

INTELLECTUAL ACTIVISM OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN POST 1990 KERALA

**Thesis submitted to the
University of Calicut
for the award of the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH**

by

NAJDA A

Under the supervision of

**Dr SAJITHA M. A.
Assistant Professor of English
Department of English, Farook College (Autonomous), Calicut**



**CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
FAROOK COLLEGE, CALICUT**



**Affiliated to the University of Calicut
October 2018**

Dr Sajitha M. A.
Assistant Professor of English
Department of English
Farook College (Autonomous)
Calicut

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **Intellectual Activism of Muslim Women in Post 1990 Kerala** submitted by **Najda A.** to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is an original record of observations and bona fide research carried out by her under my supervision and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles.

Calicut
30-10-2018

Dr Sajitha M. A.
Research Supervisor

Dr Sajitha M. A.

Assistant Professor of English

Department of English

Farook College (Autonomous)

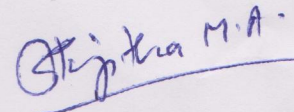
Calicut

CERTIFICATE

I, Dr. Sajitha M. A., Research Supervisor, Farook College, Calicut hereby certify that my candidate, Ms Najda A has incorporated in this text all the suggestions from adjudicators of her thesis on **Intellectual Activism of Muslim Women in post 1990 Kerala**

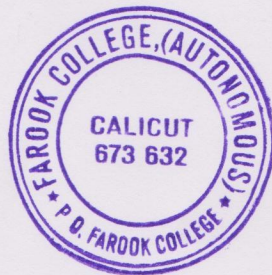
Farook College

28.02.20



Dr Sajitha M.A.

Research Supervisor



Dr. Sajitha. M.A
Assistant Professor & Research Supervisor
Centre for Advanced Studies &
Research in English
Farook College, Calicut -673 632

DECLARATION

I, **Najda A.**, hereby declare that the thesis entitled **Intellectual Activism of Muslim Women in Post 1990 Kerala** submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is an original record of observations and bona fide research carried out by me under the guidance of **Dr Sajitha M. A.**, Assistant Professor of English, Farook College and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles.

Calicut
30-10-2018

NAJDA A.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am extremely grateful to my guide, Dr Sajitha M. A., Assistant Professor and Research Guide, Centre for Advanced Studies and Research in English, Farook College, for her influencing presence in my research venture. I am very much inspired by her concept of perfection and academic style. Her observations, suggestions and the impressive guidance have made this thesis happen.

I express my gratitude to the Head of the Department of English, Farook College, Prof C. Ummer for his well-wishing concerns on my research. I am grateful to Dr K. M. Naseer, Principal of Farook College and Prof E. P. Imbichikoya, the former Principal of Farook College, for their encouraging plans and actions for the sake of research.

I remember with love all my teachers in the Department of English, University of Calicut for inducing the research interests in me. I am indebted to the former heads of the Department of English, Dr Asha Muhammed, Dr T. V. Prakash, Prof. P. K. Abdul Naser, Prof. Abdul Vahab M., Dr C. K. Ahmed and Dr Basheer Kotta for their guidance throughout my graduation and research. I owe my gratitude to all the faculty members of the Department of English, Farook College for the energising research atmosphere, pleasant academic discussions and encouragement. I express my love for the fellow scholars in the Centre, Shibu Sir, Arya Gopi, Linet and Shareefa Beegum to mention a few, for their mentoring assistance.

I feel overwhelmed by the nature of my father, mother and brother who prioritise my studies to every other of their affairs. Their love and care helped me hurdle the small and big crises during the research period. My lovely kids have been growing well along with the thesis. I believe I have managed to balance my quality time between my kids and research. I fondly remember the concerns of my cousins, relatives and neighbours who had always sought updates on my research. Together their support helped in materialising the thesis.

I have been able to make use of the Scholarship for Doctoral Studies (January 2015- December 2016) avowed by the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, New Delhi. The books and references of C H Mohammed Koya Library, University of Calicut and Abussabah Library, Farook College were of great help in my research project. I love to mention my close friends and research groups for accessing me books, films and other references.

