman uses her wisdom to understand what is in a male gaze or what does it mean when male stare at woman, then she can be alert any danger or confront the person.

Read Beneath the Lines of the Male Gaze, Glance or Look

Sisly states woman needs to have the insight to observe and understand what does a man mean by his particular look at her:

If it happened in my life, whomever it may be, I observe people, when I talk. Even from long ago in my life, when someone talks to me, I observe whether the person is looking at my face. We need to observe it whether it is brothers, relatives or brethren's because when they look, we can understand from their looks, we will understand whether their looks are for attracting us. When it comes like that then we need to avoid it [we need to avoid them if their looks are for attracting women]. When there is a look we can ask him directly, 'Why are you looking [staring] at me?' When we ask [this question], he will understand that 'She understood something, the meaning of my look.' In my life, when any man of my age or [any man] elder than me speaks, it is my nature to observe him.⁵¹⁵

It is a cultural practice in India, when woman talk to any male, who is not a relative or not a husband, she tries to avoid direct eye to eye contact with the male. However, as Sisly argues, if women are careful in observing the look of men, it might help them to understand the motives behind men's gaze, glance or look. Women need to be courageous to read the lines behind the male gaze, glance, look or wink.

Dalit Girls do not have Sex Explained to them

Education about sex is lacking among the Dalit girls. Remani gave an example concerning her ignorance about how a woman becomes pregnant:

When I was studying in class ten, there was an essay on "Indus valley civilization" to study in Social Studies. There were eight or nine paragraphs for the Indus valley civilization essay. I was studying for the SSLC exam. [My] name in the school is Elykutty, and there was a friend named Aleyamma. When I saw the essay she was reading and enjoying, when three or four [paragraphs] were over, I told her, 'Give me that in my hand,' she told me 'No,' and she did not show it. [Again] I requested 'Please give it,' however she gave it. When I read three or four paragraphs, the fourth paragraph was a letter written to her lover. There was no knowledge for me in those days. I told my

⁵¹⁵ Sisly, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

friend, '*Edi, penne*⁵¹⁶, if you give the love letter, you will have children [you will become pregnant].' After completing tenth she went and I went to some other place. Once we met together by chance in a bus. Then she told me, 'You told [me] that day if we write love letter, we would have children, it is not like that children are born [children are born not because of writing love letter but because of sex between man and woman].'⁵¹⁷

Many Dalit girls are not aware how a woman gets pregnant and it could lead them to unexpected pregnancy if any rape or sexual contact takes place in their lives, when they are young.

There is no freedom for a Dalit or non-Dalit girl to write a love letter to a boy who loves her, before the marriage. Love marriages are not encouraged in Kerala culture. Parents in Kerala are strict especially with their daughters and they consider that if a girl writes a letter to her lover before the engagement or marriage it is immoral. When their freedom is restricted then girls find their own ways to write and pass letters to lovers and sometimes handing over the books is the medium for exchanging love letters between them. If parents gave freedom to their daughters and sons to love and marry the person whom they choose then their human rights for selecting and marrying suitable persons are not denied to girls. It might take many years for parents in Kerala to become tolerant in allowing their children to have their own choices in marriages.

Mother's Role to Train Children

Dalit mothers could train their children at home. Remani affirms that it is the duty of mothers to train the children in the right way:

Each and every one of our houses is the best training centre to bring up our children in good ways in their family lives. In our houses we mothers need to deal with wisdom. Wisdom is the most important route. In the same way along with Tamar's experience, mothers, I understand one thing, for any reason except for a job, children should not be allowed to live away from their mother before marriage.⁵¹⁸

Dalit women think that if mothers control their children and keep them with mothers, such control might keep the children in the right track. Therefore, Remani listens to the conversations between her daughter and her son:

⁵¹⁶ *Edi* is a word in Malayalam language, which is used by villagers to call a female, and it is not a respectful word. *Penne* means female, and this word is not used by civilized and educated people in Kerala.

⁵¹⁷ R. Yohannan, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁵¹⁸ R. Yohannan, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

I have a son and a daughter, I tell few things to my daughter [such as] ‘do not talk much,’ and children also should not talk beyond a certain limit. [If they talk much] mothers listen to it, what they are telling. I listen to it, when they both [daughter and son] talk, my daughter knows that I listen to it, and she is scared of me. Therefore it is in our mothers’ hands [It is mother’s duty to listen to their conversations].⁵¹⁹

Remani considers that the mother has a great role in training the children at home in the right way.

Remani suggests that housewives need to be careful, when they have sex, and children should not see parent’s sexual relationship:

Housewives, when they ‘do’ family life [sex], children even if it is three or two years old; they should not see ‘it’ in any case. I hope that you understood what I said. [If they see parents having sex] it will be there in their mind, that is why five years old, six years old, seven years old, ten years old and twelve years old children are like this as we said in case of Tamar, what ‘mal’ that. Therefore, we need to be careful in what we have to be careful.⁵²⁰

It is difficult for Dalit women, who live with their children in the one room thatched huts, to have any privacy for their sexual lives. Darkness in the one- room hut is their only privacy to keep sex away from the sight of their children.

When the Bible study ended Kavitha commented, “You deceived us.”

“You Deceived Us”

When the Bible study was over and we had tea together, Kavitha a wise Dalit woman said in loud voice: “Auntie [Sara], you deceived us.”⁵²¹ I was embarrassed and asked, “Why do you say that?” Kavitha replied, “We came for Bible study to learn from you, but you are learning from us.”⁵²² Then, being a researcher I kept on asking myself, “Did I deceive my participants? Is it a plot if I conduct Bible study and learn from them?” However, my conscience convinced me that I was not deceiving since I made it clear to them that I was there to listen to them and learn from them but I cannot deny the reality that as an ethnographer I had set my own agenda to identify the survivors of violence, when I conducted Bible study. I informed them that I am recording the Bible studies and conversations. I am aware that I conducted the Bible study against the traditional Bible study, where usually the person who conducts it does all the talking and those who attend it

⁵¹⁹ R. Yohannan, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁵²⁰ R. Yohannan, Bible Study on 21st November 2001.

⁵²¹ Johnson spoke it on 21st November 2001, when the Bible study ended.

⁵²² Johnson expressed this view on 21st November 2001, when the Bible study ended.

are mere silent listeners. However, it was simple and straightforward reflection, when I asked bare-footed Dalit Christian women to put their feet in the shoes of princess Tamar and it enabled them to tell their own life stories.

The second Bible study focused on a Levite and his concubine and it helped to unfold the experiences of violence Dalits experienced.

Bible Study Two: A Levite and his Concubine⁵²³

I planned a Bible study based on Judges Chapter 19: Verses 1-30 and hoped to encourage Dalit Christian women to think, reflect, interpret and evaluate their own lived experiences on the basis of the scripture studied.

A Narrative of the Bible Study on 23rd November 2001

As I walked along the mud path on the bank of the canal to reach the Church at Parippu, I met Elamma Babychen and Yamuna Babu, who were coming from the opposite side. Elamma told me that she was unable to come for Bible study because she was going with Yamuna and Yamuna has asthma. They told me that Remani, the wife of the pastor, predicted that there is *kaivisham* inside Yamuna and her sickness is due to *kaivisham*. Therefore, they were going somewhere for praying for the deliverance from *kaivisham*. Then Elamma requested me not to pass this information to Remani regarding, where and why, they are going. I agreed to their request and then walked forward to the Church. I arrived at the Church at 9. 35. a.m. for conducting the Bible study from 10. 00 a.m. to 12.00 afternoon. Kavitha opened the Church before 10. a. m. and then seven women arrived by 10.55 a.m. As with the first Bible study, the second Bible study also began at a later time because Dalit women were slow to arrive and therefore, I had to wait for them.

At last there were fourteen women including me, who gathered at the New India Bible Church for a Bible study based on the story of the Levite and his concubine. All of us sat on the floor in a circle and a tape recorder was kept in the middle for recording the Bible study. All the participants read loudly one verse each in the first round and the remaining verses were read by a few in the second round. Later participants were asked to think over the scripture portion and I asked them to give more attention to the concubine in their thoughts. They were asked to introduce themselves, when each person shares her thoughts and reflection.

⁵²³ Judges 19: 1-30.

Dalit Christian women give much importance to tradition such as fasting prayer on Friday and reading a Psalm, when they gather together in the Church. Therefore, Aleyamma Mathai said:

I could not come day before yesterday. I could come today [because] I came for Friday's [fasting] prayer, I never avoid fasting prayer [on Friday], when I came for it, it is this [Bible study], I am very glad.⁵²⁴

For Mariamma Joseph fasting and praying on Friday is important:

I go for Friday's prayer without avoiding even a single prayer, but I do not know how to talk in a [Bible] class like this. My daughter told me that '*Amma* [mother] don't come [because] there is a class.' I don't avoid any Friday prayer; therefore, I came by my compulsion [all are laughing when they heard it].⁵²⁵

Reading a Psalm when gathering together in the Church is important to Aleyamma Mathai, therefore, she requested: "We came here, let us read a Psalm...."⁵²⁶ I was silent, when Aleyamma's requested me to read a Psalm because we had to focus on the scripture portion read in the group.

Dalit women reflected and responded by sharing their views and interpreting the scripture from their perspective. Alice Mathai explained the context of the event: "It was the time when there was no king for Israel, no ruler to rule and anything could happen to a country, where there is no ruler."⁵²⁷

Jayamole explains the context of the incident a period of violence because there was no king or ruler to rule the nation: "When there was no King in Israel, it was a time of full of injustices and violence."⁵²⁸

Alice makes a connection with the previous Bible study and compares the context of the two incidents:

Today's thinking is from the book of Judges chapter 19. In the previous class, life experience of Tamar made it clear about the wickedness in Israel. This wickedness should not happen in Israel, if it happens, then it is punishable. When we see [Tamar's experience], there it happened under the rule of a king but here [in case of the concubine] we are unable to see a kingly rule or government rule. In such a time there was that wickedness [happened],

⁵²⁴ Aleyamma Mathai, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵²⁵ Mariamma Jospeh, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵²⁶ Aleyamma Mathai, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵²⁷ Alice Mathai, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵²⁸ Jayamole, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

therefore, we can see in this chapter that there was a desire to make known it [wickedness] to all.⁵²⁹

Alice gave her own version of how a concubine's father prevented her from going with the Levite: "You do not go with him, stay here."⁵³⁰ Alice pointed out that concubine did not like to stay with the Levite and she was a woman who was unable to make her own decision:

She may not desire to stay with a man, whom she doesn't like, even if we understand that she liked and desired her husband, she did not want to go [with the Levite] because of her father's will and word. She had relationship with other men. She was unable to put in to practice her own decision or her own opinion. Her future is destroyed because she is defeated by the word of others.⁵³¹

Alice stated that determination is important to achieve any goal: "We can have such a journey and reach into the destination if we have our own decisions and courage."⁵³² It is important for a woman to have determination and her own decision making in order to achieve any goal.

When Alice spoke about the concubine and the context, she spoke as a Dalit girl, who experienced various difficulties in life:

She was taken out, many [people] attacked and humiliated her therefore she was at the edge of disappointments and came to a decision that there was no use of living [anymore].⁵³³

The plights of Dalit women and their lived-context are clear in this statement, when Alice spoke about the concubine. When I had my informal conversation with Alice, it was clear to me that what Alice interpreted in the Bible study group was the reflection of her own experience as a Dalit girl because she herself is a survivor of violence.

When Kavitha explained the context of the incident she gives emphasis to what was happening in that land and finds homosexuality as a bad practice:

A farmer received them [Concubine and Levite] in a house; certainly he was a good man. He certainly knows about the wicked actions of the people of that land, therefore, he called them to his own house. I think it is [recorded] in the Epistle of Romans; there is a verse that they exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, men committed shameless acts with men [Romans: 1:27]. [Interruption by the child continued, when the child cried, Kavitha took the child on her lap, opened her blouse, started to breast feed the child and at the same time continued her talk. Therefore, other participants laughed at her

⁵²⁹ Alice Mathai, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵³⁰ Alice Mathai, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵³¹ Alice Mathi, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵³² Alice Mathai, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵³³ Alice Mathai, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

because she is breast feeding the child and talking to the audience simultaneously], therefore, we can understand that it was such a period.⁵³⁴

Kavitha's scriptural knowledge enabled her to point out where the reference was about homosexuality. Kavitha was bold and proud to breastfeed her baby in front of others as she spoke to the audience.

Dalit Christian women find that Pastors and preachers avoid this particular scripture portion, when they conduct Bible studies or preach in the church.

Pastors and Preachers avoid this Scripture Portion, When they Prepare Sermons and Preach

Two participants complained that pastors and preachers avoid this particular scripture portion, when they prepare sermons and preach. It is essential to explore why this text is not accepted as a suitable text in the Churches for exploring the violence women experience. Kavitha stated that preachers never preached from this particular scripture portion:

We do not know the meaning of many things in this chapter 19, not only that until today I have not heard anyone preach a sermon from this chapter [Judges Chapter 19]. If some one did it we would have some concepts in our mind, but I never heard a sermon based on this chapter 19, therefore, I believe that it's disadvantages are there.⁵³⁵

Aleyamma Mathai emphasized that it was the first time she listened to a Bible study based on this particular scripture portion, within her eight years of Christian life and she appreciated the Bible study:

I am attending this kind of class for the first time. It is now eight years, I have been baptized but no one taught us this kind of [Bible] class. Usually [we] read Psalms, I never heard this Chapter 19, and I am not remembering any sermon based on it. There should be this kind of classes in this kind of gathering. First of all I am unable to read, I am unable to read even one alphabet [because] I do not even have spectacles. I would like to tell one thing, if it is like this [Bible study], [for] people like us [Dalits] this is a very good time to get [receive] and give good opinions in our lives. As this auntie [Sara] did, people like her should come forward, at least visit us once in a month, [then] we will join with you, this is my opinion. This kind of conference is the best for people like us, and people like me. Now I am fifty- four years old, it is good for people like me to listen to this kind of knowledge that is what I have to tell.⁵³⁶

Aleyamma considered the Bible study as a good time to receive knowledge and give knowledge.

Dalit women found the answer for why this particular incident is included in the Bible.

⁵³⁴ Johnson, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵³⁵ Johnson, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵³⁶ Aleyamma Mathi, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

Why was this Incident Recorded in the Bible?

Kavitha explained why this incident is recorded in the Bible:

This incident is written in detail because this is described as a great event as if one tribe from the twelve tribes of Israel is cut off. That is why this is written in detail.⁵³⁷

This incident is included in the Bible because cutting away one tribe from the other eleven tribes in Israel is considered as a great event. Kavitha explained why one tribe is cut off from the other eleven tribes:

Certainly, for all the bad acts of the Benjamin tribe, there should be a proper response from the Israelites, it was because of that desire he [Levite] made her in to twelve pieces and sent twelve pieces to twelve tribes. When we read chapters 19, 20, and 21, they promised in the name of Yahweh that they [Israelites] should not give their daughters in marriage to Benjaminites and neither marries the daughters of Benjaminites [Judges Chapter 21: 1]. We can see that there was a situation, when they say that there is no more such a tribe in Israel [Judges 21: 6] and this [particular] incident made them to take such a decision. He [Levite] cut his wife [concubine] into twelve pieces and then sent it to the tribes in Israel because he wanted to question their injustices; he wanted to make known to them about their evil acts, so that they would not do such acts again. The Benjaminite tribe was cut off as revenge [punishment for their evil acts]. When we read another chapter if [anyone] marry the woman of Benjaminites [Judges 21: 18], among the Israelites, they keep for marriage the woman, virgins who come for the festival at Shiloh [Judges 21: 19-22]. There are other eleven tribes in Israel but they did not take anyone from this [Benjaminites] tribe as wife.⁵³⁸

Secluding the Benjaminite tribe from the other eleven tribes in Israel was because of the wickedness by Benjaminites.

During the time of this Bible study I noticed the practical problems Dalit women have in reading the scripture.

Dalit Women Face Practical Problems to Read the Scripture

I observed two practical problems, which prevent Dalit women from reading the scripture. There are Dalit Christian women, who are illiterate and it is necessary to teach them how to read and write. Sometimes literate Dalit women are unable to read because they do not have spectacles and they cannot afford to buy spectacles due to lack of income for their livelihood. When they struggle for their daily bread, buying spectacles is not the basic need for them. One Dalit woman, who did not introduce herself, was illiterate and what she said was “ [I] cannot read,” and “ First of all I do not know how to read.” She could not tell

⁵³⁷ Johnson, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵³⁸ Johnson, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

anything even from what she listened to, when others read the scripture. Therefore, I encouraged women to talk from their practical life and knowledge and from what they listened to Dalit women in the Bible study group. However, if Dalit women overcome these two practical problems such as illiteracy and buying spectacles, then they can read the scripture and reflect from it.

Dalit Christian women repeated in both Bible studies their opinion about mother's role in the upbringing the children.

Mother's Role in the Upbringing the Children

Jayamole explained how the role of a mother lacks in concubine's life:

She went in to wrong ways, when she did not have mother; usually a father will not care for a daughter as a mother cares for her daughter. Father does whatever is necessary but mother gives special attention and mother observes her ways. But there was no mother for her therefore; there was no one to observe her. Father was there but he did not observe her.⁵³⁹

Mother's role and father's role is described as different in upbringing the children.

Annamma Devasya too pointed out how important is the role of a mother:

If there was a mother she [concubine] couldn't have gone through the wrong way, even if she was mistaken, mother should have told it to her [giving her proper advise], father is unable to tell those kinds of words.⁵⁴⁰

Annamma described the role of the mother and the role of the father as different. A mother is keen to observe the ways of a daughter, and a mother gives moral advice to a daughter. Even if the daughter made a mistake mother is willing to correct and advise the daughter to live in the right way.

From a Dalit woman's perspective, Annamma Devasya gave her own explanation why women become prostitutes.

Why Women become Prostitutes?

Annamma Devasya states:

It is woman, who makes [attracts] men for prostitution, because in different ways she takes men for prostitution, attracts through laughter, talk and many other things. It is women, who make men vulgar because different women have different desires, when they see clothes, clothes to wear, chain or ear rings, they desire [for] all these things. They may not have any of such things from their childhood [onwards], and all have the desire to wear and get dressed well. It is only because of that girls go for prostitution. I will tell you now that, women have different kinds of desires; I am going to tell it [all of a sudden

⁵³⁹ Jayamole, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁴⁰ Devasya, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

Annamma shifted from talk to singing and she started singing a poem in Malayalam language]

Onnomi onnomi onnichukudum pennungalu [Firstly, women gather together]

Randomi randomi kandukuudum pennungalu [Secondly, women see something and follow]

Munnomi, munnomi muuchukudum pennungalu [Thirdly, women are more naughty]

Nalumi, nalumi ee nakkukudum pennungalu [Fourthly, this tongue is long for women or women are talkative]

Anchumi anchumi konjekkuzhayum pennungalu [Fifthly, women are cheeky]

Arumi arumi arum perum pennungalku [Sixthly, lakes and giving births are for women]

Ezhumi, ezhumi, ezhunna buthi pennuangalku [Seventhly, women are alert]

Ettumi, ettumi, pottinasa pennungalkku [Eighthly, women desire for *pottu*⁵⁴¹]

Onbathumi onbathumi onbathu mane pennungalkku [Ninthly, there are nine bodies for women]

Pathumi pathumi, panathinasa pennuangalkku [Tenthly, women desire for money]

This means women have desires for everything. It is because of all these desires; they look for ways to get money in different ways, even if it is through prostitution, they have the desires. That is all.⁵⁴²

Annamma states women's desires for various things and money encourages them to get involved in prostitution.

The Personalities of the Levite and the Concubine

In order to describe the character of the Levite I would like to bring together extracts from Kavitha's conversation. Kavitha describes the Levite: "Levite who came and lived in the interior part of the hill country of Ephraim in Judea."⁵⁴³ "He and this woman a concubine [who lived] at Bethlehem."⁵⁴⁴ Kavitha assumes that the Levite married the concubine:

When it is said that he came again to call her, certainly he might have married her and accepted her as his wife. That is what we can understand from this. He is a Levite, even if he stayed in the interior part of the village in Israel, when we read this chapter, we can, and I understand that he was a good man.⁵⁴⁵

Kavitha describes that the Levite accepted the concubine as his wife even if he knew about her bad character and then he tried to bring her back to his home:

He accepted her, even though he knew that she was a concubine but she was not faithful to him, the Holy Spirit emphasizes it there, and it is written that his concubine violated him and committed adultery. But even if his wife was such a person, he had the desire and love to bring her back, which is what we can understand [from this]. He had with him servants and couple of donkeys; therefore certainly he had the desire to bring his wife back.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴¹ Pottu is a mark made on the forehead of Hindu woman by using colorful powders or sandalwood powder.

⁵⁴² Devasya, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁴³ Johnson, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁴⁴ Johnson, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁴⁵ Johnson, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁴⁶ Johnson, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

Annamma Samuel too considers the concubine as the married wife of the Levite. She holds traditional views and urged Dalit Christian women to obey their husbands: “If a woman is married she should obey her husband and live according to his desire.” She thinks that after marriage the husband is to lead and a wife is to follow. She thinks that the concubine received the right kind of punishment for her evil life because she did not obey and please her husband and not only that she had sexual relationship with other men.

Kavitha finds that Levite did not care for the concubine:

Whatever problems it may be a person, who loves his wife or forgiving her mistakes and living with her, certainly should not have given her outside. When we read from ‘there’ onwards, her master woke up and opened the door and came out to go on his way, he did not care for his wife. He did not open the door with a desire to see where his wife is, he is going on his way and he did not consider her.⁵⁴⁷

Kavitha states that listening to the words of concubine’s father deviated the Levite’s own plans to set off:

He should not have stayed there even if that father-in-law compelled him to stay. There he should not have become a child in his wisdom; he was like children in it. If he did not have listened to that father’s words each day, if he ignored those words and started his journey early morning, he could have reached his village soon.⁵⁴⁸

Concubine

Annamma Devasya believes that unhappiness in married life could be a reason why the concubine did not stay with her husband. Annamma points out that:

Even if she was married, there was no desire and mind to stay with her husband, she returned to her previous life, when she did not get the happiness in her married life. That is why she returned to home, when her father called her.⁵⁴⁹

Kavitha describes the personality of the concubine: “His concubine was unfaithful to him and she committed adultery.” Kavitha perceives the concubine as a woman unhappy to receive the Levite when he came to call her back:

When she sees her husband after three or four months, she is not happy. She accepted him in her father’s house, but it is her father who received him happily. It is not written that when she saw her husband she was glad enough.

⁵⁴⁷ Johnson, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁴⁸ Johnson, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁴⁹ Annamma Devasya, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001. Annamma’s life story reveals that what she reflected and shared in the Bible study group was based on her own lived experience. Therefore, I see a close link between Dalit women’s reflection in the seminar and Bible study group and their daily life experience. Annamma returned to her own home because of the violence from her first husband. She experienced violence in her married life.

Therefore, she did not even have the happiness her father had, when he met the Levite.⁵⁵⁰

Kavitha argues that the concubine was not satisfied with her life with the Levite: “Even if he was a righteous man, she couldn’t lead a satisfied life with him previously. Secondly this woman is a person who walks in wicked ways.”⁵⁵¹ Kavitha considers the house, where the concubine lived, as a place of wickedness: “My opinion is this, that house itself was not a right house. She did all evil things when she stayed in that house.”⁵⁵²

Jayamole emphasized that the concubine was not sincere and faithful to the Levite:

When she was living in *thonnyavasam* [as she likes], that Levite married her. After marriage also she lived in other ways, he bore much. That is what I understand from this. Even if she lived *thonnyavasam*, he forgave and bore [everything] because he loved her. When she was going home, and when her father came to take her home, she did not say anything against it. Her husband sent her home with the expectation that she would become good. She was sent home but she did not return, therefore, he went with servants to bring her back. She did not express her love, when he reached there but her father behaved well and loved him. She did not behave in a loving way to him [Levite].⁵⁵³

Jayamole’s interpretation is from Kerala culture because in Kerala State married women are allowed to return or visit their parents’ homes only with the permission of their husbands. A father, mother, brother, elder sister, son, husband or in-law accompany women, when they go anywhere away from their husband’s home. Sometimes a husband sends his wife back to her home for character formation and to be disciplined if she is not good in her dealings and behaviour.

Ramani Yohannan depicted the concubine as a deceiver: “The concubine is as a woman, who lost insight and who deceived her father, husband and who lost the virginity of the body because of the relationship with many men.”⁵⁵⁴

Kunjumani Babu described the concubine as a woman, who had own husband but still lived as another man’s concubine. It was not by her own wish the concubine was given to a group of men but the old man instead of giving the man, who was inside his house, offered the concubine.⁵⁵⁵ She meant that instead of giving a man to men for homosexual relationships, the old man gave the concubine to the men for heterosexual relationships.

⁵⁵⁰ Johnson, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁵¹ Johnson, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁵² Johnson, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁵³ Jayamole, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁵⁴ R. Yohannan, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁵⁵ Kunjumani Babu, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

Kavitha considers concubine's experience of rape and death a punishment from God: "God punished her for her evil ways in the same way, that is what I understand from this."⁵⁵⁶

Ramani also sees the concubine's death as a punishment from God: "At last for what purpose she had given her body (sex with other men), she was ridiculed by the same cause in front of others."⁵⁵⁷ Ramani meant that the concubine was a woman, who had sex with many men therefore she was punished by the same action and a group of men raped her and then she died due to rape.

Ramani reasons that the concubine was punished to cause the people in that land to repent from their sins:

There is no other punishment for God or any court to give them more than this; it was done like this therefore, the people in that land were afraid. Not only that if we read the Bible, it is [punishment given to the concubine] a fear for the following generations because if this chapter was not written in the Bible, we would not have thought this much about it. Therefore, what we can understand from this chapter is, along with that punishment, in those days whole people *manasantharappettu* [confessed or repented]. Later, we, the following generations, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the people who live until today, those who read the Holy scripture every one has an inner fear. Therefore, my opinion is this; it is very good that this truth Holy Spirit recorded [this incident] in the Bible.⁵⁵⁸

Remani finds that the punishment given to concubine was the most suitable one and such punishment became a cause for others repentance. Remani claims that the sinner must be punished according to the law.

Pramanam (Law) is to punish the Sinner

Remani Yohannan explains:

What I understand from this Chapter is, first of all children of God should not leave the laws of God. When Moses received the commandments at Mount Sinai, 'you should not commit adultery, you should not desire anything which is your friend's, you should not swear,' if we speak the reality, these three commandments were for the Israelites to put in to practice. They did not obey it. Secondly, another thing to understand from this is, in Old Testament times even if there were no Kings or no other authorities to rule over them, there is a God at heaven, who has authority over them. Even if it was the situation of warfare without a leader, God had given *pramanam* [rules and regulations] for them and they forgot that *pramanam*. They could not believe in that *pramanam* therefore, the sin after sin increased. At last her own husband made that woman in to pieces even if she was the concubine and the husband is the one who did it. Therefore, whether it is father, mother, wife or own daughter whoever it may be, if a mistake is done against the *pramanam*, he or she should experience the punishment; there is no exemption for anyone from that

⁵⁵⁶ Johnson, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁵⁷ R. Yohannan, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁵⁸ R. Yohannan, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

punishment. It was a suitable punishment according to the mistake she [concubine] committed.⁵⁵⁹

Dalit Christian women give importance to obey the laws of God and in their view there is no exemption from the punishment for any one, who disobeys the laws of God.

Dalit women co-related the Bible study to their practical life. Aleyamma Mathai makes a link between the Bible study and the practical life of Dalit women:

That girl was brought up in a place, where there was no mother for her, children without father and mother, mother is the refuge. Not only that never send girl out, if he was a right husband he could not have send her out. Even if he sent her out he could have watched for her suddenly what they are doing. If someone is sent from our home we need to watch, it is not during the dawn time to watch. Was it not because of it there was such a scenery [incident]? Our women, I was disturbed when I heard it, we also have girls, we give them in the hands of these kinds of good people, if the girl is bad, what we think when we give her to someone. In return when we hear this kind of news what a difficulty [dilema].⁵⁶⁰

Sending a girl alone outside the house is considered dangerous.

Slavery Experienced in the Lives of Dalit Women

The Bible study on a Levite and his concubine provoked the thoughts of Annamma Devasya and she explained how Dalit mothers in the past suffered slavery and became the survivors of sexual violence by the landlords. Annamma Devasya pointed out:

I would like to tell one thing because when I listened to this class, my thoughts about the olden days were overwhelming in my mind. What our parents experienced in olden days, in those days they lived as *adiyanmar* [slaves] in the houses. Our mothers and grandmothers all suffered, that means [there are] difficulties that come in the lives of slaves. In those days also our ladies were beautiful. In those days the landlord of the slave cast out the slave [man] and then he creeps in to the house of the slave because our ladies were beautiful.⁵⁶¹

Dalits were slaves in Kerala State and the previous generations too experienced slavery even if slavery was stopped according to the law. Annamma keeps the fresh memory of how her parents suffered slavery under the landlords in the Kerala State. Dalit women were treated as objects of sexual pleasure for high caste men.