I prostrate before Allah for all the blessings bestowed upon me and for directing my knowledge and research instincts.

A NOTE ON DOCUMENTATION

For the purpose of documentation, the Eighth edition of MLA Handbook is used.

CONTENTS

TITLE	PAGE NO
INTRODUCTION	1-44
CHAPTER 1: FEMINIST PRAXIS OF WRITING RELIGION	45-86
CHAPTER 2: GENDERED SPACES OF SOCIAL CRITICISM	87-118
CHAPTER 3: REGENDERING SOCIAL JUSTICE	
• PART I- THE INCLUSIVITY QUESTION	119-179
• PART II- IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION	180-219
CONCLUSION	220-246
WORKS CITED	247-263

INTRODUCTION

The mobility and creative actualisations of Muslim women during the prolonged history of Islam in Kerala is a recent research area corresponding to the gender discourse in Malayalam literature. The social, political and literary engagement of the Muslim women deconstructs the negative stereotyping of the Muslim community in the public though the advancements as well as the crises in the politicised religious/secular binary spaces in the state complicate the Muslim women discourse. The visibility of the agency and subjectivity of the Muslim women in Kerala is explored in the study analysing the pattern of social criticism of the Muslim women writers. The intellectual activism of the Muslim women has been strengthened post 1990, proportional to the development indicators of the state and the political position of the religion in the secular mainstream.

The practising and non-practising women with or without any form of hijab, identifiable by Arab-Muslim names and pertaining to the religious identity even when criticising its texts and practises, mark the heterogeneous category of Muslim women in the state. The impossibility of the concept of the universal identity of Muslims, except in the pattern of worship, necessitates the regional addressing of the agency, subjectivity and problems of the Muslim women. The secular public problematises the appearance of the Muslim women in shawls, scarfs, and veils as symbols of suppression, compulsion and retention to accuse Muslim men and Islam. The literary and public activism of the Muslim women in the contexts of Islamophobia, Islamic feminism and gender justice voice their standpoints in their subject positions as women, Muslim women, and Indian citizens.

The Malabar-based Malayalam Muslim women writers Khadeeja Mumtas, Shamshad Hussain, Fousiya Shams, K.P. Salva and Ummul Fayiza raise, discuss and problematise the gendered social political economic and religious situations of Kerala. Their subject spectrums, social concerns, and gender justice proposals emphasise the intellectual activism of Muslim women in the state. They detect the critical problems of identity, marriage-centeredness and social exclusion of women over the intricacies of the trinity of early marriage, polygamy and *talaq* within the community of Muslims in India. Their writings about religion problematising the patriarchal gender system of the Muslim societies contribute to the discourse of Islamic feminism.

The study explores the literary discourse on the Muslim women in the mainstream as well as in the community spaces which comprises the analysis of the social status, political significance and cultural importance of the visibility of the Muslim women post 1990. The critical-insider positions of the Muslim women critics are assessed on the basis of the concepts of gender justice in their works of social criticism. The study projects the problematic locus of the Muslim women between the male hegemonic community and the dominant secular mainstream discourses. It also locates the Muslim women discourse in the state in relation to the global Islamic feminist studies by acknowledging the regional differences in culture. The mainstream and the community responses to the subject positions of the Muslim women in general and writers in particular are deeply analysed in the research.

‘Muslim woman’ as a debated subject has emerged in the academic and amateur discourses towards the last decades of the twentieth century. The feminist readings on Muslim women in texts and cultures have inspired and mobilised the global

‘Muslim woman’ identity. Despite the intellectual exercises they put forth, the studies are imprudently considered as fallen for the anti-Islam tactics of stereotyping the Muslim women negatively. The agency, subjectivity as well as the research resourcefulness of the Islamic feminists are neither acknowledged nor perceived in the male-hegemonic academic societies. Beyond the universal identity markers, the “Muslim women” has to be studied with reference to their respective cultural contexts relating to their biological identity as women than the social identity of religion. The mobility of Muslim women in and through the religious spaces, the influences of regional social political events and the anthropological analyses of family and home managements redefine the Muslim women.

The elite Hindu nature of Indian model selective secularism continues to exclude the religious and caste minorities from largely engaging in the mainstream public. The post-partition decades amidst the formation of a democratic state have witnessed the polarising of the Muslim community particularly revolving around the controversies of Muslim Personal Law. The declaration of Emergency (Jun 1975- Mar 1977) and the Shahbano Case (1985) have impacted in the organised social and political mobility of the community. The unsatisfactory stands of Indian Union Muslim League on the problems directly concerning the identity of the community such as Babri Masjid demolition and the murder of Sirajunnisa in Kerala have led to the formations of social and political post 1990. With books, journals and magazines, the religious, political and cultural organisations within the Muslim community, vigilant to the political changes, debate and problematise their minority Muslim identity. The consciousness raising drives strongly influence the social political literary and religious engagement of Kerala Muslims in the first decades of the twenty-first century.

Almost a century after the pre-independence golden era of women critics and publishers heralded by B. Bhageerathy Amma (1890-1938) J. Kunjulakshmi Amma, T. Ammukkutty Amma, and M. Haleema Beevi (1918-2000), similar active social, critical and literary engagement of women in general and Muslim women in particular, has been accelerated post 1990. Though labeled as feminists, the writers like Geetha, J.Devika, S.Sharadakkutty and Shamshad Hussain problematise the intricate gendered injustices in the social structures and systems of Kerala. The patriarchal situations demand women in general, to write about gender justice and Muslim women to criticise the problems within the religion. The gradual evolution of feminist methodologies from their writings corresponding to the cultural situations of Kerala, structures the gender discourse distinct and different from the downloaded western feminist models.

The women writers are prejudiced as writing only about women and feminism. This marginalises the other themes of discussion in their works. The label 'woman writer' connotes a hurdler overcoming the patriarchal restrictions and familial responsibilities. With the writing, the women, until then subjects in male-written literature, acclaim subject positions and agency. The feminist undertones get diverted to the barbarity of the religion Islam when writing about the Muslim women, in the popular logic of the continued strategy of 'other'ing the Muslim societies. The Muslim women are stereotyped as the weakest and harshly suppressed by the Muslim men, necessitating sympathising with them. The gender and religion are more at play in the debates between the secular rescue missions and religious-defending for Muslim women.

The agency of Muslim women as writers accelerates the discussions on gender in the secular public socially and politically forceful than when Muslim men defend the

religion for women sake. The Muslim women writers are mistakenly marked as writing only about 'Muslim women'. The problems Muslim women face as writers are the impacts of the male dominant social structures in the state than the laws of the religion. Some of the secularists insist that Muslim women should write only about Islam whereas the conservative factions of the religion threaten women writing about religion. The subjects of women and Muslim women are never necessarily gender related though their feminist perspectives on social political economic and religious structures reflect the influence of gender subtleties in every aspect of life. On the other hand, the mainstream importance of gender studies is achieved by the efforts of the feminist writers.

The emerging, active academic discourse on Muslim women is enriched by the non-uniform, non-generalisable diverse lived experiences of the Muslim women writers from all parts of the world. The Muslim women writers writing about Muslim women is a political standpoint in the context of tensions between Islam and secular criticisms. Intellectually engaging with the religion, the writers do not hesitate to review the religious texts, rituals and practises positively and negatively. They utilise the discourse spaces within and outside the accused rigidity of religions with the attributed label of Islamic feminism.

The writings on religion begin with problematising the hulking differences between the religious texts and practises. The Muslim women writers address a crisis of criticising and defending the Muslim men simultaneously in the public platform. The criticism against the Muslim men is based on the intrinsic patriarchal anti-women practises they uphold, misreading the religious principles. The Muslim women have to defend the men for the sake of the religion Islam. There are differences of opinion

regarding the community criticism-models of the Muslim women writers for the impact of staining the religion. The misogyny within the Muslim societies cannot be entirely attributed to the religion. The critical studies on and of Muslim women possibly evolve into the methods of restructuring the anti-women conservatisms of the Muslim men. Exhibiting differences in style, language and pattern of addressing, the creative writing (fiction) and critical writing (non-fiction) though complementary, are positioned as opposites. The lay versions of philosophy in the fictions are the outputs of the critical perspectives on the life around. Creative or critical, writing is an alert gendered and gender-concerned activity. The social political and cultural upbringing of an individual reflects in his/her writings. The power relations of gender textured in literature reflect the domineering gendered aspects of life in the society. The subjectivity of a woman writer controverts contrasts and challenges the range of representations of women in literature.