Dalit Women as the Objects of Sexual Pleasure for the Landlords

Landlords used the female Dalit slaves for their pleasure by sending their husbands away from their huts. The present generation is not aware of what happened to the Dalit female

⁵⁵⁹ R. Yohannan, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁶⁰ Aleyamma Mathai, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁶¹ Devasya, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

slaves in the past and how they suffered but Annamma heard it from her parents and she passes on that oral history:

I don't know how to take those scripture verses and I don't know about it but I was thinking about that olden days, about the traps that happened to our mothers, many of them were in traps. In those days they were taken through the marriage, when they were thirteen or fourteen years old. Even if she [Dalit girl] is married, that husband was not allowed to take care of her and it was not possible because it is that landlord, landlord [who uses her](all are laughing). I am not telling it for you to laugh [but] this is what happened to our fathers and mothers. These are the experiences of our parents from the time of our mothers, we have to study that, people those who are living now [present generation] they don't know it. Now all may think that we are telling something without sense, but I have listened to the sayings of my mother's mother [grandmother] onwards, that is why I am telling this. *Thamburan* [landlord] calls and takes our *achen* [father] for the work and then *thampuran* is at our *kuura* [hut] because in those days we have to accept it, and they [mothers] had to be ready for it [sex with landlords], but our fathers could not get our mothers for it [sex], only the landlord of that house could use our mothers, that was the circumstance. That is why, they submitted [mothers submitted themselves to the desires of the landlords because of compulsion and there was no means for Dalit women to escape from such situations] according to the situations. It will not work out now, now we received little education [Now it is impossible for us to please the landlords].⁵⁶²

Dalit women, who did not have any source of income to provide food for their children, submitted themselves to the sexual exploitation of the high caste men. Annamma Devasya shared her experience of poverty and she witnessed Nayars, one of the high castes, visiting her hut for sex with her widowed mother, who was poor:

I am telling my own experience. When I was twelve years old my father died. When I was twelve years old, those days I may be in class four, I did not know much, there was no wisdom to go to school. Then there was no *kanji*,⁵⁶³ sometimes my mother purchased one *parippuvada*⁵⁶⁴ for me and took me to school. Why is it I am telling it clearly now, you don't think anything bad about it [what I am speaking now]. My mother... in those days my mother did not stay for it [sex], now only it is coming clear in my mind, those times we stayed in the place of Nayars, and their *melaru* [elder] came and sat on our veranda. You do not think anything [about what I am telling], it is clear in my mind now [I have a clear understanding of it now], and if I had today's wisdom in those days, he would not have sat there (Women burst into laughter), if I tell he would not have sat there means...[incomplete sentence]. In those days our livelihood was because of removing the coconut from his coconut trees [Dalits were paid for removing coconut from the tall coconut trees]. Today it is not possible [Dalits are not ready for this kind of job]. Whatever coconut [double meaning] he gives, we will not accept his [coconut]. [If he comes now for sex]

⁵⁶² Devasya, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁶³ Poor people including Dalits in Kerala drink *kanji* instead of a proper breakfast or a proper meal. *Kanji* is the rice cooked in plenty of water and they drink water and rice together after adding bit salt. Instead of curry they grind few chillies, onion and salt together in a stone to make chutney and they drink *Kanji* along with chutney. Poor are unable to afford more than this if they do not have any income. When there is no work, they are unable to make *kanji*, then they try to get raw jackfruit or tapioca and they survive by eating it.

⁵⁶⁴ *Parippuvada* is pakhora made out of lentils, onion, chilly and salt.

I will not leave him without beating (Women laughed loudly). I did not have the wisdom in those days; in those days somehow we wanted to get something to quench our hunger. I can tell that he might have done adultery to my mother, it happened because of that time's circumstances, [but] now it will not work out. In those days our mothers (crying) and fathers suffered much, now also we think about it [their suffering].⁵⁶⁵

Just like Annamma Devasya there are powerful, courageous and wise Dalit Christian women, who evaluate and remember their own community's suffering through slavery.

Dalits not only suffered slavery and sexual exploitation but also they were discriminated against in their education.

Control Over the Education of the Dalits

Annamma Devasya explained that Dalits were not allowed to go to school in olden days:

In those days we could not study. If we wanted to study [it was not possible because] it was the time of pollution [untouchability]. If we wish to go to school our children were allowed to sit one mile away [from high caste children], but we could learn only by listening [hearing] to the voice [of the teacher]. Then, Ambedkar, during the time of Dr. Ambedkar [there was change for that situation] why, it was because of the education, and in those days, they [Dalits] sat seven feet away from the school, what they heard from the school they wrote it down, they learned and got educated [Once Dalits never had the privilege to go inside the class room to study but they could stay away from the school some where out side, listen to the voice of the teacher and learn in that way]. I heard from others, my mother never had the chance to go to school, my father also did not go, and in those days it was impossible to go [to school]. Only those who are very brilliant could learn the lesson of class one. Today we got the authority [permission] to go to school, we got the authority to study, and we got the authority to wear clothes.⁵⁶⁶

Dalits were put down in their education and in their way of dressing because of their caste identity and such treatments by the high caste people were inhuman. Even if now things are different from the olden days but still there is a long way to go forward for a complete transformation in the situation of Dalits in India. Transformation could take place if some high caste reformers and Dalit leaders challenge together the evil caste system. If Dalits get the full support and co-operation from the reformers, who are fighting against the evil practices, it can create awareness in the society that Dalits are humans created in the image of God.

Forcing Dalit women to be bare-breasted was another kind of cultural oppression in Kerala State.

⁵⁶⁵ Devasya, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁶⁶ Devasya, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

Bare-breasted Dalit Women

Annamma tells that Dalit women were bare-breasted by compulsion: “In those days we were not allowed to wear any dress, then we wear something above the knees.” Annamma explains why Dalit women were bare-breasted: “We could not wear clothes in those days because they wanted to see our breasts, that is why they did not allow us to wear clothes; they wanted to see the breasts of the slaves.”⁵⁶⁷

Dalit female slaves could not cover their breasts because the evil system did not permit them to do it. Masters treated Dalit slaves as animals and used them as bullocks to plough the land. They could use their slaves for any purpose because slaves were powerless human beings, where masters were powerful Lords over the slaves.

God Forgives the Sinner

Alice Mathai explains that the society hates the sinner but God forgives the sinner: “No government, no rule or even no Church [forgives the sinner], when this kind of people commit sins, God only forgive them.”⁵⁶⁸ Alice is right because when a Dalit woman gets involved in prostitution due to poverty, society and church exclude her and consider her sinner but they do not evaluate why she went for such job. God is the one who forgives the sinner and understands the situation of Dalit woman, who goes for prostitution.

The Bible study closed with a prayer from Kavitha Johnson.

Conclusion

There were mixed responses from Dalit women to the scripture portions studied in the Bible study groups. The one-day seminar and two Bible study groups started to uncover the violence Dalit Christian women experience. Dalit women interpreted their everyday experiences on the basis of the scripture they studied and discussed in Bible study groups.

I would like to refer briefly to a few of the significant lessons apart from what has been explored throughout this chapter. I learned from the Bible study groups that the sexual violence, domestic violence and cultural violence has a great impact on the lives of Dalit women.

First of all I learned that Dalit women are the silent survivors of the sexual violence.

⁵⁶⁷ Devasya, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

⁵⁶⁸ Alice Mathai, Bible Study on 23rd November 2001.

Four participants agreed that if rape happened to them they would not tell anyone. I observed Dalit women's facial expressions, when they spoke in the Bible study groups. When Leela (not real name) shared her opinion her eyes were filled with tears and she did not want to reveal her problem but I realized that she was holding some tension within herself. My observation helped me to conclude that she might be a silent survivor of sexual violence. I understood that my observation was right, when I spent time with her in informal conversation. Leela's life story in the next chapter reveals that she is a survivor of sexual violence.

Secondly, some Dalit women might try to commit suicide because of the shame and disappointment they experience due to rape. Two unmarried girls stated that if rape happened to them they would commit suicide. I learned from their comments how important it is to explore the reasons behind any Dalit woman's suicide.

Some Dalit women, who are the survivors of sexual violence might turn as criminals in their lives. Alice Mathai told that she would have revenge forever and she would try to kill the person who raped her. In certain cases Dalit women might turn to criminals or violators due to the sexual violence they experience. Therefore, I learned that violence might lead to another violence, where survivor of violence turns to a criminal or the person who takes revenge.

Some Dalit girls might avoid marriages because of the rape they experienced. One Dalit girl commented that she would stay unmarried if someone raped her. Her comment made me understand that there could be unmarried Dalit women, who avoided marriages because of the rapes they experienced. They avoid marriages because of the fear that husband, family members or the society might humiliate them, when they come to know about the rape taking place.

Some of these women find that it was a right punishment given to the concubine because she was an unfaithful wife to the Levite when she had sex with other men. There were women who thought that the Levite was not a faithful lover to the concubine. One woman responded that the concubine was unhappy in her married life with the Levite. That was the reason she did not want to stay.

However, Dalit women's life stories in the next chapter reveal in details that they are the survivors of violence.

CHAPTER FIVE

LIFE STORIES

This chapter is based on the life stories of six Dalit Christian women, all of whom are survivors of violence. First of all this chapter recounts the life stories of two women, who are survivors of sexual violence within the family. Secondly, it deals with the life stories of three women, who survive domestic violence, such as wife battering, at home. Thirdly, it analyses the life story of a woman, who is the survivor of cultural violence.

Sexual Violence within the Family

Leela

Leela⁵⁶⁹ is a Dalit Christian woman from the Cheramar (Pulaya) caste, who is thirty-three years old, married to a Pastor, and the mother of two children. Leela studied up to S.S.L.C.⁵⁷⁰ and is now a housewife.⁵⁷¹

When she was asked to tell her life story Leela started with a story of the violence she had experienced in her childhood. She pointed out that it was the first time in her life that she had shared this experience with anyone:

Within these thirty-three years it is at this moment I am telling it. I have a case that burns within me today also. When I pray in the presence of God, always I have a thought that 'I am a sinner.' Let me share it openly now.⁵⁷²

Dangers in a Joint Family Set-up

The joint family system can be a seedbed for nurturing sexual violence against female children and women. Leela told me that her experience of sexual violence originated in a joint family arrangement:

My parent's family was a joint family. My father's family included grandfather, grandmother, father's brothers and sisters. It was a family that lived with difficulties and I had its [setback] experiences because of the joint family. If I had today's knowledge in those days it [sexual violence] would not have happened. When I was in class three or four, from that time onwards my father's brothers [used me]; they [the uncles] are elderly people now and I hate

⁵⁶⁹ Leela is not the real name of the participant; name is changed for safety reasons.

⁵⁷⁰ Secondary School Leaving Certificate.

⁵⁷¹ Leela, Registration Form, One-Day Seminar on "Women's Suffering," Parippu: New India Bible Church, 19th November 2001.

⁵⁷² Transcript of Conversation between Leela and Sara Abraham at Leela's Residence in Kottayam on 28th November 2001.

to look at their faces. He is my father's brother, now he is nearly fifty years old. In those days I was in the age of studying in class three and his age at that time might be thirty or thirty-five. In those days we were living a joint family, when my parents were not at home, I was attacked, attacked means sexually in every way and I am unable to tell it to others because at that time I lived by depending on all. There was no love between my father and mother. They were not in good tune because of doubting each other. They hated each other because of the difficulties in their lives. Therefore, from my childhood onwards, I was careful to avoid such situations [any quarrel], that is why [I had] this kind of experiences from my father's brother. My father's brothers, both of them one after another used me. Now, when I think about it, what had happened in my life, that troubles me. Those time and now also I do not tell it in order to avoid quarrel.⁵⁷³

Leela could not talk to anyone about the sexual violence she experienced because her violators threatened her life. Leela states that the sexual violence by her uncles continued even after she moved away from the joint family:

[Uncles] had sexual relationship with me. I know that. I was attacked. They used me as they liked and I was scared. If it were today, I could stand and speak it straight away. In those days, it was impossible to utter even a single word against father's younger brothers due to fear. It was not possible to tell anything because of the fear. When they come back home at night after work, there was no separate room for anybody but all [of us] used to sleep together [in the same room]. I slept with father and mother but there were occasions [uncles could do anything to me], when my parents went for work and they were not at home. If uncles could not go for work, they would do wicked things [sexual abuse] to me according to their age. They did whatever they wanted to do to me. After that I was threatened not to tell it to anyone.⁵⁷⁴

Leela describes how the sexual violence by her one uncle continued even after she left the *kuttukudumbam* (joint family):

When the youngest uncle came home I used to run and hide; my parents and others did not know about it. I was told that if someone comes to know about it, he would kill me or he would do that or this [he would do any kind of harm]. I was scared when I heard it. One day while I was having bath inside the thatched bathroom I knew that he is back [at home], then there was no sound of pouring water [I did not pour water on my body in order to avoid any sound]; I controlled my breath and stood still. He came in and called me and did everything [sex], as he liked; it was inside the bathroom. He took the bath towel by force from my hand and pushed it inside my mouth. [My] father and mother had gone to the field for work. My four brothers used to go [out] and play; two [of them] are elder to me. My own brothers did not know that their own uncle would do such things. They [uncles] are of my brother's age. One day this disturbance was stopped. My father and mother used to quarrel always, therefore, there was no peace; in such a situation how can I talk about this matter? As I was sleeping at home [with my family], my younger uncle was at home. When it was midnight he got up and drew near me. I knew it was him when [I felt his] breath. When some one comes home, I get worried because I

⁵⁷³ Transcript of Conversation between Leela and S. Abraham.

⁵⁷⁴ Transcript of Conversation between Leela and S. Abraham.

do not know what to do, where to go and where to sleep [If someone comes home I do not have a safe place to sleep at night]. In those days my parents would not permit me to go to the neighbours house [to sleep]. They [parents] did not think that this [sexual violence] would happen from our own people. I was unable to sleep because of his presence at home. When all others were in deep sleep he came near me. When he drew closer, my mother felt something as she turned to one side, and she touched his hand or leg unknowingly, when he sat near me. Mother turned and asked 'Who are you?' She got up immediately. Then he started to pretend [abnormal]. I know that this [sexual violence] would happen therefore, I did not sleep but I pretended that I was in deep sleep. Auntie, you might ask that why did not I tell [to my mother] about it then. If I had told it, my mother would have made him two pieces, that was her nature, therefore, I just remained there without moving. He pretended abnormal and uttered, "Where am I? I want go home right now." My mother [in her] sincerity asked 'Where do you want to go this night?' This uncle was in the same age of my mother's eldest son [my eldest brother]. Therefore, she said 'Do not go anywhere this night, go when it is morning.' He knows that if my mother comes to know it she would do something. Therefore, he left my home at dawn. That problem ended on that day. I have not yet told anyone about it until today. When I pray, when the Holy Spirit works in me, I am thinking that I am a sinner (sobbing).⁵⁷⁵

The sexual violence Leela experienced in the childhood demonstrated that the joint family could be a context for sexual violence in the lives of female children. Leela's ignorance about sex was another contributing fact leading to sexual violence by her uncles.

Leela came to know about sex when she had her first menstruation. Leela's mother advised her to be careful and explained what sex was and how babies are born. When Leela listened to her mother, she realised that what her uncles had been doing to her was sex and then she was afraid of pregnancy:

It was not a touch but a proper [penetration] in all the way. When I began to menstruate my mother told that if female and male join together in this way, babies are born. When this much was told, then I understood [what sex is] and then there was a great fear in my mind [whether I would become pregnant]. Oh, God it did not happen, what would have been my life in such a situation?⁵⁷⁶

Leela is not yet relieved from the psychological effects of the sexual exploitation she experienced in her childhood.

Sexual Violence in Childhood and Its Impact on later Life

Leela experienced difficulty adjusting to life with her husband after her marriage because of the sexual violence she had experienced from her uncles. After the marriage she could

⁵⁷⁵ Transcript of Conversation between Leela and S. Abraham.

⁵⁷⁶ Transcript of Conversation between Leela and S. Abraham.

not co-operate in sex with husband. Leela experienced hatred and fear at night due to the sexual violence she experienced in her childhood.⁵⁷⁷ Leela explained that after marriage she had to survive violence from her husband, when she could not co-operate in sex with him:

Once in the night he threw me out of the bed, he threw me on the floor. There was a sofa here. I used to quarrel, I did not co-operate [for sex], and when it was morning I was in the sofa. He used to beat me in the night. *Ammachi* [mother] and *Appachi* [father] were there, in those days we were not in the faith. I came to faith because this [struggle] was there in my mind. Mother [mother-in-law] also came to faith. My husband used to play cards, drink toddy and he had all the bad habits. After drinking toddy he related to me [did sex] in the way he liked and if I was not co-operating, as he liked, then I was thrown out of the bed. Then at night he called his mother, father and sister and abused [me in front of them]. He said abusing words and then asked them to send me home. Then I thought about the situation at home if I returned. Three or four months passed. They married me and sent me away, therefore, if I returned I would be a burden to them. Later I started to co-operate [in sex] with my husband but for one year I could not co-operate sincerely.⁵⁷⁸

Although Leela's family is in financial difficulties and she fears the bank will confiscate her house and belongings if they are unable to pay back their debt,⁵⁷⁹ Leela explains what troubles her more than everything at present is her childhood experience:

I have peace now, if it [house and property] is going, let it go. I depend on the word of the Lord. I will see the new sky and new earth and I comfort myself in that way. We may lose everything we did by our own hand [house and property] but still I [keep] smiling and get comforted... My husband has a bit of an angry nature but he loves me more. This debt is not a problem for me but my childhood experience is still threatening me.⁵⁸⁰

Until I listened to her story Leela had not found anyone, with whom she could share her experience of sexual violence that continues to threaten her daily.

Keeping Silent about Abuse

Leela gained courage through talking about the experience of sexual violence and started to overcome the fear and insecurity, which had prevented her from sharing her experiences of sexual violence with her parents, husband, pastor or any friends. She feared that if she disclosed it to others her uncles would do all kinds of harm to her. If she shared it with her husband, he might accuse her and despise her or their relationship would be damaged. If

⁵⁷⁷ Transcript of Conversation between Leela and S. Abraham.

⁵⁷⁸ Transcript of Conversation between Leela and S. Abraham.

⁵⁷⁹ Transcript of Conversation between Leela and S. Abraham.

⁵⁸⁰ Transcript of Conversation between Leela and S. Abraham.

she tells it to friends or pastor, they might degrade her and she would not be treated or respected well.

Even if Leela is leading a happy family life⁵⁸¹ at present she thinks it is wise not to share her experience with her husband:

Some times I think that why do not I tell it, why do not I tell it to Babuchayan [husband]? Then I think is he not a man? If he gets something in mind, then he will behave accordingly. When man [husband] gets angry, he could humiliate me by 'referring to what I tell,' and using 'this' is enough.⁵⁸²

Leela finds that fear prevents her from disclosing her experience to any one:

These kinds of experiences [experience of sexual violence] are unable to be shared because of fear. I should have told my family and avoided such things but we lived by depending one another because of the joint family. Therefore, if I tell, it would affect my mother by thinking that I did not tell it. If I tell [it to anyone] my father's brothers are rowdies [and they might harm me].⁵⁸³

Leela explains the violent character of her eldest uncle:

Wherever, there are beatings and quarrels, he is there in the midst and everything takes place under his control. I am scared of him and local people are also scared of him.⁵⁸⁴

Leela continues to explain:

My elder uncle, after his marriage, called me. I responded to his call because of fear. He asked me, 'Have you seen Omana's [wife] breasts? This should be big as her's, and then he caught my breasts and attacked me.'⁵⁸⁵

Violence against the Mother and the Female Child

Leela explained that her parent's quarrels and father's violence against her mother also damaged the peace of her childhood. Leela explained how she tried to kill herself because of her unhappiness:

When my parents returned after work, I am at home. When they return, the reason for their quarrels are [silly] like 'Did not go to shop' or 'Did not purchase things.' [Father] tell one thing and for the second saying [he takes sickle]. I can be proud and say that there is no other good man like my father but he has this kind of bad habit taking the sickle suddenly. He gets angry. It might be due to my mother's voice and words; I can't say that it is not because of it... I decided to die because I did not want to see my parents fight. I decided

⁵⁸¹ Leela tells: "Now [we are happy] and there is no problem." Transcript of Conversation between Leela and S. Abraham.

⁵⁸² Transcript of Conversation between Leela and S. Abraham.

⁵⁸³ Transcript of Conversation between Leela and S. Abraham.

⁵⁸⁴ Transcript of Conversation between Leela and S. Abraham.

⁵⁸⁵ Transcript of Conversation between Leela and S. Abraham.

how to die. I took a *thorthu*,⁵⁸⁶ my house was on the banks of a canal, and there was some field and a pool. I went there and sat with *thorthu*. I pushed that *thorthu* inside my mouth. At that time one of our neighbours, who likes me, called. I thought that I would go inside the canal in the struggle to die. There is mud [inside the canal]. I expected to go inside the mud in the canal. She saw that my eyes were bulged and then she took me. Then she asked, “What did you do? Why do you bother if father and mother are doing like this [quarrel]? You should not do this kind of work [do not kill yourself] by thinking that [about parent’s fight].” I had that kind of experience, and in such occasions [whenever I try to kill myself] some one comes and saves me.⁵⁸⁷

Leela is a witness of the father’s violence against her mother.

Leela's Strength through the Word of God

Leela finds strength and guidance by reading the Bible. The scripture became a source of strength for her survival while Leela faced difficulties at home:

There was disturbance from parents and there was no peace at home but I had a thought to do Gospel ministry. I desired to have a Bible. When I started reading the New Testament, I asked for a [full] Bible. When I got the Bible I wanted to go for gospel ministry.⁵⁸⁸

Prayer, singing and reading the Bible are the sources of strength for Leela’s survival. Leela declares that:

I will not tell any other human being these difficulties I experience now. Whenever there are problems in my life, I tell it in the presence of God. This morning also there was a talk between us [Leela and husband] that ‘Why do we have to tell our matters to others?’ We need to make peace and we need to comfort ourselves, even if we tell it to anyone, there will not be a solution. I sit, pray and cry in the presence of God, I find peace by doing this and when I sing a song my troubles are gone.⁵⁸⁹

Kavitha Johnson

The next survivor of sexual violence is Kavitha Johnson. She is a twenty-six years old Dalit Christian woman from the Cheramar caste. She studied up to class eight and her present partner is Johnson Thomas, who is thirty-eight years old. Both of them are daily wage labourers and they have one child.⁵⁹⁰ Kavitha’s childhood was difficult because her parents lived in the joint family and there were also quarrels between her parents.

⁵⁸⁶ *Thorthu* is a thin cotton towel.

⁵⁸⁷ Transcript of Conversation between Leela and S. Abraham.

⁵⁸⁸ Transcript of Conversation between Leela and S. Abraham.

⁵⁸⁹ Transcript of Conversation between Leela and S. Abraham.

⁵⁹⁰ Registration Form, One-Day Seminar on “Women’s Suffering,” Parippu: New India Church, 19th November 2001.

The 'Culture of Quarrel' in the Joint Family

Kavitha's father had the heavy responsibility of looking after his own wife, four children, his parents, a sister and her four children, and his father's brother. Kavitha explained how she went to her mother's home:

Therefore, looking after these many people, this heavy responsibility was on my father. There is *nathunporu*⁵⁹¹ between the in-laws in our Kerala State. Therefore, they did not like it when my mother was there. My father has two sisters and they gave bad reports about my mother. What I am telling now is the knowledge I got through the sayings of my mother and mother's people. They all said that my mother's character was bad, therefore, my father doubted my mother and started to beat her, and in that way he took the four of us to my mother's house.⁵⁹²

Kavitha shares her memory about her childhood how she lived in a 'culture of quarrel':

My mother has four brothers, two younger sisters, and one elder sister; they are eight children, parents and we were in their midst. If my mother's sister was sent away by marriage, my mother's one brother married and brought one, [including her] three, they have one child, the eldest one is of my age, my uncle's daughter. When we lived there, father's sister and children were a burden, but when we came here, we became a burden for my mother's brother and children. They did not have their freedom there [at home] because these many members were there, they are eight, [including] mother and father ten, [including] daughter-in-law eleven, [including] their child twelve, and we are four, [all] together [there were] sixteen [people]. Was it not necessary to feed sixteen stomachs? Therefore, there [all] experienced the difficulties of it in the lives. It was the house for their freedom but we were a burden there. Therefore, they quarrelled with each other over every single item.⁵⁹³

'Untouchable' Dalit Women are as 'Touchable Objects' of Sexual Pleasure

Rich and high caste men, when they get involved in sex with Dalit women, ignore caste and untouchability. Kavitha explains how rich people sexually exploited Dalit women and how her mother became part of this degrading system:

When I became grown up, I understood one evil thing; that there was an office of a rich man in the eastern side of our house. There was his office and [he] had about hundred acres of farm. My grandfather was the guard for that farmland, and my mother used to work there. She worked there day and night. During the harvest time, they had to collect grain, clean it, and do many other things. Yes, I have seen the situation, where they worked without any difference between day and night. The people, who come there for the agriculture, were Christians, Nayars, Kuruppan and high caste people. Then there were other people [Dalits] for all other work except the work in the paddy field. There was

⁵⁹¹ *Nathun* means sister-in-law and *poru* means fight. *Nathunporu* is a Malayalam word, which means the fight between sister-in-laws.

⁵⁹² Transcript of Conversation between Kavitha Johnson and Sara Abraham, Parippu: New India Bible Church, 27th November 2001.

⁵⁹³ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

friendship with such people. But later I understood one thing. There were so many people who come from far away for this work, and they make [temporary] house to stay. There were many acres of land for harvest and seedling. When they stay there, rich men go in for physical relationships with the [Dalit] girls who come there and they are brought for that purpose [sex], but outside [in public] it is said that they are brought for work. That is one side. It is right that they are brought for work, but, in those days, I did not know things clearly. Later many told of it. I am speaking this on the basis of what I saw at that time. Therefore, my mother also was a slave to that bad custom. My mother's people speak about her innocence, mother was innocent, and my father left my mother because of their [own family's] pressure and the pressure from his sisters.⁵⁹⁴

Dalit women, who are treated as 'untouchables,' may consider the sexual contact of the high caste men as a privilege to break the untouchability.

Poverty and financial difficulties are other factors encouraging Dalit women to have sex with high caste men. Kavitha said that her mother used to talk little to own children and Kavitha could not understand the personal difficulties of her mother:

My grandfather, mother's father constructed a house in five cents [of land]; it was on the eastern side of the canal. I started to go to school, when we were staying in that house. In those days my mother used to speak very little at home, if I say 'very little,' that is she spoke [to us] only when it was very necessary. I did not understand what she experienced in her private life.⁵⁹⁵

Kavitha explains the incidents she witnessed and how an Ezhava Hindu male visited her mother at night for sex:

There was an incident when I was studying in class eight and I was studying at Kumarakkam. One-day night, when I was studying, I did not know what was the time but I know it was midnight. I saw a person opening the door of the room, where we were laying down, and he came in. Then I did not know personally anything about it [why did he come in]. I thought 'why has he come in, who might be he, what might be it.' I heard about *bhuutha pretha pisachukkal* [devil, the soul of the dead person, and Satan] that came first in to my mind. After sometime, I heard the sound someone knocking on the kitchen door. Next day again at the same time [he] came. I saw [him] on the following day also. I have seen him on those days, but I did not know why this person came. It was over, and then I did not think much, when I was studying. I did not know that he comes like this [for sex] and I did not know anything about it. When I heard from others and my friends about the things that happen in different places, I started to think. Then I thought about it, 'there is an incident like this in my house, I need to find out what it is, I need to find out it' and this thought was there in my mind. One day it happened [again] and I have seen it by my eyes. When the door was opened, he opened the door and came in, I saw, when my mother lifted the lock of the door. When I opened [again] my eyes and [my mother] opened the door, there was nice moonlight outside therefore I saw the person, who came out. He was sent for switching on the

⁵⁹⁴ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁵⁹⁵ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

motor, when there was no water in the paddy field. When it is late evening he goes to his house, and then he returns about 12.00 p.m., comes to our house at midnight, then he returns to his house, this is what happened.⁵⁹⁶

When Kavitha came to know that her mother was involved in the sex business she started to hate mother.

Kavitha Confronts Mother

In her childhood Kavitha confronted her mother concerning her involvement in the sex business. However, Kavitha's mother's life style had developed because of the financial difficulties she faced. When she had sex with men, it brought in some income to rear her children. However, Kavitha could not understand the life style of her mother. Later Kavitha kept a knife under her pillow to attack the man who came for sex with her mother:

I kept a knife, which [I] used for harvest, under my head. [I will kill him] by one cut if he [Ezhava man] comes again. When he knocks [the door] and calls, I will do as my mother did [opening the door] and then I will take the knife and cut him. I took that decision in my mind to cut and kill him but it did not happen [he did not visit] for many days. One day the door was opened but I was unable to do anything. Even if I thought like this and lay down, I could not get up or call my mother; there was no strength for it. The strength I desired in my mind was destroyed. I became very sad and did not tell anything. After sometime he left. I told my mother, '*Amma* [mother], I know everything now.' She did not say [reply] anything. I said that 'Thirteen year old me understand everything that I see.' She asked me 'What did you see?' Then she disliked me and there was revenge. She asked 'What did you understand?' I asked her, 'Is it not because of this [evil habit] my father left you and you are staying here?' I cried so much on that night. On that day my elder brother and sister were [not at home, they] went to my father's house. Once in a while, my father's people came and took them. We little ones were with our mother. I asked my mother, '*Amma*, was it not because of your bad character, you are brought and left here and we are ridiculed in front of others? Is it not because of your character we are humiliated by others?' I cried so much on that day. My younger brother also cried. I told my mother, 'I do not want to live anymore, I will go and die somewhere, you gave the space for others to talk about you, it is a shame. If my friends come to know about it they will not mingle with me.' Not only that the person who came his daughter is one of my close friends; her name is Sandhya. Therefore, I was disturbed much. I spoke and cried much. Then my mother replied, 'I did not have this character in early time, I had a good character, but your father made me like this, I never went to anyone. I went because such situation came and it was a burden for me to bring-up all of you. I could not send you to others, that is why I have done this.' Later that man did not come to our house. When I saw him next day, there was a long and big iron rod in our house. My grandfather used that long and flat rod for grinding the *murukkan*,⁵⁹⁷ it is long and thick rod. I took that iron rod and showed him, when he was coming in front of our house. My mother was at work. After

⁵⁹⁶ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁵⁹⁷ *Murukkan* is a mixture of betel leaves, arachanut, lime and tobacco made for chewing.

showing it I told him, 'Hereafter if you come and get inside my house, I will kill you with this iron rod, I will not shrink from that.'⁵⁹⁸

Kavitha's boldness prevented the Ezhava man from continuing his sexual relationship with her mother.