The literature is not yet an accommodating space of actualisation for women. The writings by women are prejudiced to be lesser in standards with those of men. The term 'woman writer' either negatively intends the feminist style of writing or is downgraded as not worth reading. The male ego of losing the upper hand in inherent human talents such as writing reflects in restricting the women writers in terms of tradition, religion and even biological differences. Whether writing fiction or non-fiction, the women writers are more subjected to criticism than the men over the world because of being women. The gendered literary criticism does not serve the purpose of discussing the literary aspects in the writings of women. On the basis of studies on gender justice, a woman writer should be addressed as a woman writer only if a male writer is addressed as a male writer, or else the term writer should be applied for all genders without beetling the distinctions.

Writing philosophy, particularly about religion can be considered as the peak of human intellectual exercises. The critical thinking, reading and analyses upon the sanctity of the religion theorising into theologies and theosophies demand courage. The spiritual and ritual aspects of the religions administered by the elite male authorities in all societies dissuade the writings on religion and religious societies. They blaspheme every new reading or discussion of religious living except those favouring them and execute brutal punishments to those who challenge. The women philosophers and theologians are generalised and categorised under *écriture féminine*. The philosophers Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous, and Alice Walker are designated as feminists. The debated, attributed label of feminism fails to spotlight the gender-surpassing theories and philosophies in their works and tend to believe that intellectual literature is not meant for women. On the other hand, that gradually theorised the fact that the gender cannot be excluded from any creative or critical expressions of humans. The feminism is indeed the outburst of the social political physical and mental suppression of women for centuries over time.

The prominence given to the 19th and 20th century feminist writings and movements wrongly tracks back the gender studies to those periods alone. The creative and critical literary articulations of women, being natural, could have begun with the first society on earth. Doubtlessly gendered, such actualisations expressed, emphasised and established the complementary nature of the male-female relationship. Every civilisation has maintained the balance of clashes between patriarchy and feminism in its own way. The male hegemony of the society is directly proportional to its feminist social political and literary actualisations.

The influence of colonialism has sanctified the European and American models of feminism since the 17th century. Addressing the feminist movements of the twentieth century in first, second and third waves become an incorrect method of marking the history. The nature, style and methodologies of feminism in different regions differ distinctly in gender studies. The 'Third' wave realisation of the universal gendered nature of feminism has deconstructed its own first and second wave discourses. The growing global communication networks access feminist movements of different places to admire, associate and empower each other. The differences in race and religion complicate the enabling of the universal gender order on biological terms.

The Masculinism or masculinist studies have emerged after 1980 as a response to the rise of the feminist studies. Subjecting the masculinities in various ideologies based on image, myth, discourse and social structure, it analyses the power relations among men from history to the present. The feminist movements and literary academic activities of the twentieth century were responses to the immediate social cultural and political contexts corresponding to different places. The celebrated bibles of feminism in the twentieth century Europe and America such as *A Room of One's Own* (1929), *Second Sex* (1949), *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and *Gender Trouble* (1990) have engaged with the women question in the discourse of gender.

The armchair philosophies and theories of cultural studies have always been criticised for their ivory tower perspective upon social issues and lives of the people. The solutions to the social political and personal issues of women as debated and derived in academics are not effectively implemented in the public. The amplifying distance between philosophy and living reality unaccommodating each other becomes the reason

for the atrocious injustices in the society. The bridge between issues and remedies is controlled by the authoritarian voracity for power and money prioritised over the subtleties of gender in societal problem spaces. The amateur research and social criticism combined intellectual exercises in popular and social media, platforms for interactive social changes. Free from the technicalities of the academic research, yet profound original and weighty, such studies ensure the interaction with the public upon subjecting the society in particular. The consciousness rising endeavours in critical writings thus have the advantage of the direct public audience. The humanitarian ideals of the writers are effectual to drive the reading public in whichever turns possible. The social criticisms as published in popular magazines are debated in speeches, seminars and conferences in the public.