Kavitha's Experience of Exclusion by Society

Later when people came to know about her mother's character, they were ostracised by the society. Kavitha tells about the seclusion:

Everyone slowly came to know my mother's matter, what had happened secretly for many years. When it was widely known among people in that locality, they stopped co-operating with us.⁵⁹⁹

Kavitha then shared how the isolation led her to develop her first love affair with an Ezhava boy:

Like that, at that time [while we were living in seclusion], a man named Aji used to come to our house. He used to come to a house, where my Auntie is related. He used to come and stay in our house too. Gradually, I began a love affair with him. Some times we were in deep love but he did not do anything [no physical contact] and did not tell it to me. I became the centre of his life. There was no co-operation for me with my mother, then there was my younger brother, there was no co-operation with the people in the locality, in such a situation I got him as a companion, therefore, and I loved him sincerely. I was unable to leave him but I could not understand the evil and deceiving, which exists in the hearts of people. I understood that the one who smiles at me [Aji] loves me. Today I understood the wickedness and deceiving in it but I could not understand it at that time (Crying).⁶⁰⁰

Kavitha explains that she could not understand the hidden agenda of Aji, when she eloped with him:

When I come to know that he is going to marry someone, I was so much [sad] then I thought [if he marries someone] there is no meaning in living. He will marry someone, then I do not have any co-operation with local people, there was not even that much co-operation with my mother, even if I talk to her I am detached from her mentally; it was a wide gap and we could not co-operate. I was sad because she [mother] was hiding everything from me. There was none to love us, as is a mother's duty, usually a mother loves her children but my mother spoke to us rarely. If I do anything opposite, I have the love towards my youngsters; I loved three of them. In such a situation I thought when this man loves me sincerely, [I would elope] with him, then I went with him. He was very loving to me at that time; I could not understand any deceiving. He took me to his house in a loving way.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁸ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁵⁹⁹ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶⁰⁰ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶⁰¹ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

A Violent Drug Addicted Partner

Later Kavitha discovered that her lover was a drug addict and that his love for her was not real:

Later the physical relationship [sex] was like animals. Therefore, I hated [him]. My hatred to him increased day by day. One day I went to wash his shirt, then I saw a packet, I took the packet, opened and looked it. There was something like small round seeds, it was dried, it had the colour of cumin, it was not coriander seeds and there was a packet of it. I took some in my hand, there was his elder brother and wife, and [their] children went to school. [When] I bite it, there was a sensation in my tongue. I asked *chettan* [his elder brother], ‘*Chetta* what is this? Is it anything for seedling? Is it the seeds of any vegetables?’ He took it from my hand, he pressed it with his finger and he looked at my face for sometime and then he was crying. I did not go to his [partner’s] house, this is his eldest brother [we were staying in elder brother’s house], and he lives with their three children. Then *chettan* told me, ‘This is *kanjavu* [drugs]. He uses it regularly. This [drug] is the cause for his character changes and he is a slave to it. He has been using it for many years. Even if we tried we could not redeem him from this character. We thought that he would be redeemed when you [Kavitha] are here. Therefore, we did not stand against his wishes. We agreed thinking that there would be changes in his character when you are here but there is no change for his character. If you have not changed his character, it will not change in your lifetime.’⁶⁰²

Kavitha explained how her partner started to attack later:

One day I was asked to stand and he beat me on my both cheeks; his brothers saw it. Then he [partner] told me “I do not have even little love to you. I am telling one thing today openly, if you were a virgin I only wanted to have the pleasure of that but you are not co-operating. I hate you; I do not like you. This is not the first time for me. I have many [women] here; I will continue those [relationships]. You should not oppose it. You stay here. You should not question it or oppose it.” I listened to it, when there was none, I hated him, and there was revenge in my mind.⁶⁰³

Kavitha had to survive the violence of her partner and physical attacks from two other men living in the same house.

An Attack by Relatives

When Kavitha shared her plan to leave violent partner and return home, her partner’s brother desired to live with Kavitha.⁶⁰⁴ When her brother-in-law requested she go with him Kavitha replied: “No *chetta* [brother-in-law], it is not possible to be the wife of two

⁶⁰² Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶⁰³ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶⁰⁴ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

persons in the same house. I will stay as his wife but you do not see or speak to me like that.’⁶⁰⁵

Kavitha experienced the physical attack of her partner’s brother-in-law because her partner permitted him to do anything to her:

His [partner’s] younger sister and husband came home and stayed. She made some problem in her house and could not agree with her mother-in-law. Later there was a day of violence [I experienced violence]. She used to go for work in the morning and come back at nine at night. His mother goes for work and comes back by 7.00 p.m. Even if his father is there [at home] he is unable to see and cannot hear. My person [partner] also goes for work. Then his *chettan* is there, he also goes for work; sometimes there is work and sometimes no work [for him]. Then this *aliyan* [one who married a sister] he is a great disturbance [to me] and he used to catch me by force. If I sit inside the house somewhere, he runs and comes to me, embraces me and kisses me by force. Then he leaves the house suddenly [as if nothing happened therefore] no one doubted it. There is a wife for him therefore, none will agree [understand] if I tell it [about what he did]. I told him one day “If you do like this again, I will tell Aji when he comes. There will be killing here, do you know it? Girija and Manoj will not be allowed to stay here.” His name is Manoharan and he is called Manoj. He told me then, ‘If your man comes to know it, he will not do anything to me, I am doing all these things with his permission.’⁶⁰⁶

When Kavitha witnessed her partner’s physical relationship with another woman, she was shocked:

There was a *chechi* [elder lady] named Pushpam, she used to come to our house often. Mother [mother-in-law] told, ‘Do not get bored by sitting [at home], you go there to talk with Pushpha.’ When I [went there and] looked, all doors were closed, she told me that morning she would be at home. She told me that she is not going anywhere, ‘I am at home, and you come there.’ It was eleven a.m. when I went there, all doors were closed. When I called, there was no response. When I went and opened the window my husband and she were lying down in an embrace on the bed. The door was locked. When I called and when they did not respond they thought that I might return by thinking that there is no one in. They never thought that I would peep [in]. I thought she might be sleeping. Her children went to school, her husband is a person who sells fish and he returns late evening. There are no neighbours for them. They thought that if they kept the doors closed I might return. When I opened [the window], I saw this incident. I was so sad, I am unable to tell and I returned home. He is a deceiver.⁶⁰⁷

Kavitha’s partner’s brother also used to catch hold of her.⁶⁰⁸ Kavitha continued her description of how two relatives of her partner attacked her:

Chettan embraced me. I did not permit beyond a certain limit [laughing]. He touched me, pampered me and tried to kiss me and when it was more, I left and

⁶⁰⁵ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶⁰⁶ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶⁰⁷ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶⁰⁸ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

ran from him. He desired only that much to do. He will not do anything more than that. But this Manoj has too much hunger. When he goes anywhere if I lay down somewhere [inside the house], he returns soon. If I lay down, he opens the door and comes in then there is a *malppidutham* [two persons using the force to defeat each the other], I escape from him by biting and beating him. This *chettan* also comes for a relationship without marriage.⁶⁰⁹

It was difficult for Kavitha to continue in the same house because of the wrong attitudes and abuses of three men, who lived under the same roof.

Separation from Violent Drug Addicted Partner

Kavitha explains why she decided to leave her partner Aji:

Do you know that he comes from the bar after drinking too much? After drinking he goes [to prostitutes]. Aleppy District is the centre for prostitutes. All deceive their husbands. We cannot say one in hundred but one in a thousand woman only are faithful to husbands, that is the truth... Women are coming like that [for prostitution], that is why men come [for it]. That is a reality, correct thing. It [Allepuzha or Aleppy] is a place like Sodom and Gomorrah. Then there are countable [women] by fingers with whom my husband did not have relationship there. He is very smart; he is not too dark, not too white, but in between the two colours. He is tall, normal body, with beards, good-looking; his eyes are attractive, when he looks, people [women] fall [in love with him]. He is a handsome [man], older woman, middle-aged women, younger ones, even ten and fourteen years old girls are his slaves [having relationship with him]. It is such a wicked place.⁶¹⁰

When I asked about the sexual relationship between Kavitha and her partner, she explained:

In the midnight after drinking he goes to the houses of his companions, then he comes to me at twelve in the night or by 1.00 a.m. He takes bath and then if he feels hungry, he eats if I give rice. Then he gets up by morning 4.00 a.m. Then he behaves like an animal; he is only concerned with his [sexual] pleasure. He did not mind me. He was not willing for [sex], as I like. I do not have any sincerity because he deceived me. I stayed there because I am in his trap. I forgive him that much [as long as I stayed there]. I forgave [him] much, for a long time I bore [everything], and sometimes I kept silent.⁶¹¹

Kavitha lived with him for five to six months and was lucky not to become pregnant within that short period.⁶¹²

⁶⁰⁹ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶¹⁰ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶¹¹ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

Kavitha Turns to Christianity

Life was not easy for Kavitha when she left her partner and returned home. Later she turned to Christianity. Kavitha explains how she became a Christian:

I returned home after six months. I shrank to myself, none co-operated with me from outside. I desired help from others, [but] I did not go to anyone. I went for work. I brought money and gave it to mother. Everything takes place. Then there was no desire in me to live. In the past, I did not achieve anything in my life. I was disappointed always and [my] only desire was to die. In such a situation I experienced salvation. There was a convention here. [It was the] time I desired to die...Then she [a friend] said that we couldn't achieve anything by death. She was in [Christian] faith at that time. She is [the member of] a Church in the western side; it is our New India's [New India Bible Church]. I went there for prayer. She also had hope and faith. Then she told me that 'There is no achievement by death. If we know the Lord [Jesus Christ], he will give peace in our life. Therefore, you do one thing. Come with us for prayer. God will give you a good life and you believe it. Come for prayer today.' When she told it I did not have a mind to accept it. I did not believe it. I went for convention for seven days. When I went there one evening, the present minister, [Yohannan, a Pastor from Pulaya caste] spoke. The convention was on 5th of April 1997. When I went there, from the word of God, he spoke about my past life. I thought that this is about me, this is told for me, this is the path where I walked, I thought. Then he told me that 'God can make changes in your life. Today you desire to die. But if you die, you cannot achieve anything by your life. If you die, there is no use for others. If you live for Christ, God can change you from your sinful life. Therefore, if you accept Christ as your Saviour and believe it in your heart, he will wipe away your sins. You confess it by your mouth.' I got up and stood, then confessed it by mouth. I told that I am confessing my sins and accepting Christ as my Saviour.'⁶¹³

Kavitha became a Christian and later she took a Dalit Christian man as her partner.

Kavitha Accepts a New Partner after Her Mother's Death

Kavitha's mother died due to tuberculosis, jaundice and fever. After her mother's death there was no one for Kavitha to depend on.⁶¹⁴ Kavitha recounts that she relied on a sickle for her safety, while she spent nights alone at home and then how she met Johnson her present partner:

At night, when others [men] knock at the door, then I depend on a sickle. Even if I sit holding a sickle, could I do anything when two or three people come? That time Johnson was the member of the Church at Kanakkal...He knew everything about me...Then I told Johnson that I am going through suffering

⁶¹² Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶¹³ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶¹⁴ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

and suffering means I am unable to live here alone. If I tell that I am unable to live alone, I do not have my mother now; my brother is not here.⁶¹⁵

Kavitha explained that there was no marriage ceremony, when Johnson took her to his house both of them were not welcomed in the family and in the church:

[Johnson] did not marry me but he told his sister that he was bringing me to their home. When I went there, they also did not like me. Johnson and his sister live separately. There was godly happiness and peace in [my] heart. I did not know that what I did [going with Johnson] was wrong. We were unable [not permitted] to attend [services in] the church or give testimonies [because of staying together without marriage]. Even if I sat at home, I used to sing songs and pray. Then Pastor came and said, 'Sister, do not sit like this here [please come for the worship services but] you are not allowed to give testimony in the church, that is the law of our church. What you did [coming with Johnson without marrying him] is wrong.' Will not God forgive it? Does God know that I did it in my ignorance? We should not become children in wisdom. Then we both came here for the worship. After that our marriage was conducted in this church. Now we are living happily, we are leading a happy family life.⁶¹⁶

Kavitha considers caste discrimination and colour discrimination as violence against Dalit Christian women.

Caste Discrimination and Colour Discrimination are Violence

Kavitha points out caste and colour discrimination occur within Christianity in Kerala:

"But the violence in the Christian life is the colour discrimination and caste discrimination. I am sad to tell that it exists today."⁶¹⁷

Kavitha confessed that the Dalit Christian women did not like it, when they heard that Thomas Philip was to visit their Church with his wife Mercy Thomas, cousin sister Mercy Varghese and me. Generally they do not like high caste Christians because of the caste discrimination they experience within the Church and society:

Then we told 'Oh he is bringing white *madammas*⁶¹⁸ Sarakutty, Mercy Varghese, Mercy Thomas [He brings white skinned ladies Sara, Mercy Varghese and Mercy Thomas]; this is what we told (laughing). I am not joking. This is the truth. We do not have to separate you [from other Syrian Christians]; because what we have seen is like that [usually he brings only Syrian Christians or high caste Christians with him]. Now I am speaking what we experience in the society. I am telling this not because of any personal revenge [to anyone but] we see this evil [caste system] in the society. If we

⁶¹⁵ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶¹⁶ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶¹⁷ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶¹⁸ *Madamma* is a Malayalam word referring to white ladies from Europe or West and Kavitha Johnson used the same word for referring to women from higher caste, who have light skin colour.

examine the spiritual aspect, I can tell [prove] it [discrimination]. For example, if you want to confirm it, when we take the Malayala Manorama [news] paper, examine the 'Bridegroom wanted' or 'Bride wanted' columns (laughter). [Usually it is advertised] 'The young man, who came from the Syrian Christian family, born again and baptised, wants [looking for] a bride, who is born again and from the same denomination' (laughing). I examine all these things because I hate such things. But when someone speaks [about the caste discrimination], unable to explain it with proof. Look [examine] everything. Caste discrimination is not practised [in case of] the one, who marries secondly, or the one who has any weakness or sickness advertise that they will not mind caste [for the second marriage]. Even if [a Dalit girl is] born-again, baptised, economically well, no [high caste] Christian boy desires to take [marry] a girl from our caste [Cheramar]. They desire to marry from the people, who are in their [own] level. That is right. As I told now, when sir [Thomas Philip, president of the Church] comes here, he brings such people [high caste Christians]; he brings white [Syrian Christians] people. Then once in a while he brings any [Dalit Christian] boys, who study there [New India Bible College]. That is also rarely. I listen [watch] that for years. Auntie [Sara], is it wrong what I said? Is it not right?⁶¹⁹

Kavitha explained how one of the Pentecostal Christian denominations in Kerala State is divided in two on the basis of caste:

Sir [Rev. Thomas Philip] cannot get angry to us. He is unable to show any caste discrimination to us because only we [Dalit Christians] are there in the New India Bible Church. Christians [Syrian Christians] are limited number and countable by using the fingers. The rest is Sambavars [Paraiyahs] and we [Cheramar], who came [converted] from the low castes. If such thing [caste discrimination] happens [within the New India Bible Church], we all will go to Division.⁶²⁰ Look at it; it is divided as the Church of God Division and the Church of God State. Whites [high caste Christians] are in the State and blacks [Dalits] are in the Division. Could we tell these things in front of the gentiles? Even if it is spiritual [even if this caste discrimination is there in the Church], we pray. Such things [caste and colour discriminations] are there [within the Church of God]. There are Gentiles [non-Christians] but we will not talk to them about the caste discrimination within the Church. We should not give time for others [Gentiles] to criticise us [Christians]. Why am I telling this is if they show caste discrimination in the earth then certainly my Lord will ask them [they are accountable to God]. Otherwise [if not] I will tell on that day [judgement day] that God is partial. God will show [the same to them], is it not? Your opinion [may be] God will not show it. The one, who is partial, God also will be partial to them.⁶²¹

Kavitha complained that Dalit Christians are discriminated by the leaders in the Church:

Those who are sitting in the hierarchy, show this discrimination to the ones who came to the Lord [Dalit Christians]. Did you understand? Still there is a

⁶¹⁹ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶²⁰ A Pentecostal denomination, Church of God, in Kerala State is divided as State and Division on the basis of castes. The members of the Division are Dalit Christians and the members of the State are high caste Christians.

⁶²¹ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

long way for India to go forward culturally [to break the caste and colour barriers].⁶²²

Kavitha has a solid knowledge about the existence of caste and colour discrimination within Christianity and within society.

Kavitha's Survival Strategy

Since Kavitha became a Christian she has found strength in her new faith in Christ and she is leading a Christian life:

I came here in 1992. Therefore, from that time onwards, I am leading a good life. When there are mistakes in my life, I confess it to him [God] and ask forgiveness. This [living with Johnson without marriage] happened in my life because of my ignorance. I did not know much about the word of God. If I had that word [of God] in my mind, and if I know that coming like this [coming with Johnson to his house without marrying him] is wrong, I should not have come like this. But at that time I thought about my safety and I came. But until today I did not have a failure in my Christian life. God helped me to lead a good faith life and helped me to be a good housewife. God kept us until today. God gave a daughter after eight years of waiting.⁶²³

Kavitha sincerely desires to lead a good family life and enjoy peace, love and happiness.⁶²⁴

Domestic Violence: Survivors of Wife Battering

Annamma Devasya

Annamma Devasya is a fifty-year-old Dalit Christian woman, who does not know her date of birth. She converted to Christianity from the Cheramar caste. She studied up to class five and is a daily wage labourer.⁶²⁵ Annamma gets a thousand rupees as salary per month for washing vessels in a house.⁶²⁶ Annamma explained that her family was unable to provide any dowry when she was married at the age of sixteen and her family's primary concern was to settle her with a male no matter what kind of person he was:

When I was married and sent out at sixteen years old, they were not capable to give anything [dowry]. Their thinking was to send me out with a man...that husband [first husband] was deaf and he was sick. In those days I had no knowledge [I agreed to marry him in my ignorance]...After marriage, even for one year I did not stay there [in husband's house] because he could not hear. I was bit smart in appearance therefore; he doubted [me] if I talked to anyone. I

⁶²² Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶²³ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶²⁴ Transcript of Conversation between Johnson and S. Abraham.

⁶²⁵ Annamma Devasya, Registration Form, One-Day Seminar on "Women's Suffering," Parippu: New India Bible Church, 19th November 2001.

⁶²⁶ Transcript of Conversation between Annamma Devasya and Sara Abraham Parippu: New India Bible Church, on 24 / 11/ 2001.

had no authority to talk to anyone, not even to a [little] boy but I used to talk to all. When I talked, he doubted and then I was pushed.⁶²⁷

Violence Experienced from her First Husband

Annamma Devasya explains how she experienced violence from her husband:

One day in the evening, late evening, after a day's job I returned with my mother-in-law, others, elder sister-in-laws and younger sister-in-laws. When I came back, he beat me. At home, I had not suffered in this way. After that I stayed for a year in my home.⁶²⁸

Although Annamma went to her home, again she was sent back to her husband. Annamma explained how her husband's violence against her continued:

Six months after my mother's death I was sent back to my husband. When I went there, I had the same experience and I had no freedom to talk to anyone. He used to watch over me every time. Someone would tell him that 'Eda, she will go away leaving you behind.' His ability was to listen to what others said. If I talked to someone, he strained his ears and after that he used to beat me. After that, oh, my God, a knife, he grinds rock and sharpens the knife, and he keeps it under the pillow. I do not know why he keeps it. Later in the night he makes noises saying that 'someone came and caught her.' So it became unbearable to me. His father and mother told him, "Boy, do not say false words against her. You are a sick person. You have got a good girl; she will work and feed you as long as she can. Do not trouble her." I stayed there by bearing all those difficult experiences and we had two children.⁶²⁹

Whenever Annamma faced violence from husband she returned home. There was no other alternative for her except either to go home or to continue stay with her violent husband.

Annamma explained how husband chased her:

One day when I was pregnant with our second child, he chased me with a sickle. Then, I ran to our neighbour's kitchen, who was a Christian, living down side of our house. The *thampuratti*⁶³⁰ of the house asked 'Who is that?' Then I said '*thampuratti* he is coming to cut me. Please save me.' I fell at her feet. She closed the door and waited. After two days, she told her husband, 'We should bring her out of this house after finding a solution.' The next day morning she called and told my mother-in-law, "Katri, she was brought in her youth, send her back to her people, wherever they may be." They were troubled because of me [my presence in their home]. Then I came back to my home with my children. Even if I went home, again I returned to my husband. Then I had three children.⁶³¹

⁶²⁷ Transcript of Conversation between Devasya and S. Abraham.

⁶²⁸ Transcript of Conversation between Devasya and S. Abraham.

⁶²⁹ Transcript of Conversation between Devasya and S. Abraham.

⁶³⁰ *Thampuratti* is the term used with great respect by Dalits to call the wife of the landlord or the wife of high caste man.

⁶³¹ Transcript of Conversation between Devasya and S. Abraham.

Annamma Struggles to Provide for her Children

Eventually Annamma ran away with her children in order to escape from her violent husband. She explained how she struggled to take care of and provide for their three children:

Later my elder sister allowed me to stay with her. She told me that, “I had told you earlier to be separated from this relationship. You should not have this alliance. You walk in the street with three children. Now we cannot take care of you.” Then I thought like this, ‘what shall I do? Where shall I go with these [three] children?’ I requested my sister, “Auntie, please do one thing. I will go for the servant job anywhere. I will feed my children. You do not need to give anything, just allow us to stay [in your home]. I will not do any harm. There are lots of jobs in the field. I will bring up my children. Just your permission [to stay here] is enough.” Then the eldest sister said, “I told you this, not to be distressed, but who will look after those three kids?” Then I told my Auntie [sister] that I would do a job and feed my children.⁶³²

Annamma described that later her husband’s relatives took her three children to their home but Annamma provided clothes and books for the children:

After staying one year in my sister’s house, then my husband’s mother’s [mother-in-law’s] elder sister’s children took away my children. My mother-in-law’s sister’s children took my three children. Then I was left alone at home. I worked in my elder sister’s house and bought clothes for my three children and [met them] every week. When it was time for schooling, I used to buy schoolbooks and give these to them at school.⁶³³

Annamma was informed the death of her first husband Joseph and she visited his home.⁶³⁴

Violence from her Second Husband

The family arranged Annamma’s second marriage even though she was hesitant about a union with her new husband Devasya. Her response was: “I have three kids; I will bring them up some how. Even if by begging or by doing work I will rear them up. Again I do not want a marriage.”⁶³⁵

The relationship between Annamma and Devasya deteriorated, when Devasya had a new affair with their neighbour, who is a widow.⁶³⁶ Annamma described how she experienced violence from her second husband:

⁶³² Transcript of Conversation between Devasya and S. Abraham.

⁶³³ Transcript of Conversation between Devasya and S. Abraham.

⁶³⁴ Transcript of Conversation between Devasya and S. Abraham.

⁶³⁵ Transcript of Conversation between Devasya and S. Abraham.

⁶³⁶ Transcript of Conversation between Devasya and S. Abraham.

When he used to come after “doing”[sex with Aleyamma] I stopped him at the way and asked him everything. Then he disliked me very much. He hated me and beat me. In response to whatever I say he used to get angry and beat me. One day he beat on my leg with a hammer. Have you seen a hammer, Auntie? See the skin of the leg has gone like this [Showing deep wound marks on the leg where skin is still white and other parts of the body are black]. The skin went off on that day. Now you see, he used to say, “You mind your business. I will go with whomever I like.” He used to quarrel with me by saying all these things. I was depressed. He used to beat me. He beat me a lot; my blouse was torn, torn in to pieces. When I was beaten, she was clapping her hands; she was laughing ha...ha... I could not bear this [her laughter]. Then I told that I am the cause, I should not be an obstacle for both of you. [Then] I told that I am going to die (crying). I ran, brought kerosene bottle and poured kerosene from head to toes. He was standing at the corner of the courtyard. I ran to the kitchen and pushed the mat-door. I looked for the matchbox. He understood that I am looking for the matchbox. Then he ran to me and snatched the matchbox from me, closed the door, and poured water on my body.⁶³⁷

Annamma believes that when she is away from home, the neighbour lady comes home for sex with her husband.⁶³⁸

Lover Instigates Violence against Wife

Annamma depicts her husband as a good man and considers the other woman as a cause of damage in their good marital relationship:

We have good relationship. We have no problem but she is coming in between [us] [and] making him to lay flat. He is not such a wicked man. My husband is not such a wicked man. If one person is coming to him, would he leave [her]?⁶³⁹

Annamma Devasya's Struggle to Survive

Annamma's sources of strength for her survival are Christian faith and the word of God. Annamma explains how she survives: “Let me tell you now, I am living on by depending only on the word [scripture]. I am sustained by the word.”⁶⁴⁰

Annamma believes that the Christian sacrament of baptism is another source of strength for her survival, therefore, she explains:

I asked Pastor, in those times, I thought if I accept baptism, I would have deliverance from this. In the midst of the day, I told Pastor, please baptise me,

⁶³⁷ Transcript of Conversation between Devasya and S. Abraham.

⁶³⁸ Transcript of Conversation between Devasya and S. Abraham.

⁶³⁹ Transcript of Conversation between Devasya and S. Abraham.

⁶⁴⁰ Transcript of Conversation between Devasya and S. Abraham.

if not, I will not [remain] in this earth (Crying). During the following week I accepted baptism....⁶⁴¹

Annamma not only uses the scripture as a source of strength but also she urges her husband, who is her violator, to use the scripture in order to change his bad character. Annamma points out that: "I take some scripture verses from this book (showing her Bible) and asked him to read it. That time he used to say 'I know everything better than you do.'"⁶⁴²

Elsamma Babychen

I now turn to the life story of Elsamma Babychen a forty-year-old Dalit Christian woman, who does not know her date of birth. She studied up to class seven, is married to Babychen and they have three children. Elsamma converted to Christianity from the Cheramar caste. She and her husband are daily wage labourers.⁶⁴³ When Elsamma shared her life story she cried continually.

Elsamma's Childhood

Elsamma explains how she suffered in her childhood:

After marriage while they [parents] were living together, [they] did not go for any better work. But, when we joined a Catholic Church, [father] got verger's job in the church but economically we did not get much from it. Mother went for work once in a while somewhere. Therefore, our family grew up in poverty. Our neighbours also helped us [when we were in poverty]. Thus in our childhood, when we went to school we had been using one [the same] dress. In those days we suffered a lot. After that, we lived in another place; it was [my] father's own [native] place. It was after the death of father and mother, [we] have been living there. Father can do work but did not work. He was very weak. At the same time my mother also became sick. Mother got TB sickness. After the verger's job, after reaching here, [father] started a small business. When the business started and flourished, my father started an affair with a lady, who was near there. When my mother came to know that woman was receiving whole money from my father, she quarrelled with him. When she quarrelled and cried [he] sent her home. As mother was beaten and kicked severely [by my father], she became sick. Hence, she spent [her life] for a while by eating pills and medicine. My studies went down because of mother's sickness. I always thought about my mother, and then I stopped my studies. I studied up to class six. Later my life was full of depression; we were living in

⁶⁴¹ Transcript of Conversation between Devasya and S. Abraham.

⁶⁴² Transcript of Conversation between Devasya and S. Abraham.

⁶⁴³ Registration Form, One-Day Seminar on "Women's Suffering," Parippu: New India Bible Church, 19th November 2001.

depression. When my elder sister was grown enough to do work, she started to work in the paddy field, and the family was run by [her] income.⁶⁴⁴

After her mother's death and her elder sister's marriage Elsamma's father became sick. Then it was Elsamma's duty to take care of her younger brother and sickly father.

Elsamma explains:

While my father was sick, there was a marriage proposal for my sister, and then she was married and sent off. After her marriage this burden came [to me] and there was a situation, which I could not bear [manage]. I was in a circumstance that I had to [find out resources for my] living; look after the family and my father. My younger brother is not capable of [doing] anything. There is a nunnery at Kidangoor and someone put him in that nunnery. Thinking that I could make ten paise by [his] work, I sent him to the nunnery. Later my father and I were living alone at home. After some days [I] went for threshing sheaves.⁶⁴⁵

Elsamma explains that it was not safe for her to sleep in a house, which is not constructed properly, when her father became unconscious:

Later he became unconscious and was totally bedridden. What should I do? There was none to help me. Then there was none to help me and especially am I not a young lady? I am at home and father is unconscious. I do not have good house and when [we] stay like this some one might attack [me]. To whom will I tell that he is in an unconscious state? I spent many nights without sleep [because] I was afraid to lie down [sleep]. Even if it is our neighbours how can we believe them or bring them inside [my home] to sleep? For many days [I] could not sleep.⁶⁴⁶

Elsamma's difficulties in life led her to marry own cousin Babychen:

Father is sick. I thought if my father dies then, who is there for me? If I am given for marriage, I can't think of that who will [be ready to] marry [me]. Who will marry me [a girl] who has nothing? These thoughts came to my mind. Then my uncle's [my] mother's brother's son, [who is] my father's sister's son [too] with whom I am married.⁶⁴⁷

Violence and Abuse from her Husband

Elsamma's marriage was registered in the registry and she got married before becoming a Christian.⁶⁴⁸ Elsamma explains how her husband started to doubt and attack her:

Yes, he doubts [me]. My husband doubts me. Then many times when we discuss various matters [he] says like this 'Haven't [you] gone in such a way [immoral way]?' I remained faithful to this man; but he has no insight to see it.