In the classic work *On Intellectual Activism* (2012), Patricia Hill Collins refers to Intellectual Activism as “...the myriad ways that people place the power of their ideas in service to social justice” (viii). Though the intellectual activism is inherent in the literary genres, the prominent power structures overpower such themes and practises to the extent of placing them in rival positions.

Speaking the truth to power in ways that undermine and challenge that power can often best be done as an insider. Some changes are best initiated from within the belly of the beast. Standing outside, throwing stones at the beast, and calling it names won’t change much, except perhaps to make the beast more dangerous because now it no longer believes that its underlings love it. Challenging power structures from the inside, working the cracks within the system, however,

requires learning to speak multiple languages of power convincingly. (Collins xiii)

She suggests speaking truth to people than to power and urges the need to present research studies among social circles outside the academic spaces to have rapid results in the society on acute problems regarding class, caste, religion and gender.

The intellectual activism as social criticism demands strong political agency and subjectivity from any writer. The critics are made by the society. The identity, subject positions, perspectives, region, religion, caste, class, sex and gender of the writer are as important and influential regarding the writer's standpoints on different social issues. With the possibility of criticism inviting controversies, the writer should be alert not to hurt the culture, tradition as well as the community sentiments. The concept and concerns of the gender justice thus need to be evolved out of daring critics and social criticism on every aspect of gendered structures of public and private living.

Derived from the Latin word *genus*, 'gender' is a loanword from Anglo-Norman and Middle French *gendre* which means 'kind', 'type' or 'sort'. The dynamic discourse over 'gender equality' has gradually evolved into the concept of gender justice as developed from concerns of gender equity. The biological and social distinctions beyond male and female visibly marked by the movements of LGBTQ over the world have necessitated the ideals of justice regarding the gender status. Etymologically, the term 'justice' roots to the Latin words *justus* and *justitia* and old English *justise* meaning the administration of the law. The philosophy of justice is the fundamental aspect of social living on earth as it is the beginning, development and the end of every literary,

social, cultural, political and religious discourse. The religious ideologies revere, hymn and incarnate their respective gods as the embodiment of justice.

The heavy coinage of gender and justice together as gender justice implies the justice envisaged and attributed in the actualisations of any gender. The actualisations comprise social political cultural and potential realisations. As the euphemism for feminism, the usage becomes important as the product of the centuries-long sufferings, suppression and protests of the women. The males and females of a species can be compared on anatomical and morphological aspects and never on social roles, status and spaces. The complementary nature of male-female relations prefers, projects and supports the gender justice over gender equality, thereby setting space and importance for actualisations of all genders. The influence of other social issues like power and patriarchy over the existing range of gender actualisations is the problem area regarding gender justice.

A gendered division of labor, even when it burdens women and men equally, is unjust if it is set in a social context that endorses gender norms that make some choices cheaper for women and other choices cheaper for men. The pressure such norms put on people casts doubt on individuals' freedom to choose certain valuable elements from the lifestyle of the other gender. Sometimes this happens because gender norms make the costs of such elements prohibitive. Even when the costs are not prohibitive, and individuals are free to choose these elements, gender norms compromise the equality of women's and men's access to what they have reason, and sometimes choose, to pursue. (Gheaus)

The academic discourses of sociology, anthropology and feminism are yet to derive at solutions regarding the range and domain of gender injustices. The womanly actualisations are considered as inferior to the power based masculine instincts. The biological potentials of women in pregnancy, delivery and mothering are defined, considered and accused as the symbols of weakness. Earlier discussions of gender equality revolved around the rights of man and rights of women whereas the present discussions on gender justice comprise the actualisations of LGBTQ community. Most of the countries are reforming their social laws to incorporate the third genders after decades of their organised demand for social approval.

The concept of gender Justice is prevalent in all civilisations, with roots in the philosophy of religions. The earlier human beings-men, women and transgender- did what they could biologically and socially by living in accordance with their respective actualisations. The religions, philosophies and cultural situations influenced by climate, geography, physique and power as well as the technological advancements continue to assign non-uniform gender roles for men and women different in all places. The pattern of gender roles facing checks on and often in all the patriarchal societies implies the inherent nature of justice and gender justice in humans. The problems of gender injustice lie with the interpretations, subtexts and practises of the religious philosophies. The Semitic religions like Judaism and Christianity discuss women in relation to men as of family systems. The Old Testament is considered to be written by men for men with prominence in the then public spheres. Except for a few mentions in stories related to the prophets, the women are not even addressed in canonical Jewish religious texts and

interpretations. The Jewish feminism demands the involvement for women within the structures and systems of the religion.

Unlike the Old Testament, the Bible mentions many women but mostly without voice. Most of the commands favour men alone and most verses ask women to be submissive and dutiful to men. The Bible says, “Of the woman came the beginning of sin, and through her we all die” (Eccles. 25: 22). The Christianity accuses woman as the reason for the First sin and the resultant fall of humans from heaven. The books on gender justice admit the anti-women nature of the Bible as the reason for suppression of women all over the world (Ashrof 70). The Christian rituals and practises have structurally evolved into episcopacy and deny spaces for women within. The piety, dedication and sacrifice add to the cathartic self-actualisations of women in spirituality in the nunneries. Though graded less, the nuns are able to be part of massive missionary activism all over the world particularly during the political crises like wars and invasions. The Christian feminist studies advance the spaces of power for women within the platform of religion based on the principles of social theories and gender justice than the holy texts.

The casteist origin and structure of Hinduism cannot be generalised as wholly suppressing women. The Hindu groups and societies are diverse to be categorised as a single religious identity. The close association with nature and seeing divine in everything powerful than humans, account to lakhs of Gods, goddesses, deities and saints in Hinduism. Despite the goddess status, Vedas, *Smritis* and *Puranas* insist women to be dutiful, family-bound and subservient to men. The authenticity of controversial interpretations of verses from *Manusmriti* downgrading women is questioned with the

rise of Hindu feminist counter-readings of revered texts and epics. Modeled on European and American feminist methodologies, the Hindu feminism problematises the misogyny within the religious spaces.

The reduced material dominance of men in the graded spirituality spaces of Buddhism impacts in less percent of gender injustices. Unlike men, women are allowed into the Buddhist order only after accepting the Eight *Garudhammas* (heavy rules). The spiritual realm of Buddhism attracts women, who are exhausted of the existing patriarchal social system, to the order despite the burdensome rules. The *Theri-gatha*, the anthology of verses by the old nuns dating back to the 6th century BC, reflects the happy life of female monks in Buddhism. The absence of class caste and race distinctions in Buddhism makes it a welcoming religion for Dalit communities in the Indian context, where conversion to Buddhism is an act of strong protest against the majority's attitude towards Dalit. Islam has woman-friendly laws and practises though descended during one of the most barbarous and extremely patriarchal of civilisations in the 7th century AD. The Holy text of Qur'an considers, addresses and positions women along with men. The verses of Quran and Hadith compilations problematise the suppressed status of women in the patriarchal societies, insist women-friendly social order and prioritise spirituality over the material ritualisation. Though Qur'an talks about the duties of men and rights of women, only the duties of women are discussed. The vicegerency of women as presented in Quran is not yet acknowledged or admitted.

The war-based plots of Greek and Roman epics are patriarchal, masculine and anti-women picturing the women either as jealous goddesses having almost treacherous roles in wars or as paragons of beauty on earth causing fights on land. The similar

influential folk oral and written literary genres in all the regions and cultures portray patriarchal societal systems with less intellectual roles, spaces and engagements for women. The women had lesser character roles in the Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha* as they are presented as ‘something’ to be adorned adored and protected by the men always. The influence of the patriarchal pattern of the epics persists to have archetypal status in their performance versions to the feminist critical readings.