⁶⁴⁴ Transcript of Conversation between Elsamma Babychen and Sara Abraham, Parippu: New India Bible Church, on 27/11/2001.

⁶⁴⁵ Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

⁶⁴⁶ Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

⁶⁴⁷ Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

⁶⁴⁸ Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

When [he] goes outside anywhere, even if I am alone at home before he returns I do all domestic work neatly. When he returns, he views the house and comments, 'Oh what happened today to do this much work brilliantly? You might have got some good luck, someone might have come here today to talk and do anything as you like.' [He] could not understand my heart. He could not call and ask me straight away. He beats me, kicks me as he likes. Then there was none to say a comforting word to me. Perhaps my neighbours might think that she might have gone in bad way that is why he says so. Therefore, I do not go to anyone to tell anything. I cry in loud voice and [this is] the reason I bear it. When I sob my sadness will not be off [but] when I cry [loudly I get some relief from my sorrow].⁶⁴⁹

Elsamma suffered because her husband doubted her and was hesitant to take her anywhere even when there was a death, anniversary or marriage because of the presence of other men at such occasions:

The reason why I was not taken [anywhere] is not because of the limited space, [but] there are boys [and] grown up men. Men means [he] does not think that whether [they are] elder or younger [to me]. Now if [I] go to sister-in-laws house, there are many [men] and because of such reasons I was not taken [to such occasions]. I was not taken for [the occasions of] a death or death anniversary. If someone is inviting for a marriage, they invite the whole family, or [they ask for] 'one person to come,' or [they invite] 'one person and the child to come,' or [they invite] 'no all of you must come.' If someone forces [invites the family], he makes ready the child. Then the child asks 'Are we not taking mother?' 'If mother comes, let her come' [he replies]. Could I go without he tells [his permission]? I can get ready only when he asks to 'get ready.' Then our child was very sad. '*chacha* [Dad] please take *amma* [mother].' Then he replies, 'Tell her to get ready'. When I hear it, I think that 'Now he asked [me] to come then if I sit at home that is a problem. Yes [we] will go.' Then I get ready with dislike [to go] and we reach there. After the marriage and the feast he asks the child 'Where is mother? [Let] us go.' Then we return. On the way he questions [me], 'Why did you stand aside and smile at [so and so]? Who was it? Who is he to you? Do you not [have any] previous relationship with him? That is why you smiled at him. Do you think that I did not watch it?' Truly, there was no such thing happened [I did not smile at any man]. I was tired of this [kind of doubting character]. There are many experiences like this in my life. I was tired of experiencing beating and kicking. When I hear these false accusations, I thought like this even though I was not a Christian believer, I had knowledge that there is a God who sees my experiences. I understood it. Oh God, did I commit anything wrong to experience it [violence]?⁶⁵⁰

Elsamma experiences violence from her husband although she does no wrong. She describes how she survived an attack, when she was present in her neighbour's house, after a man had died:

One uncle [man] died in our neighbour's house. It was evening. I am glad to go and sing songs in the house, where the death happened. As I have the talent for singing I liked to go and sing in that house. When I went there they were

⁶⁴⁹ Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

⁶⁵⁰ Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

washing the dead body... There were many ladies sitting there, I also sat among them. At the same time many men were standing outside. We need not listen to [mind] them. I leaned on the wall and sat with other women. There was a [song] book in my hand, and a person next to me found a number [from it] and we sang that song. While [I was] singing, somebody told me, 'Elsamma is wanted.' I asked, "Who?" "It is Baby [Babychen], he is standing there." Then my heart began to beat faster [because] I know the matter [why he calls me]. When I went out to him after [I have taken] three or four steps [forward], there was a hard hit at my head and [he] said "*keradi*" [get in female]. I don't feel the pain if I am beaten but [when] people are watching it; I could not bear [the shame]. I fell into the bed immediately after reaching home. As I lay down I thought that 'there was a death in that house, then this situation came in my life that I cannot go out.' I cried. The next day morning at 10'o clock, when the dead body was being taken away, I looked out [watched] from my house. The body was taken out but I was unable [not allowed] to go out. There are many experiences like that (Crying) in my life. Later I thought about all these things. If I had done [anything] wrong I could have been punished.⁶⁵¹

Violence Leads her to Suicide Attempt

Elsamma explains how her husband's abuse and violence had lead her to try and commit suicide:

Then I thought, 'God, in my life there will not be a [good] time.' So I have no desire to live. Even if I have to live leaning on a stick, I will not go for a wicked life. [I] heard about it. [Then I] decided to live no longer. One-day night I took the child and [went to] courtyard then [I] went to the side of the canal, I know swimming. Then I thought I would jump into the water but as I know swimming, in the struggle for life I might come out. Then I thought if I threw the baby into the water it will drown [first] then when I see it I could jump into the water and die. After my child's death could I be alive [how could I live after my child's death]? I thought to do as I planed. When I stood there a thought came to my mind that 'why should I destroy a child's life?'⁶⁵²

It is hard for Dalit Christian women to find out a way of escaping from their violent husband because there are no shelters or counselling centres, where they could seek help or advice in their crises. However, loyalty to their children encourages them to struggle on and overcome the thought of committing suicide.

Violence Makes her Sick

Elsamma became sick because of the violence and abuse she experienced from her husband:

I was sitting alone in my solitude thinking all these things. No one is there either for comfort, for any thing or for [any] helps. Then Babychen's family

⁶⁵¹ Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

⁶⁵² Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

members became unfriendly to me. They never cared for me later. Then there was no one to care for [me] or to enquire [my welfare] or at least to give a meal once in a while. Then I became sick in my head because of much thinking. Sickness can be treated with medicine but this is not [real] sickness. We go to hospital by saying that it is sickness. I was taken to a hospital, near Kottayam Medical College. The reason is quarrel [not sickness], he has beaten me and kicked me much, and my body pained much. I was beaten at the head and back. I experienced violence a lot. He attacked me a lot. Even if I said that I suffered these pains, at the end when I think [about it] I have pain inside my head [mental agony], which I am unable to bear. I laid down closing my eyes for five or six days without eating meals. I have taken five to eight pills a [per] day. [If] there is no [physical] sickness, then how can medicine be effective? Thus I was treated in many hospitals but he used to beat me much as he likes.⁶⁵³

Elsamma explains that there was no freedom for her to eat the food her husband brought and then she worried about it:

After doing job, he used to bring enough things [food items], but I could not make it or eat it in a peaceful way. He used to bring good food but he will not talk to me. He brings good things and keeps it at home. I used to cook it, when it is prepared he used to serve for himself and eat. When I eat, he used to comment, 'Eat well. I bring it by working hard. You go for wickedness and drink, as you like.' That is another talk [talk with hidden meaning]. Then I thought, I have no peace if I eat, this is what he says. I have no peace in any way. I was sitting worried thinking these.⁶⁵⁴

Accusation from her Husband and her Secluded Life

Elsamma describes how her husband accused her:

I am accused of boys. If the accused boy is seen on Babychen's way back home then there will be big quarrel on that day, terrible quarrel. He will not give me peace on that day.⁶⁵⁵

Elsamma explained she had seven years secluded life because of her husband's accusing and violence:

I have not given an occasion to crack jokes with others. I experienced this kind of punishments for seven years in my life and stayed in my house. I have not spent time with any human beings, with my friends, with my age group, neighbours and ladies because if there is gladness then only we can talk to neighbours. Since I am always depressed what can I talk to my neighbours?⁶⁵⁶

Elsamma Attends Prayer Meeting

Elsamma shared how she and her husband came to know God by attending prayer meeting

⁶⁵³ Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

⁶⁵⁴ Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

⁶⁵⁵ Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

and then how there was change in the situation of her life:

While we were living like this there was a prayer meeting nearby. I had no permission to go anywhere until that time. I have no permission to go anywhere for the last seven years. I was comforted when I hear prayer meeting in the evening. I have heard prayer and I used to stand outside. Then I thought in my mind that if I go there I might get peace and comfort, quietness to my head, [solution for] all my problems. I thought like this many times. After thinking like this I asked. 'Oh even if I ask, there is no use, I will not be allowed. Why should I desire like this?' Like that there were many occasions came to my mind. Once I asked 'Could I go for the prayer meeting there?' When [I] asked, he gave [me] permission to go. Then immediately I took the child and went for prayer. When [I] came back after prayer, [he] did not speak to me. On the other hand, [he] did not show any dislike. That was over. I do not know anything but I had a desire to go for [prayer] next week also. Then I felt, hereafter it is not good for me to go alone. Even though it is difficult, I asked him whether he could come with me because I am alone. 'Ha [yes], then I shall come' then he came with me. In this way we started going to prayer group. That is the way we come to know God. But before that while I was having great suffering, these seven years I had to live in the house.⁶⁵⁷

Elsamma explained that attending the church and prayer meeting brought change in their lives and at present her husband takes her wherever he goes:

When we continuously started to attend the church, God brought a complete change [in him]. When this sickness of doubt has gone completely, our family life became happy and [now] we live happily. Wherever [he] goes, [he] will not go without me.⁶⁵⁸

Elsamma explained that knowing God and attending the Church helped her to experience peace and joy in her family life:

I am happy to share my experiences because I have joy in knowing the Lord. After knowing God, wherever he goes, he will not go without taking me. My children quarrel and when they get angry they tell, 'Wherever dad goes, he drags mum also.' Then he tells, 'you are children; you go there [do not get involved in our matters]. Even if you go for a party, what can you tell?' Wherever he goes, he takes me. We come together in the Church on Sunday; we come together (crying). I have three children now; I praise God now (crying). The dress that I wear, and my children wear all these things are [purchased] because of his [husband] work. [I have] a sari. If I buy a sari by giving 250 rupees, [when it becomes old and torn] it is folded up, and its [torn] side is kept up, there is no use [even] after ironing and coming [stitching] it. [I use] one sari for a year. The dress is kept neatly to go for prayer. Then I thought there is nothing important in dress [no need of worrying about the dress I wear].⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁶ Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

⁶⁵⁷ Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

⁶⁵⁸ Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

Elsamma's Strength through her Faith

Elsamma describes how she finds strength in singing Christian songs:

Some [Christian] songs give me peace and comfort. Then I thought even if there is no one to help me, at least these songs could [comfort me]. But I don't know more about it but for my peace this song in my heart [this song gives me peace in my heart]. *Ithra saubhagyamikshithiyil* [this great fortune in this earth], *illa mattengum iddharayil* [it is not anywhere in the earth]. *Theeratha santhosham kristuvilundennal* [if there is eternal joy in Christ], *thoratha kannire mannillu, mannillu* [there is only endless tears in the earth.]⁶⁶⁰

She explains that her knowledge that there is a God, who sees everything, helped her to survive the violence:

When I hear these false accusations, I thought like this, even though I was not a Christian believer, I had the knowledge that there is a God, who sees my experience.⁶⁶¹

It was a great comfort for Elsamma when she thinks of a God who understands her.

She finds joy and comfort in telling her life experience; she gives thanks to God by doing it:

I grow in faith and I have happiness in my heart. I will not tell outside all these things I told [you]. I thought to come here and to tell all about it in order to give thanks to God and there is joy in my heart. When I tell these experiences there is a great comfort in my heart.⁶⁶²

Mary Babu

Now this chapter turns to the life story of Mary Babu, who is a forty-two years old married Dalit Christian woman and the mother of four girls. She is from the Cheramar caste. She studied up to class four and is a daily wage labourer. Her husband is forty-four years old, and his job is selling sand.⁶⁶³ She was born and brought up in a Christian family belonging to the Church of South India.

Marriage against her Wishes

Mary Babu did not have freedom to select her life partner. She was married to a man from a Catholic family against her wishes:

⁶⁵⁹ Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

⁶⁶⁰ Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

⁶⁶¹ Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

⁶⁶² Transcript of Conversation between Babychen and S. Abraham.

⁶⁶³ Mary Babu, Registration Form, One-Day Seminar on "Women's Suffering," Parippu: New India Bible Church, 19th November 2001.

I used to tell at my home that I do not like to get married to a [any boy who belongs to] Catholic Church. When I used to tell it my father told that 'After marriage you go to the Church, which you like.'...After coming here [after the marriage] I did not like to go to Catholic Church.⁶⁶⁴

An arranged marriage against her wishes resulted in clashes and enmity between Mary and her husband.

Mary tells how she lacked clothes after her marriage: "If I wet [wash] the clothes I wore, there was no second pair [for me] to wear. That was the situation from that day."⁶⁶⁵ Mary tells how she depended on her husband or her parents to purchase clothes for her:

I am not going for any work, therefore, I have that difficulty also. If he brings any clothes for the children and for me then only we have it. Even for him clothes are brought from my home.⁶⁶⁶

Dalit women are poor because they are not educated, not employed and they do not have any land in their names to cultivate anything. Why Dalit women are illiterate in a State that boast hundred per cent of literacy, is a debatable issue. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and lack of the ownership of the land are some of the contributing factors to the violence experience in the lives of Dalit Christian women.

Mary Babu describes that her life was not comfortable after the marriage:

My husband was a drunkard, one who plays cards and lived in evil ways. He was in relationship with ladies. When I see it [his relationship with ladies], I have pain in my heart. I did not tell it to anyone, but I used to tell my husband [when I speak about it to my husband] those times these kinds of people [those who lead evil lives] get angry. I suffered very much. He used to beat me, punch me, hit on my head, beat on my cheek, he did much, and I was living like that.⁶⁶⁷

Her husband's relationship with other women was a cause for his violence against Mary.

The Mother-in-law Instigates Violence against her Daughter-in-law

Married women, who live in the joint family, are more vulnerable to violence because of the instigating mother- in- laws or in-laws. Mary Babu tells how her mother-in-law instigated her husband to beat her:

⁶⁶⁴ Transcript of Conversation between Mary Babu and Sara Abraham, Parippu: New India Bible Church, 1st December 2001.

⁶⁶⁵ Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham.

⁶⁶⁶ Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham.

⁶⁶⁷ Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham.

His mother used to instigate him to beat me because I went to my home for the delivery...His mother was a mother who fights much. She speaks with double meanings and by speaking like that she instigated him to beat me.⁶⁶⁸

Mary Babu's husband does not listen to his wife but he listens to the advice of his mother. The mother has authority and power over a married son and his wife. Some married men are unable to detach themselves from the power and authority of their mothers because of the joint family system; therefore, they do everything to please their mothers at the risk of their wives' happiness and peace. Mary tells:

He did not send me home for one and half years. I was not sent home because he listens to his mother. If I request, I received beating, kicking and hitting.⁶⁶⁹

Mary describes an incident in which her mother-in-law instigated violence that flattened her to the floor:

Once I wanted to go home for Christmas, it was soon after our marriage. There was harvest in one place. I was planing to go that evening. Therefore, I washed and kept my sari to dry, I wanted to wear the *manthrakodi*.⁶⁷⁰ He was drinking *kanji* in the morning. I have the sari that I brought from my home but I was wishing to wear *manthrakodi*, when I go home. I was going to put it outside for drying, that time his mother came and asked 'Hey, boy why does she wears this sari and go? I said that when I go there I would be mocked [if I was not wearing *manthrakodi*]. 'Why do they mock? They will not tell anything' [His mother said]. The one who desires to buy [another sari], buys and gives [Mary said]. When I said it mother and son did not like it. He ran and came, he is very healthy, and he gave me one hit on my back, now also I have that difficulty inside my chest. I fell down at his one blow. I could not get up. I lay down [was flattened] in the same position for sometime. Then he did not drink the rest of the *kanji*; he left it, washed his hands and went away. He went to Parippu and threshed the grain from the barn...He returned to see me, that time also I was lying down because I was unable to get up, it was such a [hard] hit. This mother instigated him to hit me.⁶⁷¹

Mary Babu explains how a mother-in-law, who experienced violence from own husband, can instigate her son to beat wife:

Each day this mother [instigates to do violence], she experienced more suffering from her husband. This man did not have anything [anger] to his children but he is angry with their mother. It was his second marriage. She died by experiencing so much suffering, she was afraid to sleep in the house because she was scared of her husband. She could not sleep because of the disturbance from him; she experienced such kind of suffering. She desired to

⁶⁶⁸ Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham.

⁶⁶⁹ Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham.

⁶⁷⁰ *Manthra* means prayer and *kodi* means new cloth. *Manthrakodi* is the expensive new sari given to bride by the bridegroom. During the marriage service priest does some ritual on it and keeps it on the head of the bride. After the service, bride wears *Manthrakodi* and then comes for the marriage feast.

⁶⁷¹ Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham.

have the same kind of experience for her daughter-in-laws that is why she instigated her children.⁶⁷²

Mary's mother-in-law who experienced violence from husband does not wish her daughter-in-law to enjoy life with her son.

Violent Husband

Mary Babu lost two teeth because of the violence she experienced from her husband and later she became sick due to starvation and the violence.⁶⁷³ She explains about the most recent violence:

Other day when I spoke about child's education, he scolded me and dragged [me] inside the house. I keep quiet now because of experiencing such things. I suffered more than that but I forgot. I experienced so much violence and there is no end if I tell. Now also my mind burns and burns. I am worried about the children, and their education. They are growing now; if we have money, it is not a problem, but we do not have money.⁶⁷⁴

She is worried at present because her four girls are growing to marriageable age and she does not have a proper house except a hut.⁶⁷⁵

A Dalit Christian Woman's Struggle to Educate her Children

Mary Babu has the whole responsibility of educating the children and whenever she speaks about their education there is row between herself and her husband. Mary explains:

When it was time for sending the child to school, he could not do it, he wanted me to take the child to school, therefore, I sent my second child to my home. They saw my sufferings and difficulties, therefore, the child stayed at my home then they sent her to school and she studied up to class eight. After that the child was brought here for an year but the necessary books or textbooks were not purchased...He expects me to send the child to school and there is competition for it...Then I sent the fourth child also to school and he is sad to spend any money [on the children's education]...I have the desire for my children to study as much as they can.⁶⁷⁶

Mary Babu's eldest daughter's education was affected, when Mary became sick and had surgery. Then her eldest daughter had to take care of Mary:

She made hot water in the morning and gave me a bath. She bought milk, gave short bread and milk to me. Then she had to make *kanji* and curry before she

⁶⁷² Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham.

⁶⁷³ Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham.

⁶⁷⁴ Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham

⁶⁷⁵ Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham.

⁶⁷⁶ Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham.

went to school and there was none to help...if I needed to drink a glass of water [there was none to help], she has to go to Parippu, at the east side of the bus stand in order to go to school. From there she used to run and come home to give me lunch, then there is no time for her to eat, then she runs back to school. She had the same kind of work again, when she comes home evening. She struggled to [concentrate on] studies and then she failed in the exam. After that I wanted to send her to school but her father said that he would not send her. I sent her again but she failed again. Again she wants to go. When she failed for the second time and [I] sent [her] again, he beat her and dragged her inside the house.⁶⁷⁷

Mary's second daughter failed in class ten (SSLC) and she is unable to send her daughter to study and prepare for the re-examinations because of the financial difficulties in her life:

Now we have to give Rupees 3000 as fees...There is no money to pay the fees therefore, she is not going now. It is a pain for me...The day before yesterday when I spoke about the child's fees, he tells 'If you can, you give money, I am not giving money, why should I give, no need of writing exam.'...What shall I do? If I could do it [educate the children...] I am unable to make this much money. When I go to the field, if I get sixty-five rupees per day how many days do I have to work in order to make it 1000 rupees? When I think all those things, I wish to die.⁶⁷⁸

Mary Babu Survives through Faith and Prayer

Mary's survival strategy is prayer and she is praying that God will grant wisdom and a good attitude to her husband. She believes that there is strength and deliverance in prayer with tears. She prays while she lies down on her bed: "I always pray, pray with tears, therefore, there is deliverance."⁶⁷⁹

Mary's another source of survival is the ability she received from God to forgive her violating husband and she said: "God has given me the ability to forgive all these."⁶⁸⁰

Another source of strength for survival is forgetting the violence she experienced. Mary believes that God has hidden the violence she experienced:

If I tell the truth, I forget everything. I do not know, because many years passed. I am unable to make known what I have experienced that is the situation. Now I forget everything. I believe that the God almighty has hidden it.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁷ Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham.

⁶⁷⁸ Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham.

⁶⁷⁹ Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham.

⁶⁸⁰ Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham.

⁶⁸¹ Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham.

Mary Babu was disturbed physically, mentally and psychologically because of the violent behaviour of her husband. Her difficult situation leads her to think about suicide but Mary has survived thus far because of her faith in God. She states:

After the birth of my eldest child, he did not talk to me; there was no meaning in living. He married me willingly but because of his evil life he found happiness in them [women]. He did not love me. After the birth of the child, I told myself 'Why should I live further? I will go and die in the river.' Then I came out of the house in the night and walked [towards the river] with the purpose to die. [Later] I felt in my mind that I should not do it. Again I walked. They are Catholics, therefore, they do not have this kind of faith or prayer, we are CSI, and therefore, we have it.⁶⁸²

Mary Babu lacks words to describe the violence she experiences. She fears that if she talks about the violence it will not bring any relief to her and she states:

I forgot to tell what I experienced; I suffered very much. I do not know how to tell it now. God Almighty has given me ability to forget it. There is no use for us to think about it now.⁶⁸³

Cultural Violence

Annamma Yohannan: Survivor of Rape and Cultural Oppression

Now this chapter turns to the life story of Annamma Yohannan, who experienced cultural violence. Annamma Yohannan is a seventy-one year old, illiterate Dalit Christian woman and a widow, who lives without any income. She has been a Christian since her birth.⁶⁸⁴

Annamma Yohannan shares the story of her difficult childhood:

[In] the house, where I was born and brought up before marriage, were great difficulties. When I was ten or fifteen started to go for the work, for plucking the weeds from the field. Sometimes others call me for the daily wage labour. There was a place where I could carry mud and stone, I worked and lived with the wage I got.⁶⁸⁵

When Annamma was nineteen years old she got married to a widower, Yohannan. It was his third marriage. Annamma explains that when Yohannan's former wives died "he decided to marry any woman, who lacks something."⁶⁸⁶ Annamma was a member of the Brethren Assembly and Yohannan was a member of CMS (Church Missionary Society)

⁶⁸² Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham.

⁶⁸³ Transcript of Conversation between Babu and S. Abraham.

⁶⁸⁴ Registration Form, One- Day Seminar on "Women's Suffering," Parippu: New India Bible Church, 19th November 2001.

⁶⁸⁵ Transcript of Conversation between Annamma Yohannan and Sara Abraham, Parippu: New India Bible Church, 27th November 2001.

⁶⁸⁶ Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham.

and their marriage took place in the CMS Church at Kottayam.⁶⁸⁷ Annamma Yohannan describes:

When I got married at CMS Church at Kottayam, when I was brought for marriage, the priest asked him, 'Will you take care of this lady if you marry her?' It was because of my lips like this [She showed her upper lip, which is divided in the middle as two parts. Her teeth are visible due to divided upper lip and when she talks some words are not clear]. He told 'Acho [Achen is Priest] I will take care of her.' Our marriage took place like that. When I remember [his demise] I am sad [because] he never made me tired, we lived in deep love (Crying).⁶⁸⁸

Annamma had a very good relationship with her husband Yohannan. She does not remember the exact date of her husband's death but she told me that he died in 1970s due to rheumatism.⁶⁸⁹

Annamma is sick at present and she lives with her married daughter and she described her present difficulties:

The opening of my anus is got closed almost, unable to pass pooh...that is a big [difficulty]. My uterus is pushed out little, these two are the greatest sicknesses, and I have to experience many sufferings... Beyond it even if she is my daughter, she quarrels because I am unable to help. Now I am living in great suffering because of all these difficulties.⁶⁹⁰

Rape by the Neighbouring Landlord

Annamma experienced rape when she was a girl. Annamma's life story reveals how easily a man from another caste can rape a Dalit girl. Her rapist was a man from *Ezhava*⁶⁹¹ caste. Annamma described her experience of rape:

I used to go to remove mud because of the difficulty gaining a livelihood at home. In those days a man called me and told that there was a one-day job available, I was alone at home when he called. He was my neighbour. He called me and I went for the job. There was no problem during the first day, a second day also passed, on the third day he told me that 'We have some work up there' [in a different place from where I was working] and [he] called me. He was a married man, who had children; I did not know that time whether he was a married man or not. He caught me with his might, I cried, shouted there and asked him 'Was it for this you called me for the work?' What do you know about me? Am I not young? I spoke to him angrily but he did not agree [listen]. As we read in the Psalm 'The man, who is stronger than me,' could we hold the man who is stronger than us? Then what... mine...did [he raped me].'' [I was] eighteen years old at that time.⁶⁹²

⁶⁸⁷ Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham.

⁶⁸⁸ Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham.

⁶⁸⁹ Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham.

⁶⁹⁰ Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham.

⁶⁹¹ Ezhavas are considered higher to Dalits but they are not considered equal to the highest castes.

⁶⁹² Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham.

Annamma explained that she was sad and angry:

I am sad. Even if I was sad, when he calls or tells, I did not go or do the work. (Disturbance because of the cock's cry) I am angry outside...The one who did it [raped me] was an Ezahava.⁶⁹³

Annamma remained the silent survivor of this particular violence and did not disclose her experience to anyone.

Bare-Breasted Experience: Cultural Oppression

Annamma's life story demonstrates that she is a survivor of cultural oppression in other forms. As a Dalit woman she was formerly not allowed to wear any clothing above her waist. As a Dalit child she went to school wearing only a *thorthu*, which is a small piece of cloth around her waist. As a Dalit girl she survived the rape by a man from Ezahava caste. Dalit Christian women were not allowed to cover their breasts even after their conversion to Christianity and this is a form of cultural oppression intended to degrade Dalit women. However, many Dalit women did not develop a negative attitude to such degradation but they survived it by walking courageously bare-breasted. Annamma talks about her bare-breasted experience:

We were not allowed to wear *chatta*.⁶⁹⁴ It [*chatta*] was not allowed [to wear], I do not know what is the purpose, but in those days nobody wears. I have not heard that anyone scolded and telling [me] not to wear it but was not worn *chatta*. I do not know whether it is a law or not. People, those who were in my age none wore *chatta*...after I delivered a baby girl who died, and then I started to wear *chatta*, now it is about forty years, that's all. Walking bare-breasted was not shameful.⁶⁹⁵

Dalits were not allowed to Wear Clean Clothes and Turban

Annamma told me some stories she heard from her parents, which told how low caste people in Kerala, were oppressed culturally:

During the time of my father and mother, we could not get good clothes to wear. *Muthalalemaru* [rich men] used turban and we were not allowed to wear turban. It was not possible [permitted for a Dalit] to wear a turban in those days. If you were caught wearing a turban, it was confiscated and then you would be beaten and sent away; the one who married me also told [confirmed] this. There was a rich man named *Kurisummudu*, he lives on the banks of a lake at Veluru. It is about three miles away from Kottayam. He owns a boat, a motor to dry the water and many canoes. [People] from our caste were not

⁶⁹³ Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham.

⁶⁹⁴ *Chatta* is a loose blouse usually used by Syrian Christian elderly women in Kerala State.

⁶⁹⁵ Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham.

allowed to go near him in good clothes. If [any Dalit in good clothes or turban] went in a canoe [near *Kurisummudu* then he] calls. *Kurisummudu* used to order, “Come through this way.” When he ordered, if [Dalit] was in a canoe he rowed it near *Kurisummudu*. Then *Kurisummudu* used to order, “Do not come with a turban on head” then he used to give a blow. [He] used to order to remove the cloth [from the head] and then ordered to leave; later [he warned] not to return through that way. It was only rich people, who wore turban on their heads. In my childhood I also did not wear [clean cloths or turban] when I went. ... We were allowed to wear black [unclean] clothes; the one, which became dirty and smelly [but] we were not allowed to wear good clothes.⁶⁹⁶

Paul Chirakkaro, a Dalit Christian author from Kerala, confirms that Dalits were not allowed to wear clean clothes. Chirakkaro writes, “When a Dalit rarely gets a cloth, he was allowed to wear it only after making it dirty by applying charcoal and mud.”⁶⁹⁷ Dalit women and men endured this kind of cultural oppression and they wore dirty and smelly clothes because their status denied them the right to wear clean and nice clothes.

Dalit's were treated as Animals

Dalits in Kerala State were treated as animals not as human beings. Annamma recalls the plights of Dalits through her singing of traditional folk songs, which recall these sufferings: “I remember one or two lines. Then...one song is there, that is in olden days human beings were tied with buffaloes and bulls to plough the land, when they were unable to walk, they were kicked, beaten, killed and buried. I know two or three songs.”⁶⁹⁸

Annamma sang to me a song in Malayalam language, which describes the cry of a Dalit, who was treated as animal:

Ayayo kelkenname [ayayo⁶⁹⁹ please listen]
Iee papeyude nilavelikal [to this sinner's cries]
Kalayodum pothenodum inachukettee [tied with buffalo and bullock]
Nilamuzuthe [and ploughed the field]
Nadakkan vayya thanghumbol [can't walk when kicked]
Idechadichu konnu kuzhichumoodum [kicking, beating, and will be buried after killing]
Ayayo kelkenname [ayayo listen please]
Iee sadhukade muravilekal [to this poor one's lamentation].⁷⁰⁰

Annamma then sang the song again with a slight difference:

⁶⁹⁶ Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham at New India Bible Church, Parippu 27th November 2001.

⁶⁹⁷ Paul Chirakkro, *Dalit Christhavar Keralathil* (Dalit Christians in Kerala), Tiruvalla: Christhava Sahithya Samithy, 2000, p. 92.

⁶⁹⁸ Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ayayo* is a word in Malayalam language, which expresses the pathetic situation of a person. This word is used in the times of sorrow, despair, failure, death, grievance, pain and cry. This word has no particular meaning therefore, it is difficult to translate it to English language.

⁷⁰⁰ Transcript of Conversation between Annamma Devasya and Sara Abraham, 27th November 2001.

Ayayo kelkename, sadhukade muravilekal [please listen to the lamentations of poor]
Kalayodum, pothinodum inachhu ketti nilamuzhuthu [tied with buffalo and bullock and ploughed the land]
Nadakkan vayyathakumbol pidichadichu kuzhichu moodum [when it is unable to walk caught beat and then buried]
Nadakkan vayyathakumbol adichidichu kuzhichu moodum [when it is unable to walk beat and hit then buried]
Ayyayo kelkaname sadhuvinte muravilikal [please listen to the lamentations of the poor].⁷⁰¹

Annamma believes that this song was written from the tragic lives of Dalits. The experiences of the past were appalling for all Dalits but especially degrading for women:

This might have happened during the time of my grandfather and I heard it when they said it. [Dalits were] killed. In their [Dalit men's] childhood when they [get] married, they were not given the girls whom they married. In those days there was no good house [for Dalits] to lie down, it was in the *madam* [Dalit's hut]; *muthalai* [rich man or landlord] reaches there before dawn [When it is dawn the landlord enters in to the hut of Dalit to use Dalit woman]. He drinks [alcohol] and goes there, then sends husband [Dalit man to the working place], it was impossible not to go. [Dalits were] not allowed to take care of the infants; they had to leave the infants and go. Otherwise [he] had to go with the *muthalai*. It was such violent days. In those days it was not safe for good girls [beautiful Dalit girls] to walk anywhere. If the children were born, they [Dalits] were not given their children. It was such a wicked-action's days. [Dalit women] were separated from husbands. Now, if some one asks [a Dalit girl] 'Who are you?' then she replies 'What do you want?' [This shows the courage of the present Dalit girls]; today's girls are like that. Today [Dalit] girls will slap, if they can give two slaps [they will give it]. In those days [they] were not allowed to talk anything about it. Even if they [high caste landlords] did evil, we had to obey and stay other wise they never allowed [Dalits] to live.⁷⁰²

Slavery in Kerala

Annamma shares the story of a Dalit couple, who experienced slavery and bondage, in Kerala:

One mother [Dalit woman] delivered a baby. She had to leave that child, a small child who had started to crawl and then [mother] went for work. If she is not going for work *muthalali* would not allow it and she had to go for all work. [Someone referred to this story while] preaching from the Bible, [I] heard [it] when [I listened] to preaching in the Church. I forgot all those things. The child cries and crawls, crawls and reaches [follows the mother], but the mother was not allowed to turn, look and come back; the mother goes [for work]. The mother and father went to different places [for work]. The mother was not allowed to breast feed the baby, when it is mid-day. Only the elder child is there [at home] and [elder child] follows the baby for long time [to take care] then [the elder child] fell down in the fire and then died in the pit. Other [baby] child creeps and creeps then it reached in to the group of ants and the child died

⁷⁰¹ Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham.

⁷⁰² Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham.

by the bites of ants. When father and mother returned [home] both children had died and how can we bear such things? Even then the landlords did not have 'blood in their eyes' [no mercy] and made [them] to work, [it is] destruction. Could we go to any other country? That was not possible. If someone wants to come and buy [slaves] he has to pay money to the other person [master].⁷⁰³

Annamma continues to tell the story of Dalit parents whose children died when they were away for work:

I told about the children... one [died] in the water [fire] and the other [died] by the bites of ants. [When] father and mother saw that ants ate child's eyes and [they] cried. When the landlord came and scolded [them], they [Dalit couple] said that they would not go [for work because of sorrow]. [Then the landlord] asked them to go to any other hut [there was no permission to continue to stay in the same hut given by the landlord if they would not go for work]. They might have eaten something that night, slept or did not [sleep] they had to go for work next day. That was how the life [for Dalits in those days].⁷⁰⁴

Annamma then further detailed the plight of the Dalits who experienced slavery in Kerala:

Another person could buy [slaves] and go after paying rupees. Where to go because of the fear? [Slaves were scared of masters and they could not escape from the hands of masters]. They [slaves] were destroyed there itself, it was like this in those days. [It is said that] if there is a dog [for Dalit woman], that dog is husband [for her]. [There was no difference between a slave husband and a dog]⁷⁰⁵

Annamma's Survival Strategy

Annamma considers her baptism as a source of strength for her survival. She survived the agony of rape because of her strong faith in God and she tells: "I was baptised. This incident [rape] happened after my baptism."⁷⁰⁶ Annamma believes that God is the one who gives comfort, when there is suffering. Her Christian faith does not allow her to question why her comfort did not last for a long period. Annamma tells: "Once I experienced so much suffering. The Lord [God] gave me comfort later [but] I could not experience it until the end."⁷⁰⁷ Another source of strength for her survival is a close relationship with God. She reported that she tells her difficulties and problems to God and receives healing and a way forward. Annamma depends up on God for everything. Her strong faith and intimate relationship with God helps her to survive in this world even if she experiences difficulties,

⁷⁰³ Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham.

⁷⁰⁴ Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham.

⁷⁰⁵ Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham. In the following chapter I refer to a Dalit story, where a Dalit woman, imagined her dog as her husband.

⁷⁰⁶ Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham.

⁷⁰⁷ Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham.

sickness and lacks money. Annamma says that: “If any sickness and any difficulty comes, everything I tell God (Crying), I receive healing, and I get well.”⁷⁰⁸

Conclusion

These life stories of Dalit Christian women exposed the violence they experience in their lives. They were the silent survivors of violence until they started to speak out in the one-day seminar, two Bible studies and their informal conversations. The next chapter analyses the significant issues emerged from the research on violence against Dalit Christian women and explores how a relevant Practical Theology can be developed which reflects the experience of Dalit Christian women and suggests the strategies for transforming action in their lives.

⁷⁰⁸ Transcript of Conversation between A. Yohannan and S. Abraham.

PART III: CONCLUSION

CHAPTER SIX

A NEW THEOLOGY RELAVANT TO DALIT CHRISTIAN WOMEN

In this chapter I shall first analyse the significant themes, which have emerged from my research into the life experiences of Dalit women. I shall then show how these, together with the cultural traditions of the Dalit community, are important resources for the development of a feminist practical theology which is relevant to their lives. Finally I shall make concrete suggestions for the development of a programme that could bring hope and transformation in the lives of Dalit Christian women who are experiencing violence.

Significant Themes and Issues, Which Have Emerged from the Research

Endemic Nature of Violence against Dalit Women in the Research Group

Dalit women, like all women, have violence as the context of their lives. The life stories of Dalit Christian women in the previous chapter demonstrate that the Dalit women, who participated in my research, experienced sexual violence, domestic violence and cultural violence. They experienced these kinds of violence in their everyday lives and this is related to the same issues of power and gender as anywhere in the world. As Adams states, "...but as women, we live in harm's way: everyday, everywhere...and we are statistically more at risk at home than in public. Physical and sexual violence is the context of our lives."⁷⁰⁹

The perpetrators of sexual violence are high caste landlords and sometimes husbands and relatives from the same Dalit family. When a man purposely poked the breasts of Kavitha and another man poked on the buttocks of Alice they were humiliated in public as they travelled. Kavitha resisted such humiliation by slapping the conductor who poked her breasts and Alice resisted by pricking with a safety pin the buttocks of her violator, these courageous Dalit women used their own self-defence in order to stop the actions of violators. Sexual violence takes place within the private circle such as one's own family home. Dalit women are raped in the working place such as landlord's garden or farming land.

⁷⁰⁹ Adams, *Violence Against Women*, p. 12.

Dalit woman's counterpart is the violator, who uses power over her. The word woman is derived from an old English word "wifman," which means "wife of man."⁷¹⁰ This definition reflects on woman in relation to a man and man is her counterpart. When considering the nature of the violence Dalit Christian women experience, I find Letty M. Russell's definition of violence helpful. Russell writes, "Violence is most commonly understood as physical force that produces injury or harm, but violence is not always physical force."⁷¹¹ Violence produces visible injury and wounds to the body and also invisible harm in the bodies and minds of women who survive it. Dalit Christian women in my research group experienced not only physical violence but also other form of violence such as discriminations based on their caste, colour and gender. Violence is not always physical force but it can be destructive behaviour, wounding words or the derogatory language of the people who have power in the caste hierarchy. Such degradations hurt subordinate Dalit women throughout their lives. All kinds of discrimination based on the skin colour, caste and gender are also violence against Dalit women. Physical violence can be proved easily by showing the wounds or marks in the body but it is hard to produce proof concerning the violence Dalit women experience on the basis of their skin colour, caste and gender. However, on the basis of my research and the nature of the violence my informants experienced, I would like to give three definitions for the violence Dalit Christian women experience.

Firstly, violence is physical force, which produces visible wound or marks on the body of the survivor. For example, Annamma Devasya, who experienced domestic violence, showed me the marks of violence in her leg. Mary Babu explained to me that with physical force her husband smashed two teeth.

Secondly, violence is verbal abuse, destructive behaviour and derogatory language, which create mental distress in the survivor. For example, Elsamma Babychen experienced not only physical violence but also mental agony due to her husband's verbal abuse and tormenting such as 'You go for wickedness.' He also engaged in destructive behaviour such as watching to see whether she smiled at or talked to any men. Mahoney points out that "Psychological abuse is much more common than physical or sexual abuse in intimate relationship."⁷¹² Psychological wounds in the mind of the woman survivor heal more slowly than the physical bruises in her body. As Elsamma suffered continuous beatings, she became sad, upset and psychologically depressed. She became sick because of the

⁷¹⁰ Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (ed.) *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996, p.193.

⁷¹¹ Russell, *Dictionary*, p. 307.

mental agony she experienced due to her husband's violence. The medication could not heal the psychological agony in her.

Thirdly, violence is discrimination based on caste, skin colour and gender, which produce severe invisible harm throughout the life of the survivor. For example, a high caste conductor in the bus poked the breast of Kavitha Johnson, when she travelled with her schoolmates. High caste children did not make friends with Kavitha because of her dark skin colour and caste. Syrian Christian women do not respond well when Kavitha greets them and the reason for their reaction is due to her skin colour and her caste. Kavitha experienced male violence from her partner, partner's brother and partner's brother-in-law and these three violators are from Ezhava caste, which is higher than her own. Discrimination based on caste, skin colour and gender keep on harming the survivor mentally and there is no end for such harm. She cannot change her caste identity and neither she can change skin colour. Such discrimination made Kavitha believe that her colour is ugly and her caste is not worthy. Being a researcher among Dalit women, I consider this discrimination is a kind of violence against Dalit Christian woman because it keeps on wounding the survivor. Any violence against Dalit woman's family members also affects her life. If Dalit woman's hut is burnt down, or if her husband, father or son is murdered it certainly affects the well being of Dalit woman.

Gender analysis can reveal that Dalit women experience violence and discrimination based on their gender. My research proves that Dalit women experience physical and sexual violence by men because they are women. Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune's work⁷¹³ is a gender analysis of violence against women and children and what they refer from the Western context is relevant to the lives of Dalit women in Kerala State:

Physical and sexual violence against women, usually committed by men, is pandemic in our culture and the high rates of violence against women and girl children make it clear that we who are female are particularly vulnerable to violence simply due to our gender. We live with the reality that theologian Mary Hunt has described: violence is the context of our lives rather than separate, individual episodes in our lives.⁷¹⁴

Dalit women, who participated in my research, are expected to behave according to the expectations of their husbands or other men in the society. Annamma Devasya and Elsamma Babychen's husbands expected them not to talk or smile at any other male and these women were treated as their husband's property. Men are permitted to use their

⁷¹² Patricia Mahoney in C. M. Renzetti, *Sourcebook on Violence*, p. 152.

⁷¹³ Adams, *Violence Against Women*.

⁷¹⁴ Adams, *Violence Against Women*, p. 12.

power over Dalit women. MacKinnon sees gender as an inequality of power, a social status based on who is permitted to do what to whom. She argues that inequality comes first; differences come after.⁷¹⁵ This kind of inequality is developed on the basis of gender. Radha Kumari proves how gender discrimination creates inequality between women and men:

A wife was expected to carry out all services needed by her husband and to keep him happy and satisfied. The wife ought to respect her husband as God. He was a master, owner and provider even if he was vicious drunkard and void of merit. A daughter or a wife was a commodity or a possession.⁷¹⁶

As MacKinnon writes: “All the ways in which women are suppressed and subjected- restricted, intruded on, violated, objectified- are recognised as what sex is for women and as the meaning and content of femininity.”⁷¹⁷

Dalit Christian women are women and untouchables therefore they are vulnerable to abuse and violence from their own men and high caste men. Being Dalits, being women and being poor, they are expected to be submissive to the power of men in all castes. MacKinnon writes:

Paying attention to every detail of every incident of a woman’s violation they can get their hands on, women attempt not to be her. The problem is, combining even a few circumstances, descriptions, conditions, and details of acts of sexual abuse reveals that no woman has a chance. To be about to be raped is to be gender female in the process of going about life as usual. Some things do increase the odds, like being Black. One cannot live one’s life attempting not to be a Black woman. As Black women well know, one cannot save it that way, either.⁷¹⁸

Stereotypes become standards in the society in which Dalit women live in the midst of various oppressions. For example, ‘woman’s place is in the kitchen’ is one of the stereotypes used in Indian society. It is assumed that the duty of woman is to bear and rear children, prepare food, wash pots and pans, fetch water and firewood, wash clothes, sweep the home, and provide food and pleasure to husband. These kinds of stereotypes are changing slowly in the lives of high caste women as they become educated and gain professional jobs but they are imposed on all Dalit women, who are poor, illiterate and unemployed. Men from her caste and men from higher castes exercise power over Dalit woman on the basis of these existing stereotypes. If a high caste woman’s place is in the kitchen a Dalit woman belongs to the paddy field, garden or kitchen of the so- called high

⁷¹⁵ Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*, Cambridge: Harvard University press, 1987, p. 8.

⁷¹⁶ Kumari, ‘Crime Against Women’ in Sharma, *Crime Against Women*, p. 145.

⁷¹⁷ MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, p. 6.

⁷¹⁸ MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, p. 7.

caste people.⁷¹⁹ My participants in the research are daily wage labourers, who work in the paddy fields or in the kitchens of the high caste people.

Dalit women are silenced as Dalit females. Caste hierarchy in India compels Dalit women to accept the ideas that they are stupid, their experiences are unspeakable, their ideas are not valid, they are filthy, they are untouchables, they are the 'others,' they are 'blacks,' and they are 'ignorant.' They are not suppose to talk or laugh loudly, they are asked to keep their hands on their mouth as they talk because they are Dalit women. MacKinnon points out this kind of gender discrimination women experience in their lives:

Women have been silenced as women: we have been told we are stupid because we are women, told that our thoughts are trivial because we are women, told that our experiences as women are unspeakable, told that women can't speak the language of significance, had our ideas appropriated by men, only to find those ideas have suddenly become worthy, even creative. Women have been excluded from education as women.⁷²⁰

The Caste Nature of the Society

From my research I understand that the caste nature of the society is based on the Brahminic religion and the violence Dalit Christian women experience has a direct link with religious traditions, which sustains the caste system in society. Dalit Bandhu writes:

Aryans oppressed Dalits thus far in the name of god; they used god. The god of Aryans said that Dalits are born from below the foot of god. That infrastructure made Dalits, Dalits.⁷²¹

T. M. Yesudasan refers to seven Dalit novels, which describe the role of religion in pushing Dalits in to the 'pit-hell.' These novels in the Malayalam language expose the caste nature of the society and its effect on Dalit life.⁷²²

Pulaya (cheramar) Dalit women's identities have fallen below that of slaves because of the Brahminic religion as K. Panoor, who worked as the special officer for the colonies of Scheduled Tribes, or (Adivasis) who are Dalits, writes:

Paniyan, Adiyar, pulayar [Pulayas] these names are fallen below the word slave- their status, honour and personality everything got destroyed. Their life histories are for centuries can be written in one sentence. Born beside the

⁷¹⁹ According to Sarita Ranchod, more than 80% of Dalit women work in the agricultural sector and Dalit women in urban areas work in informal sector such as hawking, scarp collecting and domestic work. She highlights that 31. 6% of Dalit girls are child workers. Sarita Ranchod, 'Highlighting Dalit Women's Rights at the WCAR'.

⁷²⁰ MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, pp. 56, 57.

⁷²¹ Bandhu, *Dalit Daivasasthram*, p. 27.

⁷²² Those novels are Paul Chirakkarod's five novels *Pulayathara*, *Mathil*, *Nizhal*, *Velicham*, and *Avaranam*, C. E. James' *'Samvalsaranga'*, and D. Rajan's *'Mukkani*. Yesudasan, *Dalit Swathavum*, p. 117.

agricultural land, live inside the mud of the field, after a long time's poverty and suffering becomes the compost for the soil. This situation continues even today.⁷²³

I have explained in chapter three how the caste hierarchy started in Kerala State. The invasion of the Aryans and the destruction of the Indus valley culture made Dalits powerless and the Aryans powerful, therefore, Indian society functions on the basis of such hierarchy. Dalit Bandhu states that all women in India including Brahmin women are Dalits, deceived, oppressed and they are the slaves of men.⁷²⁴ In this case Dalit women are more vulnerable to all kinds of degradation by men because they are women and they are Dalit women. Rape by the landlord, and rape by the nearest relatives are common among Dalit women. Radha Kumari writes:

Crime against women agricultural labourers by the goondas of landlords and gang rapes of tribal and dalit women are being used as weapons in the hands of dominant class and caste forces. In fact, many of the crimes are committed by the guardians of law and order.⁷²⁵

Kavitha, in her life story, explained how Dalit girls, who were brought for harvest were used by high caste men for sex. Such sexual abuse or rape in the working places can be considered as landlord rape and caste rape. All 'landlord rapes' are the exercise of power and also 'caste rapes' because dominant people use their power to rape women, who are considered as powerless beings. Radha Kumar points out other two types of rape 'rape by those in authority' and 'caste rape.' Kumar writes:

There is the category of 'rape by those in authority,' comprising the exercise of power within the workplace to rape women employees or juniors. There is the category of 'caste rape,' in which caste hierarchy is exercised to rape lower-caste or outcaste women (such as 'tribals').⁷²⁶

Men, including Dalit men, want to prove through violence that they have power over Dalit women. Annamma Yohannan's neighbour from the Ezhava caste used his power to rape her. High caste male power is used over the sexual exploitation of the economically poor Dalit women. Dalit women experience violence because of the power imbalances and power is associated with the dominant so-called 'touchables' in a society where 'untouchables' are considered as powerless human beings.

Untouchability, therefore, is not merely a social evil resulting from the deviant behaviour of one social group (upper caste) against another (Dalits) to be

⁷²³ K. Panoor, *Kearalathile Africa* (Africa in Kerala): *Travel Notes on the Tribals of Wynad*, Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative, Kottayam & National Book Stall, Kottayam: 1963, p. 23.

⁷²⁴ Bandhu, *Dalit Daivasasthram*, pp. 11, 12.

⁷²⁵ Kumari in Sharma, *Crime Against Women*, p. 147.

⁷²⁶ Kumar, *The History of Doing*, p. 128.

corrected through education and obliterated through urbanization. It is rather a systemic denial of rights to access resources and power.⁷²⁷

'Touchables,' high caste people, use their power to exploit the balance of power between high caste and Dalits. Meyer Wilmes refers to the Fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995 for defining the violence against women:

By violence in relations between the sexes we understand any kind of violation of physical and /or mental integrity which is connected with the gender of the victim and the perpetrator and which is exercised by exploiting the balance of power between men and women present in existing structures.⁷²⁸

Power associated with the dominant people in the caste based society shelter violence against Dalits.

The Economic Position of Dalit Women in a Caste based Society

The economic position of Dalit women is very poor because of unemployment, low wages, lack of resources, lack of education and most of them are landless people. My research enabled me to understand that the violence Dalit Christian women experience is linked to their poverty. My participants in research are pressed with financial difficulties and poverty at home. A. Padmanabhan too points out the economic problems of Dalit Christians:

The Dalit Christians constitute about 75% of the Indian Christians and they have their own serious socio-economic problems. They are spread out in villages like Hindu Scheduled Castes. The Non-Scheduled Caste Christians and the Church do not treat them equally. The Christianity too has its casteism.⁷²⁹

Annamma Devasya and Kavitha Johnson explained how their mothers became objects of sex for high caste men due to the grinding poverty they experienced. Sex is a major emotional outlet in contexts of grinding poverty and this results in the exploitation of Dalit women by their male counterparts.⁷³⁰ Sexual exploitation by high caste men is also worsened because of the poverty and lack of income of Dalit women. Sexual exploitation and rape takes place when economically poor Dalit women go to high caste people for work or when they seek any help from high caste men. Dalit women who are economically poor may get into prostitution in order to provide daily bread for their children. The

⁷²⁷ Dalit Right to Life and Security, *Black Paper*, p. 02.

⁷²⁸ Meyer-Wilmes in *Concilium*, 1997/4, p. 56.

⁷²⁹ Padmanaban, *Dalits*, p. 45.

⁷³⁰ 'Dalit Women's Right to Gender Equity': Sixth Demands Sheet, *Black Paper*, p. 02.

National Commission for Women reported, “Almost all women in prostitution in the country are from either dalit communities or the tribal groups.”⁷³¹

Material deprivation plays a great role in the violence against Dalit Christian women and they experience certain practical difficulties in their lives because of it. Dalit women are unable to afford to have nutritious food and they survive with poor meal *kanji* (cooked rice and water). They cannot afford to buy milk, meat, fish and fruits. Dalit adults are adjusted to their poverty somehow but such poverty is harming the growth and health of their little ones and Dalit parents are unable to provide the minimum needed food or milk to their children. Kavitha Johnson told me that she did not give milk for her little girl for a long period and the little one cried, when she saw her mummy boiling milk because she wanted it so much.

Dalit women do not have proper clothes to wear and sometimes no second pair of clothes, when the clothes they wear, are wet from washing. Mary Babu, Annamma Devasya and Elsamma Babychen reported that they experienced these kinds of difficulties. Elsamma uses one sari for a year and when it is torn then she stitches the sides of the sari and then reuses it. Two Dalit Christian women expressed their need and expected me to provide saris for them.

Dalit Christian women do not have properly constructed houses to live in. They dwell in one-room huts, which have no proper doors or roofing and leak during the rainy season. There are no sanitary facilities in their huts. They take baths in the open canal. I found it difficult to get inside Kavitha's hut because there was a rough shaking stone instead of concrete steps and while I came out from the hut and slipped on this stone. When I observed the belongings in the hut I understood that brave and intelligent Kavitha is economically very poor. Twenty-six year old Kavitha wrote a letter to my address in Glasgow expressing her sincere desire to continue her education but her financial struggles prevents her studying.

Most of my informants are landless and work in the agricultural sector. When there is no work for them, there is no other income for their livelihood. Dalit women face all these difficulties due to lack of resources and lack of their own land. This situation makes them weak to stand and challenge the male violence and power used against them. Gail Omvedt writes:

⁷³¹ National Commission for Women 1995-96, *Societal Violence on Women and Children: A*

The basic economic dependence of women, their propertylessness and resourcelessness, renders them fearfully weak in standing up and challenging the violence and power that is used against them in the society.⁷³²

They are vulnerable to all kinds of violence because of the poverty in their lives.

The Black Paper affirms the reason for the poverty among Dalits:

However, the most crucial factor is poverty caused by unequal distribution of various forms of resources. This systemic imbalance needs priority attention in Dalit women's empowerment and fulfilment of their livelihood rights.⁷³³

This is correct in my observation because four of my informants lived in huts that exist on a few cents of land on the banks of the canal and their huts get flooded in the rainy season. Dalit women are labour dependent, which means they have been deprived of land as a resource.⁷³⁴ The National Campaign Manifesto claims:

In order to restore dalit rights the Indian State must provide constitutional guarantees for the restoration of land to the dalits and for the redistribution of land so that all dalit families will have the means of living, which will embody their right to live.⁷³⁵

Unemployment among Dalit Christian women is another cause for the violence they experience. Many Dalit girls do not go to college after their school education and they stop their education due to the financial difficulties at home. Mary Babu experienced violence from her husband whenever she spoke about the need for finance to enable their girl to continue education. Mary Babu's girls do not have money to pay their tuition fees. If they are unable to get enough educational qualification they cannot get employment in the future. Unemployment creates tension within the family. There is no other way for progress than education. The Black Paper argues that Dalit girls are forced into labour for their survival:

Due to lack of permanent and secured income in the family, the girl child is forced into a situation where she not only has to substitute the labour of parents at home, but also supplement the family income as a girl child worker.⁷³⁶

Annamma Yohannan, who survived the rape of the neighbour landlord, went for work from the early age because of financial difficulties and poverty at home. She could not continue her education because of the financial difficulties at home. She is living in a hut with her married daughter and she faces poverty. This proves that there is a link between

Report, New Delhi: Government of India, 1996, p.12.

⁷³² Omvedt, *Violence Against Women*, p. 5.

⁷³³ Dalit Women Right to Gender Equity, *Black Paper*, p. 02.

⁷³⁴ *National Campaign Manifesto: Dalit Human Rights* 10th Dec. 1998-15th Aug. 1999, Secunderabad: 1998, p. 22.

⁷³⁵ *National Campaign Manifesto*, p. 22.

⁷³⁶ Dalit Women Right to Gender Equity, *Black Paper*, p. 03.

poverty and the violence Dalit women experience. The Black Paper confirms that Dalit women workers usually enter the labour market before the age of twenty.⁷³⁷

Dalit Women's Labour

Mary Babu in her life story describes how she has to work many days in order to get the necessary money to pay the fees of her daughter. Dalit women, who are discriminated on the basis of their gender and caste, have no choice of work. They have to accept whatever work is offered and whatever work is available to them. The Black Paper states that Dalit women's low wages in various areas of work contribute to their poverty:

In urban areas, Dalit women also fill the unorganised, self-employed sector as hawkers, scrap collectors, petty traders and house servants. They also earn their livelihood in wage work: domestic workers, construction workers, earthwork, beedi / agarbatti manufacture, candle making, garment/jari, embroidery works. All these sectors of employment are characterised by low wages, irregular work and wage, absence of social security, sexual harassment and dependency on the whims of middlemen and employers.⁷³⁸

The Black Paper supports the conclusion that Dalit women experience discrimination in work and payment on the basis of their gender: "Dalit women labour is labelled as unskilled, and, therefore, unrecognised, underpaid, and even unpaid."⁷³⁹ Later in this chapter I refer to a Dalit story, where a Dalit woman received meagre wage, a basketful husked rice for a day's labour. Black Paper affirms that:

It is only when labour is recognized as that of a human person, irrespective of caste and gender considerations, can there be a situation for Dalit women to have access to resources and income, and to facilities and opportunities for such access.⁷⁴⁰

The discrimination against Dalit women is obvious in Kerala and Dalit literature testifies to Dalit women's life experiences. As Jyoti Lanjewar writes, "Scorching life experience is the price of Dalit Literature."⁷⁴¹ Paul Chirakkarod an educated Dalit writer refers to Divakaran Kadavanthra's hand-written poem *Vayalarikel Oru Dalit Sthree* (Beside the Farm a Dalit Woman). Through referring to Kadavanthra, Chirakkarod recounts how powerful landlords expressed their cruelty to Dalit women who laboured in their fields:

If a Dalit woman who produces grain for the landlord takes a bit of rest the landlord will scream like a tiger; not only abusing her but also beating her. She does not have the freedom even to breast-feed the infant she has delivered. As

⁷³⁷ Dalit Women Right to Gender Equity, *Black Paper*, p. 03.

⁷³⁸ Dalit Women Right to Gender Equity, *Black Paper*, p. 03.

⁷³⁹ Dalit Women Right, *Black Paper*, p. 03.

⁷⁴⁰ Dalit Women Right, *Black Paper*, p. 03.

⁷⁴¹ Jyoti Lanjewar, 'Dalit Literature and Dalit Woman,' in P. G. Jogdand (ed), *Dalit Women in India: Issues and Perspectives*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1995, p. 188.

she lays her infant beside the field, and as she works in the field, her sincere prayer is that no danger should happen to her child. She is ready to give a cock as an offering. [But] at last the cry of her child had awakened her motherhood. She went to the land [to the child] with leaking affection [leaking breast]. The landlord came with a rod. She got hit on her head and blood gushed from her head and she became unconscious and flattened to floor. When it was late evening somehow she crept and reached her child, then she got the fifty-six day old infant's little skeleton.⁷⁴²

Divakaran Kadavanthra explains in his poem how a Dalit mother cries when she hears her infant's cry and is unable to breast feed her infant because the cruel landlord does not permit her to do so. She not only prayed to the mountain to be with her child but she also asked the eagle, which flies in the sky, to give a bit of shadow to the child. She begged the landlord's permission to feed her crying child but he showed his big rod to her. At last the Dalit mother became impatient and tried to come out from the farmland. She was hit on her head and then there was a river of red blood. When she became conscious at evening she crept and reached the child and she kept close to her breasts the remains of the body eaten by ants.⁷⁴³ In the last stanza of the poem Kadavanthra refers to a big field at Chathangeri near Thiruvalla in Kerala State and writes, "If you go today through the varanbhu [small thin paths] in the Chathangeri field and listen, a cry is heard *perthum, perthum, perthum*."⁷⁴⁴ This poem gives a clue that this particular incident might have happened in Chathangeri. Annamma Yohannan too told a Dalit story, in which ants ate a Dalit infant, when the Dalit mother was away for work. I see similarities in both stories in which a powerful landlord is cruel to a Dalit woman.

The Impact of Caste-Society upon Dalit Men

The impact of caste-society upon Dalit men also plays a role in the violence against their women. Domestic violence, such as wife battering, is very common among the Dalits. Five among the seven Dalit women with whom I had informal interviews reported that they suffered violence from the hands of their husbands and one among these five suffered violence from the hands of an unmarried partner. Patricia Mahoney, Linda M. Williams and Carolyn M. West define battering and its impact upon women:

Battering is a term used to describe a pattern of behaviours through which one person continually reinforces a power imbalance over another in an intimate/romantic relationship context. Typically, a batterer uses both

⁷⁴² Paul Chirakkarod, Prof. M. Sathya Prakasam, Dr. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, *Dalit Kavithakal: Oru Padanam* (Dalit Poems: A Study), Tiruvalla: CLS, 1992, p. 56.

⁷⁴³ Divakaran Kadavanthra, 'Vayalarikel Oru Dalit Sthree' (One Dalit Woman beside the Farm) in Paul Chirakkarod, Prof. M. Sathya Prakasam and Dr. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, *Dalit Kavithakal: Oru Padanam* (Dalit Poems: A Study), Tiruvalla, CLS, 1992, 191, 192.

⁷⁴⁴ Kadavanthra, in Chirakkarod, *Dalit Kavithakal*, p. 192.

assaultive and non-assaultive behaviors, which, over time, have the effect of dominating, controlling, and inducing fear and /or subservience in the relationship partner.⁷⁴⁵

Elsamma Babychen, Annamma Devasya and Mary Babu suffered violence at their homes from the hands of their husbands. Elsamma not only suffered violence at home she was also hit by her husband in front of the crowd gathered at the house of a dead neighbour. It is hard for Dalit women to find a place of safety, when their husbands are violators and their homes are dangerous places for them to live.

Dalit men assault their partners for a number of reasons. First of all, Dalit women are beaten when they ask their husbands to provide money for their children's education. Mary Babu's husband attacked her, when she asked for the money to pay the fees for children's education. Dalit men get irritated if they are unable to provide for the needs of their wife and children. Even though I did not listen to the life stories of Dalit men, what I heard from Dalit women enabled me to understand that Dalit men express their frustration in the form of cruel violence against their wives and their children. I understand that Dalit men are under a lot of pressure because of their poor economic situation and unemployment. Dalit men are unable to meet the basic needs of the joint family in which they live with their wife and children. When Dalit joint families lack basic items such as food, clothes that creates tension. In such a situation 'a quarrel culture is developed' within the joint family. *Pulamadathile pulambal* (the complaints, cries and quarrels inside the hut of the Pulaya) is a traditional saying among the high caste people in Kerala State. The financial difficulties of a life of poverty and debt are burdens on the shoulders of Dalit men. Leela, Susamma James and Mary Babu spoke about the financial difficulties and debts they have on their shoulders.

Secondly, Dalit women are beaten, when they are not behaving as their husbands' expectations. Elsamma's husband expected her not to talk or smile at any other man. Annamma Devasya's first husband expected her not to talk to any man including any little boys. Dalit men's violence against Dalit women is due to their suspicion whether they have any relationship with other men as their wives smile at members of the opposite sex. Elsamma Babychen and Annamma Devasya experienced violence from their husbands because of their husband's suspicion. When Elsamma's doubting husband returned home after a day's work, if the hut was kept tidy and she prepared good food and if she was in

⁷⁴⁵ Patricia Mahoney, Linda M. Williams & Carolyn M. West, 'Violence Against Women by Intimate Relationship Partners,' in Claire M. Renzetti, (eds.), *Sourcebook on Violence Against Women*, (pp. 143-178), p. 145.

good attitude, he doubted whether any male visited her or assumed why she did all these things at home. He assumed that some male visited her and spent time with her, and then he started to accuse, abuse and beat his wife. Annamma Devasya's husband doubted her, when she returned home after a day's work and then attacked her. Traditionally, this is what happened in the past because the powerful landlords visited Dalit huts for sex with Dalit women, when their husbands were away for work. This thought is inherited in Dalit men from father to son and from generation to generation. This doubt can be getting cleared only, when Dalits are treated equal with all other castes and when they are given equal access to all resources, education and employment.

Thirdly, Dalit men are violent against their women because they understand that other men including landlords use their power to sexually exploit Dalit women. Mahakavi M. P. Appan's *Muthumala* (pearl Chain), a poem that describes the life story of a Pulaya woman, shows how Dalit a husband uses his power over his wife. Appan explains in this poem that an artist loved a Pulaya girl and drew her picture and sent it to a competition. He won a prize for that picture and so he presented a *Muthumala* to his old lover. It created anger in her Pulaya husband who then did not believe her sincerity and chastity. Later the Pulaya husband killed her cruelly.⁷⁴⁶ Paul Chirakkarod explains why Dalit husbands are cruel to their wives:

The Dalit woman is living in different situations. She receives very little pleasure and safety from her husband. She has to live alone in the work place. Naturally this prepares the way for [husband's] doubt. The Dalit man is unable to keep her beside him. His life is full of lack. It turns to *apakarshatha* (guilty conscience), poison of doubt and murder.⁷⁴⁷

Dalit husbands are aware that the landlords use their power to sexually exploit Dalit women. Dalit men are unable to express their anger to the powerful landlords, who use their wives but instead of that they express their severe disappointments and anger in cruelty to their wives.

A fourth reason for a Dalit husband to be violent against his wife is when she is suspicious whether he loves or is having a sexual relationship with another woman. When Dalit woman confront her husband, he has the power to respond with violence to silence her. Mary Babu doubted her husband's relationship with his cousin sister. Kavitha Johnson doubted her partner's relationship with the prostitutes at Alapuzha (Alleppy).

⁷⁴⁶ Mahakavi M. P. Appan, 'Muthumala' in Chirakkarod, *Dalit Kavithakal*, pp. 193-195.

⁷⁴⁷ Chirakkarod, *Dalit Kavithakal*, p. 58.

Fifthly, including Dalit, men in Kerala traditionally do not like it when women challenge or advise them because the male attitude is that they are superior to women. Therefore, women are not expected to question men. If a woman talks much she will be known as *adhikaprasangi* (the one who preaches more than the limit). It is assumed that women are to learn from men, obey men, and listen to men. 'I know better than you' is the attitude of many men in Kerala State. Male knowledge is considered as powerful and useful but woman's knowledge is considered as useless. Even if a woman is highly educated the man degrades her knowledge. Therefore, if a woman advises her husband to do certain things in a certain way at home, he gets irritated because of the feeling, 'Who are you to advise me and guide me since I am wise, powerful and superior to you?' In order to prove his might, power and superiority, he beats his wife into obedience, submission and silence. Therefore, a major power imbalance exists in the relationship between men and women in Kerala State.

Veena Poonacha writes:

We would have to understand the function of violence as a maintenance mechanism of a patriarchal society. Here the term patriarchy has been seen as the male potency principle which in its extreme form legitimises male domination in the family so that power and authority are vested on him through various legal rights and cultural norms such as total claim to property and assets within the family, control over decision making processes within the family. At broader societal level this principle of male domination enable men to arrogate for themselves all avenues of power and authority, access to economic resources power and prestige.⁷⁴⁸

Special Issues Relating to Dalit Women

The Pattern of Marriage Plays a Role in Violence against Women

Dalit girls do not have right to choose their partners. As in Mary Babu's case there is no freedom for Dalit girls to choose her own partner. Mary had to agree to the marriage arranged by her parents and marry a boy from Catholic Church even though she did not wish for it.

The economically poor Dalit girl Kavitha eloped with a boy but she suffered violence not only from her partner but also from two other men in the same family. Poor Dalit girls such as Kavitha are unable to get married and their parents find it very difficult to produce enough money to give as dowry. A girl becomes a commodity for exchange in arranged marriages in India because the bridegroom's family bargain for a dowry and gold along

⁷⁴⁸ Veena Poonacha (ed.), *Understanding Violence*, Bombay: Research Centre for Women's Studies, nd., p. 1.

with the girl. If a girl's parents are unable to provide the amount of a dowry and gold asked by boy's family, that marriage might not take place. Then the boy's family go to another proposal to get the same amount of dowry.

Annamma Devasya's family selected husbands for her first and second marriages. She did not choose her partner but she had to agree with her family when they selected a boy who was deaf. Annamma got married to him and suffered much violence from his hands. After his death her family chose another man and now she suffers violence from her second husband. She still lives with her second husband, who tortures her.

Dalit Women's web of Relationship with Joint Families is a Cause for Violence against them

Kavitha Johnson and Leela are two survivors who suffered much difficulties and violence in Dalit joint families. Both of them witnessed the drawbacks of the joint family system, which caused in fights and violence between their parents. Dalit women live between three families, her parents' family, her husband's family and her own family. She has responsibilities and obligations to all three families. She lives in her husband's joint family with married and unmarried siblings, parents and grandparents. If she returns to her family that is also a joint family. A Dalit woman has a web of relationship with her own joint family and her husband's joint family and her own family, which includes her husband and their children. It is difficult for Dalit woman to meet all the expectations of the members in these families. Maintaining good relationship with all these members is an added burden on her shoulders. She needs to share food, money and clothes in between all these members. If she is not sharing relationships can deteriorate. She has to provide for parents and parents-in-laws, and she and her husband have to provide money for the marriage of their sisters. If a Dalit woman gives more affection to own parents, her husband might not be pleased. If she is unable to please her parents-in-law it can provoke her husband to be violent to her. The husband's and wife's love relationship may be damaged because of all the pressures of the joint family system.

Silence and Secrecy

My research has shown how the silence of Dalit women contributes to their continuing abuse. Leela, who experienced sexual violence from her childhood, never filed complaints against her violators but she kept silence about it because of her uncles' threatening behaviour. Her silence was a shelter for the abusers to continue their evil acts against her. Leela's abusers enforced secrecy and silence as MacKinnon points out "often the abuser

enforces secrecy and silence; secrecy and silence may be part of what is so sexy about sexual abuse.”⁷⁴⁹

Annama Yohannan, who was raped by a neighbouring landlord, kept silent instead of filing complaints against him and she stopped going to work in the violator’s garden. Annamma did not talk about the incident even to her parents. MacKinnon finds another reason why survivors of sexual violence do not file any complaints:

Most victims of sexual harassment, if the incidence data are correct, never file complaints. Many who are viciously violated are so ashamed to make that violation public that they submit in silence, although it devastates their self-respect and often their health, or they leave the job without complaint, although it threatens their survival and that of their families.⁷⁵⁰

Why Dalit women are silent when they are survivors of violence is a major issue to be explored further. Fear and the belief that speaking out could worsen their situation might be two basic reasons for their silence. First of all they are afraid to talk because powerful men may harm them if they reveal the violence they have experienced from their hands. Talking about such violence affects not only Dalit women’s safety but also the safety of her husband and children.

Secondly if Dalit women were to talk to their husbands about the violence they have experienced from their landlords, these husbands could become more violent to wives because of the suppression and pain Dalit men experience and which they cannot change themselves. Unwillingly and silently they submit themselves to all kinds of degradation, oppression, discriminations and violence at the hands of the high caste people. Therefore, if Dalit women were to talk about their experiences of violence, their lives might be in danger from their own men. In this case Dalit women do not see any refuge other than being silent. They see men as powerful and violent people whether it is inside the family or outside the family, whether it is within their own caste or outside their own caste, whether it is in their religion or outside their religion.

Thirdly, how can women break their silence unless they find someone who is willing to listen to their stories for the sake of bringing some transformation in their situation. The women I listened to did not know with whom to share their problems. Leela and Alice Mathai, who experienced violence, were relieved to share their experience with a woman, who would listen to them and who would treat their experiences as confidential. However,

⁷⁴⁹ MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, p. 104.

⁷⁵⁰ MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, p. 114.

they could not break their silence until I reached there to listen to their life stories. These women are not comfortable sharing their problems with male pastors or priests.

Fourthly, Dalit women believe that even if they share their life stories, this will not bring any practical solution for their problems. Therefore they find it wise not to disclose their experiences to anyone and risk the shame that might ensue. In our informal conversations Leela stated that it was better to share problems with God rather than talking about them to human beings.

Fifthly, Dalit Christian women's religion has taught them to be silent when they suffer violence. Elsamma Babychen suffered in silence when her husband continued to hit and abuse her because of her faith. The Christian teaching that women receive encourages them to forgive the violators and pray for them. Mary Babu, who suffers severe violence from her husband, prays for him and keeps silence about the incidents that take place. She believes that when God answers her prayers he might become a non-violent person.

Sixthly, if Dalit women complaint about the violence they experience from own family or from the high caste landlords, the listeners due to their bias against Dalits might not give them justice. As MacKinnon argues the court, police and doctors might not see the incident from women's perspective:

Women believe that not only will we not be believed by the police, not only will the doctors treat us in degrading ways, but when we go to court, the incident will not be seen from our point of view. It is unfortunate that these fears have, on the whole, proved accurate. The fear of being treated poorly is not an invention of women's imaginations. It is the result of the way we have been treated.⁷⁵¹

Dalit women, who are the survivors of violence, keep silent because their problems are not seen from their perspective, when they seek for justice. This problem might be solved in the future if there were enough Dalit lawyers, Dalit police and Dalit doctors, to listen to Dalit women.

Women's Love for Children Keep them Silent

Moreover, Dalit mothers who are the survivors of violence keep silent and continue in their relationships with violent partners or violent landlords because of love for their children. Dalit women work hard in order to provide food, clothes and education for their children.

⁷⁵¹ MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, p. 82.

Mary Babu experiences violence from her husband because of her desire to educate their children. When Dalit women go for work they pray for the safety of their children and work under cruel landlords.

Dalit women express their hardship and concerns for their children through singing folksongs. Resly Abraham,⁷⁵² a Dalit woman who has a Masters degree in theology, refers to a song, which expresses a Dalit mother's love for her children:

Dalit women curse their fate because they could not feed their babies from their breast. So they looked up and saw some kites (birds) flying high above. They [Dalit woman] saluted the kites and asked them whether they had seen her little ones.⁷⁵³

If a Dalit woman leaves her violent partner, or talks about the violence she experiences, then she might lose her access to their children. This is the reason Dalit women who are survivors of violence keep silent and continue to stay with violent husbands or partners. A Dalit mother thinks about the welfare and happiness of her children more than her own safety and well being even if she suffers violence from the hands of her partner.

Dalit Women's Shame

Annamma Devasya, Leela, Alice Mathai and Elsamma Babychen attempted to commit suicide because of the shame they suffered due to violence.

MacKinnon writes:

It is apparently difficult to carry on about the ultimate inviolability of the person in the face of a person who has been so ultimately violated. The shame and denial over the term "victim" has the same structure.⁷⁵⁴

Shame causes the survivors of violence to keep silent about the incident. Whether the violence took place at home in the form of wife battering and abuse, or it took place in a working place in the form of rape, molestation or sexual abuse, women try to keep silent because of the shame. A woman thinks that if she talks about it she will be blamed for the

⁷⁵² Resly Abraham is the Director of Anveshi Dalit Women's Documentation Center at Tiruvalla in Kerala State. I had an hour's conversation with Resly on 4th December 2001 in Resly's residence at Mavelikkara. She got married to a non-Christian man named Prabhakaran, who is also from the same caste Parayas. I had an hour's conversation with Resly's mother Mariamma Abraham and Mariamma commented about her caste, *Parayante kulam nallathu, kalam mosam*. (Paraya's caste is good but pot is bad). She explained why their cooking practices are bad; 'they always cook meat and keep it in the pot, therefore, it smells but Parayas are the highest *vamsam* (caste) and their character also is good.'

⁷⁵³ Resly Abraham, *The Response of Paraya Community to Selected Contemporary Liberation Movements of Central Kerala: An Ethical Critique*, Unpublished MTh Thesis, Bangalore: United Theological College, March 2001, p. 66.

⁷⁵⁴ MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, p. 13.

incident that happened. She doubts whether anyone would understand her when she tells the truth. Sometimes it is difficult for her to convince others that she was attacked, abused, molested or raped. A general tendency in India is to blame the woman by saying that if a leaf falls on a thorn or a thorn falls on a leaf hurts only the leaf. Therefore, the leaf has to be careful not to get hurt and it is a woman's responsibility to be careful not to get hurt by men. A woman cannot get proper justice even if she reports the incident of rape, molest, attack and battering. If the quarrel and beatings takes place inside the home in an intimate and private relationship then others would not get involved in the private matters of the wife and husband. The attitude of society is 'Let them sort out their own matters.' This kind of situation leads the survivors of violence to shame and then denial. Women hate themselves and lose their self-esteem, courage, happiness and peace. In case of Elsamma Babychen as a form of denial she did not eat food for many days, when she suffered severe violence from her husband. Women do not care for themselves when they are in denial. They are unable to share their pain with anyone. Denial and shame can lead the survivors of violence to suicide, when their strength for resistance is weak. Radha Kumar states that women who have experienced rape in Indian society, are considered equal to social-outcastes Dalits:

Women feel they cannot live with dignity after a rape; no one will agree to marry them, they are like social outcastes-and so are open to such marriages...In many instances women would otherwise see suicide as the only way out for them.⁷⁵⁵

Shame Keeps Dalit Women Silent therefore Isolated

Shame keeps Dalit women who are survivors of violence silent. Not talking to anyone can lead to depression and more isolation because they hold their experiences within them. If they are not talking because of shame then they are not able to get relief from their problems. Talking about the violence they experienced can bring some relief to their minds. Leela gained relief, when she spoke for the first time about the sexual violence she experienced. Shame prevented Leela telling her experience to anyone. Therefore, she was isolated until I reached there to listen to her experience. Elsamma Babychen did not talk to anyone, not even to her neighbours, during the seven years she experienced violence. Shame has kept Elsamma in total seclusion. She did not want to talk to her neighbours because there was nothing joyful for her to talk about. Therefore, she isolated herself from communication. If shame keeps Dalit women silent and isolated, then social gatherings for Dalit women can be a way for them to meet together and begin to share.

⁷⁵⁵ Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India 1800-1990*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993, p. 136.

Dalit women are ashamed to talk about the violence because of their untouchable state and such shame keeps them silent and isolated. Dalit women cannot change their identity being born as Dalits and women. The Black Paper states:

Untouchability is the demon that acts as the agent of caste system...Casteism with its ideological roots in Brahmanism did it much earlier and created untouchability in its worst inhuman forms.⁷⁵⁶

If the untouchability is removed, then it can bring changes in the lives of Dalit women. The Black Paper writes: “No profession of ‘providing’ equality and equal opportunity to the Dalits will be acceptable until untouchability is removed in principle and in practice.”⁷⁵⁷

Blaming other Woman

Although Dalit women suffer at the hands of men they often seek to justify the men and blame other women such as mother-in-laws, mothers, lovers of husbands and sisters while fathers, husbands are defended. Annamma Devasya defends her present husband, who is the violator, and blames the other woman for her husband’s violence. Therefore Annamma asks the question, ‘when a woman comes to a man with her sexual need is there any man who would ignore such need?’ Annamma Devasya argues that it is not her husband’s fault that he is unfaithful and although Annamma suffers violence from the hands of her husband she justifies the position of her husband.

Mary Babu, who lost her teeth due to husband’s violence, blames the husband’s cousin’s sister, who was fed rice by him. Mary Babu also blames her mother-in-law for her husband’s violence against her. She complained that her mother-in-law instigated her husband to be violent. Many Dalit women, who suffer violence from their men, justify the position of their men and blame other women for such violence.

Dalit women, like other women in India, keep silent in their suffering from male violence. If a woman breaks her silence, it is defying the traditional role assigned to her. Men in Kerala do not like women, who do not obey the traditional roles assigned to them. Therefore, a woman tries to please her violator and then finds it easier to blame other women. If she points out the mistake of a man there would be more violence because the man behaves as a powerful giant to her. When a survivor of male violence blames another woman, traditionally the other woman too would be expected to be silent.

⁷⁵⁶ *National Campaign Manifesto*, p. 9.

Silence of the Church about Violence against Women

Why the Church is silent about violence against Dalit women is one of the major issues for reflection. Firstly, the caste system within Christianity in Kerala State causes the Church to be silent about the violence Dalit women experience. Annamma Yohannan's life story confirms that Dalits were not allowed to wear head coverings in the presence of high caste people including Syrian Christians. Syrian Christians do not welcome Pulaya Christians inside their houses and Syrian Christian churches are hesitant to give membership to Dalit Christians. These kinds of discrimination are typical of the cultural violence Dalit Christians experience at the hands of Syrian Christians. Alexander confirms that Dalits experienced cultural oppression from Syrian Christians:

Even in the mid 1960s Pulaya converts were obliged to remove their headdress in the presence of rich Syrian Christians. While speaking with their Syrian Christian employers they had to conceal their mouths with their hands. Pulaya Christians are not given food inside the house of a Syrian Christian, but only outside the house in a broken dish or leaf.⁷⁵⁸

K. C. Alexander points out that in 1964 a large number of Dalit Christians left the Church of South India under the leadership of Bishop Stephen, who was previously a priest in CSI. They left the CSI due to the discrimination experienced from Syrian Christians.⁷⁵⁹ Kavitha Johnson in her life story reveals that she does not like Syrian Christians because of the discrimination they show to Dalit Christians.

Secondly, the Church assumes that a Christian man does not beat, hit and abuse his wife, does not rape any woman neighbour, does not abuse any child, and does not molest any little girl. The Church considers violence, as a problem 'out there' away from the church and is blind to the violence that takes place within Christian homes, within Christian congregations and even within Christian leader's home.

Thirdly, Churches in India divide the world unto a secular world, which is outside the Church, a spiritual world that is within the Church, and the other world, which is life after death. The Church is only responsible for taking care of spiritual needs and has nothing to do with the secular world. The Church does not give necessary attention to social issues and this is a major failure of the Church in India. Priests and Pastors from various denominations neglect social issues such as violence against women, caste discrimination,

⁷⁵⁷ *National Campaign Manifesto*, p. 23.

⁷⁵⁸ Alexander in Mahar, *The Untouchables*, p. 155.

⁷⁵⁹ Alexander in Mahar, *The Untouchables*, p. 157.

poverty and child labour. Social issues are not exposed in Church and covered by the thick blanket of religion.

Fourthly, the Church lacks trained people, who can handle the issue of violence against women and who can give counselling to the survivors of violence. Even if the issue of violence against women is brought to the attention of priests or pastors, they do not know how to deal with such sensitive issues because they lack the training and tools to take care of it.

Dalit Christian Women and Religion

As I explained earlier all kinds of violence done or provoked by the high caste people against Dalit women have a direct link with religions such as Brahminic religion and Christianity. Brahminic religion's interpretation of caste and its encouragement of the caste system prevail in society. Christianity's teaching to forgive the violators and its ecclesiastical language of submission, are problems for Dalit Christian women who experience violence. Religion strengthens the oppressors and the Christian church in India has a role in contributing to the present situation of Dalit Christian women.

Christianity

Christian churches have contributed to the bad situation Dalit Christian women experience because Christianity has taught Dalit Christian wives to be submissive to their husbands. Therefore, they are submissive even when they experience violence at the hands of their husbands. The survivor of violence, who is a Dalit Christian woman, keeps silent and forgives her violator. Christianity encourages the woman to continue living with the violator if the violator is her husband. When I analyse why Annamma Devasya went back so often to her violent husband, I find an answer in her religion because she has been taught to live with her husband until death no matter whether he is violent or not. Breaking holy marriage is a sin to her even if she suffers from the hands of violent husband. She sees her responsibility to keep going with her violent husband for the sake of her religion, Christianity.

Christianity taught women to comfort themselves by longing for an everlasting other worldly peaceful life. Therefore, Dalit women count that all their sufferings in this world are for the time being and they do not seek any solution for their practical problems, when they suffer violence. Religion has taught them to forgive to the violator and leave the

problem in the hands of God. Christians are taught not to murmur or not to complain about anything, therefore, Dalit Christian women, who are the survivors of violence; shut their mouths because of this religious teaching. They are taught that husband is the head of the family and wife has to obey and submissive to husband in everything. Therefore, Dalit Christian wives are expected to be submissive even when their husbands beat or abuse them. In this case Christianity does not offer practical solution for the problems Dalit Christian women experience. As A. Padmanaban writes, “Christianity preaching to the untouchable is less centered on ‘Practical’ reforms.”⁷⁶⁰ Therefore, Dalit Christian women find it hard to protest against the violence they experience.

No Support or Help for the Survivor of Violence

Most of the priests and pastors in Churches in Kerala are either from a Syrian Christian Church background or from high castes. Therefore, pastors or priests do not give much attention to Dalit women’s problems. Many Christian ministers lack proper pastoral and social concerns but their responsibilities are limited to conducting spiritual services in the Church.

If Dalit women go to a pastor or priest to share their problems, male ministers find it hard to believe and understand Dalit women. Their attitude is that we are here for your spiritual welfare and it is not our responsibility to deal with your social needs. It is unnecessary to draw a line between the sacred and secular and separate these two aspects. Most Christian leaders, with the exception of some Catholic leaders, do not consider social concerns as issues for Christians to deal with. In this situation how can a Dalit woman share her problems with male pastor or male priest? How can she talk about the violence she experiences unless pastor or priest becomes ready to listen to her?

Male ministers in Kerala are reserved about listening to women and are not comfortable talking or listening to women, who have experienced sexual violence or rape. If someone talks in public about sex, or matters related to sex, it is considered indecent talk. Therefore priests and pastors, who are spiritual leaders, are not expected to deal with sensitive issues such as sex or sexual violence. This kind of cultural norm prevents Dalit Christian women from talking to male pastors or priests about the sexual violence they experience and it prevents male ministers from listening to the survivors of sexual violence who are in need of pastoral care and counselling.

⁷⁶⁰ A. Padmanaban, *Dalits*, p. 48.

There are no counselling centres or shelter houses for Dalit Christian women to seek practical help in their crises. There is no help line available to Dalit women, or any other women, to seek help or guidance if they suffer from male abuse.

Culture Prevents Dalit Christian Women from joining together and Supporting Each Other

The church in Kerala does not encourage Dalit Christian women's capacity for self-thinking, self-organising and self-liberating. As Lovely Stephen points out Dalit women are in the front row to protest about general problems and their personal problems. But Dalit women are not included in the history of society and in women's organisations. Dalit women are always under the supremacy of others,⁷⁶¹ who belong to higher castes.

The laws of Manu prohibit women from doing anything independently and this culture prevails not only among Hindus but also among Indian Christians. Wendy Doinger writes: "A girl, a young woman, or even an old woman should not do anything independently, even in (her own) house."⁷⁶² This cultural understanding still exists in the Christian communities in Kerala even if things have started to change a bit. Therefore, it is difficult for Dalit Christian women in Kerala to get organised together because good housewives would not go for any kind of *sammalanam* (gathering together with a special purpose). Christian women are taught not to get involved much in politics or any other matters outside their homes. Only a bad woman goes to *sammalanam* is the attitude of the people in Kerala. Therefore, capable women, who can organise social or political gatherings, are ridiculed and Dalit Christian women too find it difficult to get organised in this kind of culture. However, Dalit Christian women did gather together for a day's seminar and if they can get organised in such a way and join together in future, it would be a great source of strength to them.

Spiritual Strength Dalit Women Receive from their Religion

Dalit women do receive some spiritual strength from their religion even if they are unable to find within it any practical solutions for their problems. The Church is a place of 'escape' for Dalit women. Leela, the survivor of sexual violence, felt that she was a sinner. She worried whether she would go to heaven after her death. She thought that she was not

⁷⁶¹ Lovely Stephen in Yesudasan, *Dalit Swathavum*, p. 14.

⁷⁶² Wendy Doinger and Brian K. Smith (trans.), *The Laws of Manu*, London: Penguin Books, 1991, p. 115.

qualified because she had been violated. In her difficulties Leela did not receive any practical help from the church and she did not even think that church could be a place where this was given. Church is rather a place of 'escape' from pain. Prayer, singing, sermons and worship gives some peace of mind to the survivors of violence even if their problems are not solved practically. Leela reported that singing Christian songs and praying to God gave her some relief. Annanama Devasya, and Elsamma Babychen both found temporary strength by going to the church and by attending prayer groups. However, after prayer when they returned home things were the same and there was no practical solution for their problems. Therefore, the church is a place of escape for Dalit women, who are survivors of violence. When they are inside the church, at least for that particular moment, it is a peaceful time for them. Violent husbands might not enter in to the Church to hit them and cruel landlords cannot come to the church to abuse or rape them. Church is the only place where they could experience the presence of God with them. They find it hard to experience God's presence or protection in a violent home or in a work place under violent landlords.

Survivors of violence find comfort in the 'escape' of religion. It encourages another worldly attitude that does not tackle problems but it does give strength to survive. These Dalit women, comfort themselves with the hope about the otherworldly life. However, this other worldly attitude and hope encourages them to survive their sufferings and such hope does strengthen them continue to live in this world.

Mary McClintock Fulkerson found that Pentecostal women, who are not feminist or liberationist academics, use religious power to overcome gender discriminations in the ministry.⁷⁶³

As Fulkerson discovered 'call narratives' are important sources of strength for Pentecostal women she studied. Oral narratives, which are their survival narratives, are important for Dalit Christian women. Fulkerson finds that "Pentecostal women ministers' call stories and worship performances, arguing that their ecstatic and bodily displays of joy produce their own registers of resistance as well."⁷⁶⁴ Dalit Christian women's survival stories are based on their Christian faith. Annamma Devasya requested a pastor to baptise her and she believed that Christian baptism might enable her to survive in this world as she experienced severe violence from her husband. Elsamma believes that if she goes to

⁷⁶³ Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis: 1994, p. 3.

⁷⁶⁴ Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, p. 12.

Church and attended prayer meeting it could change her life and her violator husband's life. She believed that the transformation, which took place in her husband's life, was God's answer to her prayer. She shares her life story as a thanksgiving to God. Fulkerson finds that folk religious communities rely on oral tradition. Fulkerson states that in the hands of those Pentecostal women tradition is turned into practices that claim some powerful spaces. Fulkerson employs intertextual analysis of call stories and worship practices of those women as she tries to trace the constraints they experience as well as the transgressive nature of their practices. However, Fulkerson finds it difficult to share her subjects interpretation of their practices as ideal or as God's will.⁷⁶⁵

Fulkerson argues that Pentecostal women are unable to develop 'gender resistance' because of their understanding of scripture and the same problem effects Dalit women. She states:

The requirement that men rule is supported by the status of an infallible Bible. This suggests that gender resistance will not appear around the topic of women or women's nature. It is no surprise to discover that the issue of gender is not an explicit theme raised by these women's practices.⁷⁶⁶

Fulkerson finds that Pentecostal women's call narratives lack socio-economic details such as place, family, career and love but nevertheless these narratives are spiritual histories, which explain God's call to preaching ministry. Pentecostal women gain their power through their narratives of calling.⁷⁶⁷ Those life stories are constructed out of traditions of Pentecostal community and represent religious personal narratives in the oral tradition.⁷⁶⁸ Fulkerson finds that 'power' is a word used frequently by the Pentecostal women preachers to describe the pleasure of anointing.⁷⁶⁹ Fulkerson points out how Pentecostal women preachers use power to transcend gender discriminations:

More creatively, they also use their submission to God to deflect criticism from folks who do not approve of women ministers. In the name of submission, these women stand up to men (or anyone else) who challenge their ministry.⁷⁷⁰

Fulkerson finds that those Pentecostal women preachers claim never to feel that they were put down or excluded in the Church practices.⁷⁷¹ Even if her agenda is not to make Pentecostal women feminists Fulkerson writes:

⁷⁶⁵ Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, pp. 240, 241.

⁷⁶⁶ Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, p. 260.

⁷⁶⁷ Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, pp. 260, 261.

⁷⁶⁸ Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, p. 261.

⁷⁶⁹ Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, p. 270.

⁷⁷⁰ Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, p. 267.

⁷⁷¹ Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, p. 285.

If our interest is the effects of women's practices in relation to the pertinent discursive formation and the several subject positions it offers, then the practices of Pentecostal women merit another look.⁷⁷²

Fulkerson writes:

Two dynamics have emerged in the Pentecostal canonical system from which the constraints and possibilities for something like gender discourse in Pentecostalism can be seen to arise. The first is the reliance on the empowering presence of God as Holy Spirit in human practice. The second is the inclusion in that canon of the belief that the entire scripture is inspired and available for use as literal prescriptions. This second dynamic is a constraint on the radical possibilities of the first.⁷⁷³

Dalit women's faith narratives are their strength for their survival in the midst of violence and oppression they experience. Dalit Christian women's faith narratives enable them to overcome the traditional roles assigned to them as women. They are capable of influencing their husbands through their faith narratives as Elsamma led her husband to the prayer meeting and then a great transformation took place in her violator's life. Such transformation brought peace, it changed their lives and now they are a happy couple even though they are economically very poor. Elsamma shared her life story and faith narratives as her Christian testimony. Fulkerson finds that "Given these canonical constraints, Pentecostal women display considerable, distinctive performative power."⁷⁷⁴ Pentecostal women's call stories enable them to get out from the traditional roles assigned to women and they use power, when they preach in public and minister in the sacred sphere:

They legitimate their authority even when men oppose them. The women are sagamen or heroes not only because they tell of God's victorious exploits through their lives, but because these stories get them out of their traditional roles.⁷⁷⁵

Dalit women's faith in God is their shelter and shield, when they experience violence. Fulkerson finds that the use of call story is a shield for Pentecostal woman to overcome gender discriminations, "To have a call story is to respond to the pieces of the Pentecostal canonical system that subordinate women."⁷⁷⁶ Fulkerson writes:

The idealization of dependence as female is somehow altered in their practices, in that they do not comply with the standard stereotypes of women's body control, posturing, and bodily restraint. The transgressions of worship practice, particularly its bodily and oral modes, are temporary, perhaps, but they are countersignifying processes to the compliant femininity the women espouse.

⁷⁷² Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, p. 285.

⁷⁷³ Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, pp. 285, 286.

⁷⁷⁴ Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, p. 286.

⁷⁷⁵ Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, p. 289.

⁷⁷⁶ Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, p. 289.

They are countersignifying processes to the demure, dependent, eroticised body that feminists also resist.⁷⁷⁷

Although Fulkerson makes some important points concerning the spiritual power women achieve through religious practices it seems that this form of self assertion will not stop violence against women. Dalit Christian women's willingness to be submissive to their men contributes to the violence they experience. Fulkerson finds that the ecclesiastical language of submission is linked to women's willingness to be battered:

The discourse of submission is not simply to God, but to husbands as well. The semiotic interchange between the signs for God and male head of household are indisputable. My argument has focused on the overdetermined nature of signifying and its muting effects on the communication of certain possible meanings of gendered discourse is the willingness of women to stay in battering situations. Women's willingness to be battered is often linked to the kind of ecclesiastically supported languages of submission that appear in Pentecostal women's stories.⁷⁷⁸

Dalit Christian women remain to live with their husbands even if they suffer severe violence from their men. Dalit women do not seek divorce and are not willing to file cases against their partners because of the ecclesiastical teaching to be submissive to husbands and remain with their husbands until death. Fulkerson refers to the life story of a Pentecostal woman Clady Johnson, who survived the abuse of a man for fourteen years. Johnson came to a dramatic conclusion, when her husband shot at her and their children, then she decided to get out. She got a restraining order against him.⁷⁷⁹ As this woman lived with a violent partner for fourteen years because of the ecclesiastical culture of submission, there are Dalit women remain with violent husbands because they practice the language of submission and remain silent.

Women cannot See Faith Linked to Social Change

Faith, prayer, Bible study gives Dalit women strength to survive. However, their faith doesn't lead them to a vision for action to change their present situation. Dalit Christian women, who participated in my research, have strong faith but none of them seem to expect that faith could be linked to social change. Firstly, Dalit women lack a vision for a social change because religious teaching became like opium for them and their concerns are for the other world where their sufferings would be put to an end. Secondly, they lack a vision for action and social change because they are not educated to think in this way.

⁷⁷⁷ Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, p. 295.

⁷⁷⁸ Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, p. 296.

⁷⁷⁹ Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, pp. 297, 298.

Thirdly, Dalit Christian women lack educated Dalit women leaders in their communities, who can encourage them to think about action and social changes. Fourthly, Dalit women are not concerned about social changes within society because their basic concern is for their own survival and they lack time to think about other matters. Sixthly, even if they desired social change, they do not know how to work for it. Such awareness could be developed in them if there were more seminars and meetings, which would sharpen their thinking, reflection and vision for action.

Christianity became an empowering force in the lives of Dalit Christian women in the research group because the scripture portions used in the Bible study groups gave them authority to speak about the violence they experienced. As Christians it was the first time Dalit Christian women received an open floor to talk and discuss about the violence they experience.⁷⁸⁰ They were empowered to talk because I used strategies, which are familiar to Christian women. Bible study groups prepared the ground for them to gather together in the Church to read, discuss and reflect on scripture in ways that empowered them to talk about the issues they face in their own lives. How can Christianity become an empowering force further in the life of Dalit Christian women? A new theology that takes the lived experience of Dalit Christian women a primary source for reflection can empower them in the future. If a new Dalit Feminist Practical Theology is constructed, Dalit Christian women, who experience violence, might begin to claim power for themselves.

A New Theology: Bare-Breasted Theology

The aim of articulating resources useful for creating a Dalit Feminist Practical Theology is that such theology will contribute towards liberation. Therefore, I began by exploring and exposing the violence Dalit Christian women experience in their lives. Dalit women's life stories provide insights from which to begin to construct a contextual Feminist Practical Theology, which is relevant to Dalit Christian women that I have provisionally called Bare- Breasted Theology (BBT). BBT takes the cultural strength of Dalit women and their experience as its major resource. I provisionally use the term Bare-Breasted Theology because Dalit Christian women were bare-breasted in the past. It was not a comfortable experience for Dalit women to be bare-breasted in the public but these courageous women survived this experience.⁷⁸¹ Dalit women's bare- breasted⁷⁸² experience reveals their

⁷⁸⁰ Although they often repeated conventional views of women some radical views also began to emerge as discussion developed.

⁷⁸¹ My informant Annamma Yohannan explained her bare- breasted experience and it was a cultural oppression Dalit women experienced.

courage, transparency, and positive resistance to oppression. Their breasts are the most significant symbol of motherhood even though cruel landlords prohibited Dalit women labours from breast-feeding their infants although the little ones were kept beside them in the field. Economically poor Dalit women's bare-breasts are the only resource to nurture their starving babies. Their bare-breasts are the symbol of their courage to stand against the caste discrimination and the cultural oppression they experienced. Dalit women's theology must come out of their lived-experiences as they co-relate the scripture to their lived experiences. Their basic survival resource is their Christian faith and it gives them hope for a better future. Their Christian faith is based on the vision of an eternal life, where God will treat Dalit Christian women as equal to all other Christians. BBT must be a Feminist Practical Theology that is relevant to Dalit Christian women.

BBT- A Form of Liberation Theology

Dalit women receive Jesus as the one who came to bring the good news to the poor Dalits, to proclaim liberty to them from their age old captivity of caste discrimination, and to release them from the dominating powers. Jesus the liberator made himself 'untouchable' in order to liberate the 'untouchable' Samaritan woman by his conversation with her. BBT is a form of Liberation Theology, which has a vision of Christianity as a gospel for the poor and untouchables in society. Dalit women are the poorest of poor, who seek liberation and the transformation of their lives. The life story of Annamma Yohannan reveals that Dalit women are the most oppressed people. She was like a captive when she worked under a man from Ezhava caste, who raped her. She had to depend on him for her livelihood because of her poverty. As it is written in Isaiah 61:1 "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners," Dalits are seeking liberation from the oppressive structures and dominated powers. It is Dalits' birthright to enjoy freedom and live a normal human life.

BBT- A Survival Point for Dalit Christian Women

The life story of Leela proves that traditional theology convinced her that she was a sinner. Leela stated "Oh God I am a sinner in the presence of God," although she is an innocent victim of sexual violence. There is a 'guilty feeling' in her because she became an object

⁷⁸² A. S. Altekar states that in South Indian paintings and sculptures, women appear without covering their breasts. A. S. Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization: From Prehistoric Times to the Present Day*, Delhi: Motilala Banarsidass, Second Edition, in 1959, Reprinted in 1962, 1973, 1978, 1983, p. 287.

for her violators sexual pleasure. Leela survives because of her Christian faith. Leela's story reveals a theology based on Psalms 51: 17 "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." A theology that can comfort and meet her psychological needs is necessary, when she asks "Is it possible for me to go to the presence of God?" She is very concerned about going to heaven and she confesses her sins spending nights in praying with tears. Leela shared her difficulties with me but she is unwilling to share these with others because she believes that only God can solve all her problems. God is the shelter and refuge for Leela in times of difficulty therefore she confesses everything to God. Her theology "It is better to trust in the Lord than to depend on human beings"(Psalms 118: 8). It may sound passive or pietistic to see Leela's trust in God as the means by which she survives but she and other Christian women like her may have been so overcome by shame that without this faith she would have 'gone under.'

BBT- Help Dalit Christian Women to overcome Shame and Stereotyping them as Unclean

Bare-breasted theology can empower women to overcome their shame and assure them that they are clean women created in the image of God. They can gain power to overcome the shame of 'untouchability' by associating with the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who asked for drinking water from the 'untouchable' Samaritan woman who came to fetch the water in the mid-day in order to avoid her oppressors.

BBT- A Public Voice of Dalit Christian Women Breaking Secrecy

Leela's life story breaks the silence and secrecy and it creates a space for her public voice. The tomb of violence could not hold anymore its silence and secrecy, when the survivors of violence told their life stories. Therefore, Bare Breasted Theology can be a public voice of Dalit Christian women.

BBT- A Body Theology

Christ's resurrected body and Dalit women's surviving bodies can be compared. Annamma Devasya's body and Christ's resurrected body both bodies bear the scars of violence and these bodies are victorious by surviving the violence. As Jesus was wounded for the sins of human beings Dalit women are crushed for the power and pleasure of others but both are people with great survival resources, who overcame the violence. The victorious Prince of

peace, the Saviour of the world, the resurrected Christ overcame violence and death and the tomb could not hold him from the resurrection on the third day. Bare breasted theology can liberate Dalit women from the tomb of their life long silence.

Resources in Dalit Cultural Traditions for Constructing New Theology: -

There are many rich resources in Dalit cultural traditions that could become significant in constructing a new theology.

Slave Narratives

Dalit women's slave narratives are excellent repositories of wisdom and experience from which to construct a new theology. When Dalit women spoke, some of them referred to their slave narratives. These are poems, stories and folk songs related to their slavery in the past. The song sang by Annamma Yohannan demonstrates how Dalits were treated in the past and they prayed to God from their severe struggles as slaves. The folk song sung by Kavitha Johnson shows how a Dalit girl used her wisdom to escape from the desires of her young landlord.⁷⁸³ Annamma Yohannan told two other Dalit stories describing the situation of Dalits. Dalit women lived in harmony with nature and took care of the plants and animals even though they were slaves. They prayed to mountain and birds to protect their babies. According to K. K. Kusuman, Pulayas were the largest slave caste in Kerala.⁷⁸⁴

V. T. Rajshekar writes:

African-Americans and India's Untouchables share a history of slavery and apartheid (segregation). The Untouchables, originally the African founders of the lush Indus Valley civilization, were invaded and conquered by fair-skinned Aryans from the North. In order to administer a complex web of [ethnicities] and define their relations to the conquered peoples, the Aryans instituted the 4-tiered Brahminical caste system...All the remaining populations, those who continued to fight the Aryan invaders, lost and were enslaved (the Untouchables), those who fled into the hills (tribals), those whose physical proximity probably remained too far removed from the invaders (backward castes)....⁷⁸⁵

⁷⁸³ Kavitha sang a song in Malayalam language and it is about a Dalit girl named Neeli. The song describes that the young landlord came near Neeli, who was fetching water from the well. The moment he asked for the water from Neeli, she just left the rope and bucket inside the well and replied him, 'sorry the rope and bucket went inside the well.' She was aware that asking for the water is a trick used by the young landlord to get her closer for his sexual purpose. Then he used another trick and asked her for a bit of fire to light his cigarette but she replied that she quenched the fire in the fireplace in kitchen and there is no stick in the safety matchbox to produce fire. At last she warned the landlord to leave her hut if not she would take the sickle she uses for harvest. I tape-recorded this song, when Kavitha sang it.

⁷⁸⁴ K. K. Kusuman, *Slavery in Travancore*, Kerala Historical Society, Trivandrum: Printwell Press, 1973, p. 25.

⁷⁸⁵ V. T. Rajshekar, *Dalit: The Black Untouchables of India*, Atlanta: Clarity Press, 1987, p. 5.

The song sang by Annamma Yohannan describe how slaves were yoked with buffalos and oxen to plough the land in Kerala. Karikkam Rajan recounts in his novel that Dalit slaves were considered as cattle:

Slaves were asked to work day and night. The order was to punish and kill by giving poison to the slaves who made any mistakes. Slaves are not human beings. *Thirumani* (high caste landlord) proclaimed that they are cattle.⁷⁸⁶

Rajan repeats this idea in his novel: “We do not need happiness in this birth. We will get happiness in our next birth. Landlords made us cattle.”⁷⁸⁷

Annamma Devasya stated that her mother experienced sexual violence from the Nayar landlord. Dalit novels retell Dalit slave narratives. Rajan’s novel describes a slave woman, who became the object of her Nayar landlord’s sexual pleasure:

Nayar visited the hut and asked her ‘Why did not you come for drying the grain?’ She was coming out to leave the cow-dung, after wiping the floor with cow dung. She requested, ‘*thambran* [lord] go back, I will come.’ ‘Wash the cow dung on your body. It is convenient here in the hut,’ [he said]. She did not like it, her face became black [red] and then she went inside the hut. Nayar was so much eager to have a glance at her, who was inside the hut. He made the hole of the hut wide and peeped in. ‘Go *thambran*, why are you looking? ...go *thambra*. Move *thambra*. Leave my hands *thambra*,’ [she requested]. Woman’s strengthlessness is man’s victory. That happened here. Then the black little baby ran and came in. He covered his face with his hands due to sorrow, when he saw his mother lying naked. There is no one to question it.⁷⁸⁸

In this novel Rajan describes how Dalit woman experienced the sexual violence of the high caste landlord. Rajan states that there was none came to wipe the tears of the Dalits and to understand their struggles: “How much tears slaves shed? No great person came to wipe it.”⁷⁸⁹

Dalit Stories

Dalit folk stories are also very good resources from which to articulate a new theology. Annamma Yohannan told a Dalit story to me:

One woman brought up a dog. She goes for work every day. She has no husband. When she goes to work in the field the landlord used to ask her ‘*Edi* (Hi female) do you have a husband?’ She replied, ‘Yes, yes I have.’ ‘Bring him tomorrow’ Landlord ordered. Same talk repeated daily. “He does not have any cloth to wear, he will not come,” she said. Landlord purchased clothes and

⁷⁸⁶ Karikkam Rajan, *Kallelidesam (Novel)*, Kottayam: National Bookstall, 1983, p. 7.

⁷⁸⁷ Rajan, *Kallelidesam*, p. 38.

⁷⁸⁸ Rajan, *Kallelidesam*, pp. 50, 51.

⁷⁸⁹ Rajan, *Kallelidesam*, p. 142.

gave it to her. “*Edi* what happened now after I provided cloth?” landlord asked. “He does not have anything to wear on his head,” she replied. He provided *thorthu* for him. She used these kinds of reasons for two or three days. Then one day she went with her dog. “Where is your husband?” landlord asked. “He is there, he came,” she answered. Then she pointed out to her dog. “Is that your husband?” landlord asked and he ran after the dog, beat it and killed it. After killing it he made her work. Those were that kind of days.⁷⁹⁰

Annamam Yohannan told me another Dalit story:

When [Dalit] women come after their work, each one receives one basketful of husked rice as their wage. When a woman comes from the place of the landlord with the rice, on her way there was a thorn bush called *thudali mullu*.⁷⁹¹ The basket on her head, tangled on the *thudali mullu*. Then she had put down all her rice on the bottom of the thorn bush. Then she asked, ‘Ha, everyday I get little rice as my wage and do you want that? Then she puts all her rice down and then she goes. The rice increased day by day. Then others noticed the heap of rice there under the thorn bush. Then the woman told, “When I return after work, with my wage rice, he [*thudali mullu*] says that there is nothing for his livelihood and then he catches for my basket of rice. Therefore, I throw everything for him.”⁷⁹²

First of all this story reveals that landlords did not pay reasonable wages to Dalit women for their daily work. Secondly, this story reveals that Dalit women are lovers of nature as she cares even for the thorn bush, which distracted her on her way back home. Thirdly, this story reveals that a small basket of husked rice would not make much difference in her poverty at home. Fourthly, the Dalit woman exercises creative imagination when she thinks of the *thudali mullu* as a man who is in dire need of food. She felt that even the thorn bush is talking to her about its poverty. The one who experiences poverty is able to understand the poverty of others. She was ready to help her imaginary man *thudali mullu* by giving her daily wage to him. Fifthly, this story reveals the noble character of Dalit woman because when someone desired her own resources of livelihood, she gave it freely to the one who was in dire need. However, this Dalit story is a valid resource from which to articulate a theology.

Dalit stories, novels, poems and articles reveal the slavery and discrimination they experienced. The days I spent in Kerala Sahitya Academy at Trichur in Kerala State enabled me to read some significant Dalit novels. *Kattayum Koythum* (Sheaves and Harvest), *Nanavulla Mannu* (Wet mud), *Changalakal Nurungunnu* (Chains are Breaking), these are novels written by T. K. C. Vaduthala. These novels reveal the severe cruelty and demonic oppression Dalits experienced from the hands of their landlords. They tell of

⁷⁹⁰ Transcript of Conversation between Annamma Yohannan and Sara Abraham.

⁷⁹¹ *Thudali mullu* is a thorn bush seen in the jungle and it produces sweet black berries.

⁷⁹² Transcript of Conversation between Annamma Yohannan and Sara Abraham.

Dalits being used to plough the land, beatings that have broken the backs of Dalits and Dalits being called by derogative terms such as *pulanadee* (the bad guy who pollutes).⁷⁹³ *Kurumba* by is a novel about a Dalit woman. Kurumba sheltered in her hut a prospective Member of Parliament. When the police came to search for him at night, without any fear she removed her cloth covered the leader and made him to lay down with her. The police switched on the light and screamed, 'Who is laying down with you?' Kurumba replied, 'What a fun? [What kind of question is this?] It is my Pulayan.' The police raped her. Kurumba gave her body for the growth of her party. When the protected leader became an MP Kurumba went to *Thiruvananthapuram* (Trivandrum), which is the capital of Kerala State but the MP would not meet Kurumba. Then Kurumba said 'they all climbed up by stepping on us,' which means Dalits become a means for others to get into higher positions in society.⁷⁹⁴ *Mukkani*⁷⁹⁵ is a novel, which describes the myths, rituals, faith and language of the Parayas.⁷⁹⁶ *Kallelidesam*⁷⁹⁷ is a novel, which also includes the myths and old sayings of the blacks.⁷⁹⁸ *Kocharethi*,⁷⁹⁹ is the first novel written by an adivasi (Scheduled Tribe Dalit) from Idukki in Kerala State. This novel is about a *kocharethi*, who lived in the hills about sixty years ago. It describes how business men who brought earthen vessels, pots, dried fish and cotton clothes to adivasis, sold these for unreasonably high prices and then purchased the natural resources of the forest from them at a low price. These businessmen called the young adivasi mothers *kocharethi*. This novel also describes the rituals, practices, superstitions and social problems of the adivasis. These Dalit novels are good resources to use in constructing a theology relevant for Dalit women because these novels contain the expressions of their reality and lived experience.

Experience of Dalit Struggle

Dalits in Kerala fought with others for their emancipation and the emancipation of the country in Punnappra-Vayalar. Jose writes:

The uprising at Punnappra-Vayalar is the most important of all the struggles, which took place in Travancore in the 20th century. The Dalit force was arrayed at the front. Therefore the vast majority of the martyrs who were shot down by the garrison of Dewan Sri C. P. Ramaswami Iyer belonged to the Dalit communities.⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁹³ Abraham Ayrookuzhiyil and Paul Chirakkarod, *Dalit Sahityam: Oru Padanam*, Tiruvalla: CSS, 1995, p. 27.

⁷⁹⁴ Yesudasam, *Dalit Swathavum*, p. 117.

⁷⁹⁵ D. Rajan, *Mukkani (Novel)*, Kottayam: National Bookstall, 1982, Reprinted in 1988.

⁷⁹⁶ Ayrookuzhiyil, *Dalit Sahityam*, p. 32.

⁷⁹⁷ Karikkam Rajan, *Kallelidesam*, Kottayam: National Bookstall, 1983.

⁷⁹⁸ Ayrookuzhiyil, *Dalit Sahityam*, p. 34.

⁷⁹⁹ Narayan, *Kocharethi*, Kottayam: D. C. Books, 1998.

⁸⁰⁰ Jose in Ayrookuzhiel, *The Dalit Desiyata*, p. 34.

The Punnappra-Vayalar struggle was waged under the guidance of the Communist party. The Dalits took up the communist cause while the leaders were Ezhavas. When the Punnappra-Vayalar struggle came to an end thousands of Dalits were dead but not Ezhavas.⁸⁰¹ Pulayas were the vast majority of the agricultural labourers killed in Vayalar.⁸⁰² Dalits become the targets of violence in Punnappra-Vayalar struggle. This was the most important Dalit struggle, which took place in the past in Kerala State.

When the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) released the Black Papers on 8th December 1999, it declared what rights are denied to Dalits in India. In his greetings to Friends in Solidarity with Dalits, N. Paul Divakar the National Convenor for National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights writes, “This Black paper is a collective expression of Dalit rights and a critique of the Indian State for failing to adequately fulfil these rights.”⁸⁰³

Black Paper states:

BLACK PAPER is a Collective expression of Dalit rights. It is our statement of demands placed before peoples’ parliament in India and in other nations. It is a counter-culture statement of the subaltern social groups challenging the status quoism of the State and the dominant caste allies.⁸⁰⁴

Sarita Ranchod writes about the demands of the Campaign for Dalit Human Rights for Dalit women as follows:

- That Dalit women be recognized as a distinct social group, rather than mask it under the general category of women,
- Make segregated data on Dalit women available in census reports, progress and impact reports,
- Make distinct provisions for Dalit women in planning of programmes, allocation of finances, and in distribution of reservation facilities in education and employment,
- Mandate the National Commission for women, National Human Rights Commission and other commissions to look specifically into Dalit women’s issues.⁸⁰⁵

The national Campaign on Dalit Human Rights is creating a new awareness of the Dalit struggle.

⁸⁰¹ Jose in Ayrookuzhiel, *The Dalit Desiyata*, p. 35.

⁸⁰² Jose in Ayrookuzhiel, *The Dalit Desiyata*, p. 47.

⁸⁰³ N. Paul Divakar, Greetings from the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, Secunderabad: 1998.

⁸⁰⁴ *Black Paper: Broken Promises & Dalits Betrayed*, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, Secunderabad: 1998, Cover page 2.

⁸⁰⁵ Sarita Ranchod, APC Africa Women, *Highlighting Dalit Women’s Rights at the WCAR*. <http://www.apc.org/intersections/issue1.shtml?x=287> [17 February 2003]

On 19th February 2003 the most recent Dalit struggle took place at Muthanga in Wayanad District in Kerala State. It is reported that Dalits (Scheduled Tribes)⁸⁰⁶ became the target of police violence in the incident at Muthanga. Carly Bishop reports:

The Adivasis of Wayanad are demanding land rights. On 19-02-03, six hundred Adivasis people were evicted from land they had occupied in Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary, Kerala. At least 13 Adivasi huts were burned [burned] down and several people were arrested.⁸⁰⁷

In the dawn of this century, instead of an Abraham Lincoln, a capable tribal Dalit woman, C. K. Janu, 'shot to fame symbolising the grit of a suppressed and exploited class.'⁸⁰⁸ But the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha's tallest saviour and leader Janu has ended behind bars recently as 'a most wanted criminal'⁸⁰⁹ because of the incident at Muthanga.

The Government promised to give land to landless Adivasis in Kerala. In February 2003, there was an agitation to obtain the forestland at Muthanga, which led to police violence against Dalits. They report:

After the Government went slow on its word, Janu along with Geethanandan led about 1000 families to the Sanctuary to set up huts and declare "autonomy" during the 45-day stir...But things did not go as per plan and the forcible occupation of the Sanctuary by hundreds of tribals, including women and children, climaxed in a fierce battle on Wednesday, when the tribals armed with sickles and arrows clashed with a nearly 1000-police force.⁸¹⁰

CK Janu is in custody; Keralanext.com reports:

In custody, she faces the possibility of being charged for leading cession, which ultimately ended in the bloody battle at Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary at Muthanga on Wednesday last.⁸¹¹

Janu's absence from the 'battlefield' added oil to the fire; Keralanext.com declares: "The fact that she was not seen anywhere near the 'battlefield' has lent credibility to her detractors' allegation that she was using the tribals for her personal gains."⁸¹²

⁸⁰⁶ Jose writes, "All the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes that came under the purview of the Indian Constitution form the Kerala Dalits. Under the Scheduled Caste category there are 72 communities in Kerala. And under Scheduled Tribes, there are 36 communities." Jose in Ayrookuzhiel, *The Dalit Desiyata*, p. 33.

⁸⁰⁷ Carly Bishop, *Eviction of Adivasis in Wayanad district, Kerala*.
http://india.indymedia.org/print.php3?article_id=3407 [28 February 2003]

⁸⁰⁸ *Kerala's Tallest Tribal Leader ends up as 'Most Wanted'*.
<http://www.keralanext.com/news/print.asp?id=7834> [28 February 2003]

⁸⁰⁹ *Kerala's Tallest Tribal Leader ends up as 'most wanted'*.
<http://www.keralanext.com/news/print.asp?id=7834> [28 February 2003]

⁸¹⁰ *Kerala's Tallest Tribal Leader ends up as 'Most Wanted'*.
<http://www.keralanext.com/news/print.asp?id=7834> [28 February 2003]

⁸¹¹ *Kerala's Tallest Tribal Leader ends up as 'Most Wanted'*.
<http://www.keralanext.com/news/print.asp?id=7834> [28 February 2003]

⁸¹² *Kerala: Agitators Evicted from Muthanga Forest*.
<http://www.keralanext.com/news/print.asp?id=7748> [28 February 2003]

According to report two people one police constable and one tribal died in the episode. Various social organisations including the Adivasis Dalit Ekopana Samithi condemned the police action and the subsequent violence at Muthanga on 19th February 2003.⁸¹³ Carly Bishop writes:

Now the adivasis of Wayanad district are living a marginal existence at the fringe of society. After the failing of a government scheme to distribute land to adivasi families, the recent occupation of the Wayanad Wildlife Reserve should be seen a last resort. These people are pushed to the brink. They have been historically subdued and enslaved by migrant landowners.⁸¹⁴

Nevertheless, this particular Dalit struggle at Muthanga caught the attention of the nation recently and demonstrates that Dalits are currently a people in struggle for liberation.

Practical Theology: A Theology in Action

The Dalit Christian women, who participated in my research, are aware of the issue of violence and are ready to talk about this if opportunities are provided for. When they attended the two Bible studies, a seminar and spoke about the violence they experienced in their lives, it created great awareness, which can help them to evaluate the experiences they have within their own families, within the Christian community and within Indian society. If they have more opportunity to talk about this could empower them to protest against the violence Dalit women experience. If the survivors of violence continue to share their experiences and life stories with Dalit women in small groups, in Bible study groups or in seminars it may help many other Dalit women to be aware of the violence which confronts them in society. A project, which could focus this awareness would lead Dalit Christian women to practical action and would transform their situation.

A new theology, BBT, can contribute to the practical action of transforming the lives of Dalit Christian women. I could envisage a project, which I have named **TAMAR** (Theology in Action Mobilisation Aiming Rescue) as a focus for such action. The name TAMAR emerged from the Dalit Bible study based on the rape of Tamar. TAMAR would be a Social Welfare Centre for Dalit Women, who are the survivors of violence. If TAMAR could counsel and encourage the survivors of violence from a Christian perspective, it would help Dalit women to cope with their difficult situations. If TAMAR encouraged Dalit Christian women, who are the survivors of violence, to speak in public

⁸¹³ Kerala: *Social Organisations Condemn Muthanga Violence*.
<http://www.keralanext.com/news/print.asp?id=7806> [28 February 2003]

about their experiences, it would create great awareness among people fighting against the violence Dalit Christian women experience. TAMAR would also create public awareness against this violence by conducting Bible studies, seminars and conferences. TAMAR could form a network between different Christian denominations in Kerala with the purpose of motivating and enabling Christians to stand against violence against Dalit Christian women. TAMAR might also conduct symposiums and seminars for theological students in different theological institutions in Kerala in order to create awareness amongst theological students and teachers of how to tackle violence against Dalit Christian women. Such programmes would give insights to theological students, who will be the future leaders of the Churches in India, as to how to treat Dalit Christians as equal to all other Christians. If TAMAR provided ten scholarships for Dalit Christian women to engage in theological education it would encourage them to rise to leadership positions in Churches. If TAMAR began to collect books, articles, stories, poems, the life stories of Dalit women and artefacts of Dalits, these would be useful resources to set up a Dalit research centre and Dalit museum. In this way Dalit women themselves could shape their own Feminist Practical Theology and start to gain freedom and dignity in their own lives.

⁸¹⁴ Bishop, *Eviction of Adivasis in Wayanad*. http://india.indymedia.org/print.php3?article_id=3407 [28 February 2003]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abraham, Resly, *The Response of Paraya Community to Selected Contemporary Liberation Movements of Central Kerala: An Ethical Critique*, Unpublished M.Th. Thesis, Bangalore: United Theological College, March 2001.
- Abraham, Sara, *Diary*, Parippu: 14th November 2001.
- Adams, Carol, J., & Fortune, Marie, M., (eds.), *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, New York: Continuum, 1995, 1998.
- Agar, Michael, H., *Speaking of Ethnography*, Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, 1986.
- Ahuja, Ram, *Violence Against Women*, Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1998.
- Alexander, K., C., 'The Neo-Christians of Kerala,' in Mahar, J., Michael, (ed.), *The Untouchables in Contemporary India*, Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1998.
- Altekar, A., S., *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization: From Prehistoric Times to the Present Day*, Delhi: Motilala Banarsidass, Second Edition, in 1959, Reprinted in 1962, 1973, 1978, 1983.
- Anderson, Herbert and Foley, Edward, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving together the Human and the Divine*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.
- Anonymous Poem, 'God as Food for the Hungry,' in King, Ursula (ed.), *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, London: SPCK/ Orbis Press, 1994, p. 259.
- Appan, Mahakavi, M., P., 'Muthumala' in Chirakkarod, Paul; Prakasam, M., Sathya; Ayrookuzhiel, Abraham, *Dalit Kavithakal: Oru Padanam* (Dalit Poems: A Study), Tiruvalla: CLS, 1992, pp. 193-195.
- Apte, V., M., 'Vedic Rituals,' *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol.1, Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1958.
- Arbuckle, Gerald, A., *Earthing the Gospel: An Inculturation Handbook for Pastoral Workers*, New York: Orbis, 1990.
- Arbuckle, Gerald, A., *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1993.
- Asari, V., Gopalakrishnan, 'Labour Force Participation of Scheduled Caste Population in Kerala,' in Mathur, B., B., *Women and Depressed Caste Population in India*, Allahabad: Chugh Publications, 1994.
- Atkinson, Paul, *The Ethnographic Imagination: Textual Constructions of Reality*, London: Routledge, 1990.
- Atkinson, Robert, *The Life Story Interview*, Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1998.

- Ayrookuzhiyil, Abraham and Chirakkarod, Paul, *Dalit Sahityam: Oru Padanam*, Tiruvalla: CSS, 1995.
- Ballard, Paul and Pritchard, John, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*, London: SPCK, 1996.
- Bandhu, Dalit, *Dalit Daivasasthram*, (Dalit Theology) Vaikam: Hobby Publishers, 1993.
- Bell, Diane, Caplan, Pat and Jahan Karim, Wazir (eds.), *Gendered Fields: Women, Men and Ethnography*, London: Routledge, 1993, Reprinted in 1995.
- Bellah, Robert, N., Madsen, Richard, Sullivan, William, M., Swidler, Ann, and Tipton, Steven, M., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1985.
- Ben, Gladston, B., *Awakening of the Dalits in South Travancore through the Work of Protestant Missionaries 1806 to 1948*, MTh. Thesis, Serampore: Senate of Serampore, 1995.
- Bevans, Stephen, B., *Models of Contextual Theology*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992.
- Bhagalpur, Kanhaiah, Bhelari, 'Festering Wounds,' *The Week*, Kottayam: 31st October 1999, p. 21.
- Bhargava, G., S., & Pal, R., M., *Human Rights of Dalits: Societal Violation*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1999.
- Bhattacharya, Jogendra, Nath, *Hindu Castes and Sects*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1896.
- Bingley, Captain, A., H., *Dogra's: Class Handbook for the Indian Army*, Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1910.
- Bishop, Carly, Carly Bishop, *Eviction of Adivasis in Wayanad District, Kerala*.
http://india.indymedia.org/print.php3?article_id=3407 [28 February 2003]
- Bons-Storm, Riet, *The Incredible Woman: Listening to Women's Silences in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- Bose, M., L., *Social and Cultural History of Ancient India*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1990.
- Bowen, Paul, (ed.), *Themes and Issues in Hinduism*, London & Washington: Cassell, 1998.
- Briggs, Katharine, M., *A Dictionary of British Folk - Tales in the English Language: Incorporating the F. J. Norton Collection*, PART A, Folk Narratives, Vol.1, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970.
- Browne, Joy, Elizabeth, 'Theology and Literary Criticism in the Womanist Mode- An Interdisciplinary (and Necessary) Conversation,' in Grant, Jacquelyn, (ed.), *Perspectives on Womanist Theology*, Georgia: The ITC Press, 1995.

- Brown, L., W., *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas: An Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar*, Cambridge: At the University Press, 1956.
- Browning, Don, S., *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.
- Bynum, Caroline, Walker, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, New York: Zone Books, 1992, pp. 33-43.
- Cabrera-Balleza, Ma., Victoria, *Unveiling India's "Hidden Apartheid."*
<http://www.isiswomen.org/pub/wia/wiawcar/India.htm> [14 February 2003]
- Campbell, Jacquelyn, C., and Dienemann, Jacqueline, D., 'Ethical Issue in Research on Violence Against Women,' in Renzetti, Claire M., Edleson; Jeffrey L., and Bergen, Raquel Kennedy, (eds.), *Sourcebook on Violence Against Women*, Thousand Oaks, London & New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001.
- Cannon, Katie, G., *Black Womanist Ethics*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988.
- Cannon, Katie, Geneva, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*, New York: Continuum, 1996.
- Chatterji, Suniti, Kumar, 'Contribution from Different Language-Culture Groups', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol.1, Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission, 1953.
- Chirakkarod, Paul, Prakasam, M., Sathya, Ayrookuzhiel, Abraham, *Dalit Kavithakal: Oru Padanam* (Dalit Poems: A Study), Tiruvalla: CLS, 1992.
- Chirakkarod, Paul, *Dalit Christhavar Keralathil* (Dalit Christians in Kerala), Tiruvalla: Christhava Sahithya Samithy, 2000.
- Christ, Carol, P., and Plaskow, Judith, (eds.), *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1979.
- Clough, Patricia, Ticineto, *The End(s) of Ethnography: From Realism to Social Criticism*, Newbury Park: SAGE Publications, 1992.
- Corrin, Chris, (ed.), *Woman in a Violent World: Feminist Analyses and Resistance Across 'Europe'*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996.
- Court, Catherine, *Basic Concepts in Sociology*, Great Britain: Checkmate / Arnold, 1987.
- Daly, Mary, *Gyn / Ecology*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1978.
- Dalit Right to Life and Security, *Black Paper: Broken Promises & Dalits Betrayed*, Secunderabad: National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, 1998.
- Dalit Women's Right to Gender Equity, *Black Paper: Broken Promises & Dalits Betrayed*, Secunderabad: National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, 1998.
- Denzin, Norman, K., *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century*, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1997.
- Devault, M., 'Talking and Listening from Women's Standpoint: Feminist Strategies for

- Interviewing and Analysis' in Weinberg, D., (ed.), *Qualitative Research Methods*, Oxford: Blackwells, 2002, pp. 88-111.
- Devasia, Leelamma & Devasia, V., V., (eds.), *Women in India: Equality, Social Justice and Development*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1990.
- Diaz, Ada, Maria, Isasi, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol.8, No.1, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992, p. 105.
- Diaz, Ada, Maria, Isasi, 'Mujerista Theology's Methods: A Liberative Praxis, A Way of Life,' in Whitehead, James, D., & Whitehead, Evelyn, Eaton, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*, Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995, p. 123.
- Diaz, Ada, Maria, Isasi, 'Roundtable Discussion: Mujeristas, Who We Are and What We Are About,' *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 8, No.1, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992, p. 106.
- Divakar, N., Paul, Greetings from the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, Secunderabad: National Campaign on Human Rights, 1998.
- Doinger, Wendy and Smith, Brian, K., (trans.), *The Laws of Manu*, London: Penguin Books, 1991.
- 'Dr. Ambedkar's Thoughts on Human Rights,' *Thamukku: Newsletter of the Dalit Resource Center*, Vol. 2, No.1, 2, September- December 2000.
- Fiorenza, Elisabeth, Schussler, (ed.), 'Violence Against Women,' *Concilium*, London: SCM Press, 1994.
- Fulkerson, Mary, McClintock, *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.
- Gangadharan, M., (ed.), *Jathivyavastha: Padanangal* (Caste System: Studies), Trichur: Jankeeya Prasadheekarana Kendram, 1986.
- Geertz, Clifford, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology*, New York: Basic Books, 1983.
- Geertz, Clifford, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989.
- Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, London: Fontana Press, 1993.
- Gerhardt, Mia, I., *The Art of Story - telling: A Literary Study of the Thousand and one Nights*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1963.
- Goetz, Judith, Preissle, and LeCompte, Margaret, Diane, *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research*, Orlando: Academic Press, 1984.
- Graham, E., L., *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty*, London: Mowbray, 1996.

- Grills, Scott (ed.), *Doing Ethnographic Research: Fieldwork Settings*, Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1998.
- Hammersley, Martyn, *What's Wrong with Ethnography?* London: Routledge, 1992.
- Hammersley, Martyn, *Reading Ethnographic Research: A Critical Guide*, London: Longman, 1991, Second Edition, 1998.
- Heitzman, James and Worden, Robert, L. (eds.), *India: A Country Study*, Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1996.
- Hopewell, James, F., *Congregation: Stories and Structures*, London: SCM Press, 1988.
- Human Rights Watch, *Broken People: Caste Violence Against India's "Untouchable,"* Bangalore: Books for Change, 1999.
- Hurston, Zora, Neale, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1937.
- Hymes, Dell, *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality: Toward an Understanding of Voice*, London: Taylor & Francis, 1996.
- Jacob, K., J., 'Dalit Porattangalum Varggarashtriyavum,' in Yesudasan, T., M., (ed.), *Dalit Swathavum Adhikarathinte Prasnavum*, Changanassery: Almond Books, 1997.
- Jacques, Michele, 'Testimony as Embodiment: Telling the Truth and Shaming the Devil,' in Grant, Jacquelyn, (ed.), *Perspectives on Womanist Theology*, Atlanta: The ITC Press, 1995.
- Jose, N., K., 'The Punnappa-Vayalar Struggle and the Dalits,' in Ayrookuzhiel, A., M., Abraham, (ed.), *The Dalit Desiyata: The Kerala Experience in Development and Class Struggle*, Delhi: I. S. P. C. K., 1990.
- Kadavanthra, Divakaran, 'Vayalarikel Oru Dalit Sthree' (One Dalit Woman beside the Farm) in Chirakkarod, Paul, Prakasam M., Sathya, and Ayrookuzhiel, Abraham, *Dalit Kavithakal: Oru Padanam* (Dalit Poems: A Study), Tiruvalla: CLS, 1992.
- Kelly, Ewan, *Marking Life and Death: Co-constructing Welcoming and Funeral Rituals for Babies Dying in Utero or Shortly after Birth*, Edinburgh: Contact Pastoral Trust, 1999, *Contact Pastoral Monographs*, Number 12, 2002.
- Kerala's Tallest Tribal Leader ends up as 'Most Wanted.'*
<http://www.keralanext.com/news/print.asp?id=7834> [28 February 2003]
- Kerala: Agitators Evicted from Muthanga Forest.*
<http://www.keralanext.com/news/print.asp?id=7748> [28 February 2003]
- Kerala: Social Organisations Condemn Muthanga Violence.*
<http://www.keralanext.com/news/print.asp?id=7806> [28 February 2003]
- Kirk, Jerome and Miller, Marc., L., *Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research*, Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, 1986.
- Kitzinger, Sheila, *Birth over Thirty*, London: Sheldon Press, 1982.

- Kumar, Radha, *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India 1800-1990*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993.
- Kumari, Radha, 'Crime Against Women- Role of NGOS' in Sharma, O., C., (ed.), *Crime Against Women*, New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1994.
- Kusuman, K., K., *Slavery in Travancore*, Trivandrum: Printwell Press, 1973.
- Kyung, Chung, Hyun, 'Opium or the Seed for Revolution? Shamanism: Women Centered Popular Religiosity in Korea' in Boff, Leonardo and Elizondo, Virgil, (eds.), *Convergences and Differences, Concilium*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark LTD, 1988, pp. 96 - 104.
- Kyung, Chung, Hyun, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990.
- Kyung, Chung, Hyun, 'Come, Holy Spirit - Break Down the Walls with Wisdom and Compassion' in King, Ursula, (ed.), *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, London: SPCK/ Orbis Press, 1994, pp. 392 - 394.
- Kyung, Chung, Hyung, 'Asian Christologies and People's Religions,' in Abraham, K., C., (ed.), *Voices From the Third World*, Vol. XIX, No. 1, June 1996, p. 217.
- Kyung, Chung, Hyung, 'Following Naked Dancing and Long Dreaming,' in Russell, Letty, M., Pui-lan, Kwok, Diaz, Ada, Maria, Isasi, Cannon, Katie, Geneva, (eds.), *Inheriting Our Mothers' Gardens: Feminist Theology in Third World Perspective*, Louisville: The Westminster Press, 1988, pp. 54 - 72.
- Lanjewar, Jyoti, 'Dalit Literature and Dalit Woman,' in Jogdand, P., G., (ed.), *Dalit Women in India: Issues and Perspectives*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1995.
- Lauret, Maria, *Modern Novelists: Alice Walker*, London: Macmillan Press, 2000.
- Lewis, Nantawan, Boonprasat, 'The Connection of Uneven Development, Capitalism, and Patriarchy: A Case of Prostitution in Asia,' in Fiorenza, Elisabeth, Schussler and Carr, Anne, (eds.), *Women, Work and Poverty, Concilium*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark LTD, 1987.
- Lewis, Robin, Jared, 'Anita Desai: Fire on the Mountain and Games at Twilight' in Miller, Barbara, Stoler, (ed.), *Asia: Masterworks of Asian Literature in Comparative Perspective*, London: An East Gate Book, 1994.
- Mackinnon, Catharine, A., *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.
- Mahoney, Patricia, Williams, Linda M., & West, Carolyn, M., 'Violence Against Women by Intimate Relationship Partners,' in Renzetti, Claire, M., (eds.), *Sourcebook on Violence Against Women*, Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001, pp.143-178.
- Manorama, Ruth, 'Marthidharil Marthidhar' (Oppressed of the Oppressed) in Yesudhasan, T., M., (ed.), *Dalit Swathavum Adhikarathinte Prasnavum*, Changanacherry:

Almond Books, 1997.

Maynard, Mary and Purvis, June (eds.), *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*, London: Taylor & Francis Ltd., 1994.

McFague, Sally, 'The Theologian as Advocate' in Coakley, S., and Pailin, D., (eds.), *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Maurice Wiles*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 142-159.

Murali, Kaviyoor, *Dalit Sahityam*, Kottayam: Current Books, 2001.

Murthy, P., S., Sridhara, 'Wanted a Counter-Culture to De-Hinduise Dalits & Backward Castes,' in *Dalit Voice*, Vol.19, No.21, Bangalore: October 16-31, 2000.

Meyer-Wilmes, Hedwig, 'Excessive Violence against Women in the Name of Religion,' in Beuken, Wim and Kuschel, Karl-Josef, (eds.), *Religion as a Source of Violence*, *Concilium*, London and Maryknoll: SCM Press and Orbis Books, 1997/4.

Moessner, Jeanne, Stevenson, (ed.), *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

National Campaign Manifesto: Dalit Human Rights 10th Dec. 1998-15th Aug. 1999, Secunderabad: 1998.

Narayan, Kocharethi, Kottayam: D. C. Books, 1998.

National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, *Black Paper: Broken Promises & Dalits Betrayed*, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, Secunderabad: 1998, Cover page 2.

National Commission for Women 1995-96, *Societal Violence on Women and Children: A Report*, New Delhi: Government of India, 1996.

O' Flaherty, Wendy, Doniger, *Other Peoples' Myths: The Cave of Echoes*, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Omvedt, Gail, *Violence Against Women: New Movements and New Theories in India*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1990.

Omvedt, Gail, *Disturbing Aspects of Kerala Society*.
<http://csf.colorado.edu/bcas/kerala/ker-omv.htm> [28 February 2003]

Padmanaban, A., *Dalits at the Cross Roads: Their Struggle-Past and Present*, Madras: Poompugar Pathippagam, 1996.

Pallath, J. J., *Theyyam: An Analytical Study of the Folk Culture Wisdom and Personality*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1995.

Panoor, K., *Kearalathile Africa (Africa in Kerala): Travel Notes on the Tribals of Wynad*, Kottayam: Sahitya Pravarthaka Co-operative, & National Book Stall, 1963.

Pattison, Stephen and Woodward, James, 'An Introduction to Pastoral and Practical Theology' in Woodward, J. and Pattison, Stephen (eds.), *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

Philip, Thomas, Meeting on 14th November 2001 at Parippu: New India Bible Church.

Pickett, J. Waskom, *Christian Mass Movements in India: A Study with Recommendation*, New York: The Abingdon Press, 1933.

Pielstick, C., Dean, *The Transforming Leader: A Meta-Ethnographic Analysis*.
http://www.findarticles.com/cf_0/moHCZ/3_26/63323086/print.jht [13 June 2003]

Poonacha, Veena (ed.), *Understanding Violence*, Bombay: Research Centre for Women's Studies, nd.

Prabhakar, M., E., (ed.), *Toward a Dalit Theology*, Delhi: SPCK, 1989.

Prakash, Abraham, C., *Olassa Idavakayude Charithravum Nooteyanmbathu Varshangalelude iee Edavaka Janagalil Ondakkiya Swadheenavum*, (History of the Olassa Church and Its Impact on People through out Hundred and Fifty Years), BD Thesis, Kannammoola: Kerala United Theological Seminary, 1993.

Pryce, Mark, *Finding a Voice: Men, Women, and the Community of the Church*, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1996.

Pui-lan, Kwok, 'Mothers and Daughters, Writers and Fighters,' in Russell, Letty, M., Pui-lan, Kwok, Diaz, Ada, Maria, Isasi, Cannon, Katie, Geneva, (eds.), *Inheriting Our Mothers' Gardens: Feminist Theology in Third World Perspective*, Louisville: The Westminster Press, 1988, pp. 21-23.

Pui-lan, Kwok, 'Worshipping with Asian Women: A Homily on Jesus Healing the Daughter of a Canaanite Woman' in King, Ursula, (ed.), *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, London & New York: SPCK/ Orbis Press, 1994.

Pui-lan, Kwok, 'The Future of Feminist Theology: An Asian Perspective' in King, Ursula, (ed.), *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, London: SPCK / Orbis Press, 1994.

Pui-lan, Kwok, 'Asian Feminist Theologies,' in Russell, Letty, M., and Clarkson, J., Shannon, (eds.), *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, London: Mowbray, 1996.

Pui-lan, Kwok, 'Reflection on Women's Sacred Scriptures' in Pui-lan, Kwok, and Fiorenza, Elisabeth, Schussler, (eds.), *Women's Sacred Scriptures, Concilium*, London: SCM Press & Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998/3.

Rajan, D., *Mukkani (Novel)*, Kottayam: National Bookstall, 1982, Reprinted in 1988.

Rajan, Karikkam, *Kallelidesam (Novel)*, Kottayam: National Bookstall, 1983.

Rajshekar, V., T., *Dalit: The Black Untouchables of India*, Atlanta: Clarity Press, 1987, Published in 1979, 1987 and Third Edition in 1997.

Ramazanoglu, C., and Holland, J., 'Still Telling It Like It Is? : Problems of Feminist Truth Claims' in Ahmed, S. et al, *Transformations: Thinking Through Feminism* London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 207-220.

Ranchod, Sarita, *Highlighting Dalit Women's Rights at the WCAR*.

<http://www.apc.org/intersections/issueI.shtml?x=287> [17 February 2003]

- Rayan, Samuel, 'Third World Theology: Where Do We Go from Here?' in Boff, Leonardo and Elizondo, Virgil, (eds.), *Theologies of the Third World: Convergences and Differences*, Concilium, T. & T. Clark LTD, 1988.
- Rocher, Guy, *A General Introduction to Sociology: A Theoretical Perspective*, London: Macmillan, 1972.
- Rohner, Ronald, P., (ed.), *The Ethnography of Franz Boas*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969.
- Roy, Arundhati, *The God of Small Things*, London: Flamingo, 1997.
- Rubin, David, 'The Short Stories of Prem Chand,' in Miller, Barbara, Stoler, (ed.), *Asia: Masterworks of Asian Literature in Comparative Perspective*, London: An East Gate Book, 1994.
- Russell, Letty, M., & Clarkson, J., Shannon (eds.), *Dictionary of the Feminist Theologies*, London: Mowbray, 1996.
- Saiving, Valerie, 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View' in Christ, Carol, P., and Plaskow, Judith, (eds.), *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979.
- Schensul, Stephen, L., Schensul, Jean, J., and LeCompte, Margaret D., *Essential Ethnographic Methods: Observations, Interviews, and Questionnaires*, Walnut Creek; London; New Delhi: Alta Mira Press, 1999.
- Skeggs, Beverley, 'Situating the Production of Feminist Ethnography,' in Maynard, Mary and Purvis, June (eds.), *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*, London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1994, pp. 72-92.
- Smith, Dorothy, E., *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*, Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987.
- Stanley, Liz and Wise, Sue, *Breaking Out Again: Feminist Ontology and Epistemology*, London: Routledge, 1993.
- Stephen, Lovely in Yesudasan, T., M., (ed.), *Dalit Swathavum Adhikarathinte Prasnnavum*, Changanassery: Almond Books, 1997.
- Stocking Jr., George, W., *The Ethnographers Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.
- Suchocki, Marjorie, Hewitt, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology*, New York: Continuum, 1995.
- Tanner, Kathryn, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.
- Thomas, Jim, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, Newbury Park: SAGE Publications, 1993.
- Thurston, Edgar, *Castes and Tribes*, Vol. VI, Madras: Government Press, 1909.

- Thurston, Edgar, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Volume II, Madras: Government Press, 1909.
- Turner, Victor, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti- Structure*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.
- Turner, Victor and Turner, Edith, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.
- Walker, Alice, *The Color Purple*, London: Women's Press, 1983.
- Walker, Alice, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, London: The Women's Press, 1984.
- Walker, Alice, *Possessing the Secrets of Joy*, London: Cape, 1992.
- Walton, Heather, Elizabeth, *The Threshold of the Garden: The Development of the Concept of Feminist Religious Reading with Particular Reference to the Work of Elizabeth Smart*, Ph.D. Thesis, Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1998.
- Webster, John, C., B., 'Who is a Dalit?' in Michael, S., M., (ed.), *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values*, New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1999.
- Willows, David and Swinton, John, 'Introduction' in Willows, D., and Swinton, J., (eds.), *Spiritual Dimensions of Pastoral Care*, London: Jessica Kingsley, 2000.
- Women Worldwide, 'Dalit women- Broken to Pieces,' in *Catholic Woman*, Quarterly Newspaper of the National Board of Catholic Women, Issue No. 22, Winter 2001 / 2002, p. 2.
- Vishnunambodhthiri, Dr. M., V., *Pulayarude Pattukal : Padanavum Pattukalum* (Songs of Pulayas: Study and Songs), Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1983.
- Visweswaran, Kamala, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Zelliot, Eleanor, 'The Dalit Movement' in *Dalit*, International Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 1, Waterford: February 1996, pp. 8-12.
- Yamashita, Akiko, 'A Review of Asian Women's Theology: From the Perspective of Women's Life Dialogue in Asia,' *In God's Image*, Vol.18, No.1, 1999.

Transcripts

- Transcript of One-Day Seminar on "Women's Suffering," Conducted at New India Bible Church, Parippu, on 19/11/2001.
- Transcript of Bible Study based on 2 Samuel Chapter 13: Verses 1-19, Conducted at New India Bible Church, Parippu, on 21/11/2001.
- Transcript of Bible Study based on Judges Chapter 19, Conducted at New India Bible Church, Parippu, on 23/11/2001.

Transcript of Conversation, between Annamma Devasya and Sara Abraham Parippu: New India Bible Church, on 23 / 11/ 2001

Transcript of Conversation, between Alice Mathai and Sara Abraham in Alice Mathai's Residence at Kalatheppadi, on 26/11/2001.

Transcript of Conversation, between Kavitha Johnson and Sara Abraham, Parippu: New India Bible Church, on 27/11/ 2001.

Transcript of Conversation, between Annamma Yohannan and Sara Abraham, Parippu: New India Bible Church, on 27/11/2001.

Transcript of Conversation, between Elsamma Babychen and Sara Abraham, Parippu: New India Bible Church, on 27/11/2001.

Transcript of Conversation, between Susamma James and Sara Abraham in Susamma's Residence at Olassa, on 28/11/2001.

Transcript of Conversation, between Leela and Sara Abraham at Leela's Residence in Kottayam on 28/11/2001.

Transcript of Conversation, between Mary Babu and Sara Abraham, Parippu: New India Bible Church, on 1/12/2001.

Cassetts

Cassett of Informal Conversation between Resli Abraham and Sara Abraham in Resli's Residence at Mavelikkara, on 4th December, 2001.

Cassett of Informal Conversation between Mariamma Abraham and Sara Abraham in her daughter Resli Abraham's Residence at Mavelikkara, on 4th December, 2001.

Registration Forms

Annamma Devasya's Registration Form, One-Day Seminar on "Women's Suffering," Parippu: New India Bible Church, 19th November 2001.

Leela's Registration Form, One-Day Seminar on "Women's Suffering," Parippu: New India Bible Church, 19th November 2001.

Mary Babu's Registration Form, One-Day Seminar on "Women's Suffering," Parippu: New India Bible Church, 19th November 2001