The male-female comparison in scientific biological as well as social science researches projects the complementary nature of males and females in all species except with humans. Comparing and contrasting the intellectual social creative talents, abilities and potentials of men and women often turn into negative competition spirits in every aspect of life among them. The increasing studies and research on sex and gender in all academic and amateur disciplines, unfortunately, segregate the divide more. The male-female comparison impacts the rarefied presentation of the women achievers and the prejudices against women writers, academicians and politicians.

Comparing to the developed countries, India being a developing country struggles to implement gender justice. While overcoming the stigmas of poverty, malnutrition and related chronic illnesses on one side, dowry deaths, rapes, honour killings, domestic violence and communal tensions continue to stain the development on the other. The education-empowered employment is still considered higher in status than the knowledge-bound growth of human beings which is the reason for continuing social evils in educated surroundings as evident from the cases of discrimination and oppression in higher education institutions. Neither religious philosophies and practises nor governmental measures have absolutely succeeded in changing the derogatory attitude

towards women in the largest democratic country. The family-oriented lifestyle in India gives priority to marital life than the education and career irrespective of male-female distinctions. The weight of culture and tradition is allocated on the shoulders of women than men. The methods and manners of every curve of marital life in all the religious communities in the Indian context advantage men in insisting the subservience of the women. The dowry system has been impactful in toppling down the traditional belief of considering the birth of a girl child as a blessing. Exonerating those violate the rights granted to women by the Constitution intensifies the helplessness of women.

The spaces and access to formal and informal social gatherings for women contribute to the actualisations of their selves. The lack of adequate infrastructure facilities as of institutions of education, employment and healthcare is a significant problem in a developing country like India. The social spaces of interaction as in employment opportunities grant women voice inside families as well as in society on monetary terms and boost the personal potentialities of women. The entrepreneurial activities of Kerala will be incomplete without mentioning Kudumbasree, a government aided localised productive group of women. The neighbourhood social circles, residents associations, Kudumbashree and MSME units provide empowering platforms for the women to a great extent in Kerala. The channelising of women empowerment through the productive social gatherings in rural and urban areas can superstructure the gender concerned systems from the base level better than implementing them from above.

The relevance of the term 'gender justice' increases in the present social context of Kerala with better standards of life in the development indicators like education, health, and employment. Though the women in Kerala have choice in education and

employment to an extent, the age-old family-binding attitude of patriarchy restricts them. The anti-women system of patrilineal joint families prominently prevalent in Kerala still dominates as the root-cause of gendered injustices towards the women. The sharing of familial responsibilities between the members even in urbanised nuclear family settings is neither encouraged nor much practised. The women who are trained from their very childhood to shoulder familial responsibilities have to forego with their education and build their career graph on their own. The food culture, marriage-centered systems as well as the fashion industry limit the intellectual engagements of women inversely proportional to the development aspects of the state.

The priorities for the different subject positions of the women- daughter, sister, wife, mother and grandmother, are always determined by the people other than them. The ‘ultimate’ form of femininity, motherhood, implies more personal and social responsibilities in the Indian context in general with the whole family dependent on mothers. The glorified fantasied exaggerated reverence to motherhood gets reversed in the everyday situations of toilsome mothering in the domestic spaces. Attributing patience, tolerance, care, kindness and consideration always only with mothers, the relative nature of motherhood and fatherhood is not discussed in the society. The popular modes of arts and literature should check themselves from the deep-rooted dehumanisation of motherhood to assure justice to women as mothers. The rebuke “*Ninak ammayum penganmarum onnum ille?*” [Don’t you have mother or sisters?] implies that those men having mother or sisters will not trouble any woman.

The male-dominant Kerala families follow a pattern of positioning women in the kitchen denying the entry of men. The men sharing the household chores are rare and

considered unmanly. The gender-sensitive media advertisements always associate women with kitchen and cooking to 'win the hearts of men'. The women who spend almost a day in the kitchen are called 'idle homemakers'. Even if employed, the cooking is the responsibility of women, though the situation is demanding changes recently. The varied changes regarding the gender relations and food include the sharing of the kitchen by the members of the family advantaged by the instant powder mixes and food products in the state. The deleterious dowry system has made the birth of a girl child a displeasure for families, otherwise considered as a blessing traditionally. Yet, the daughters are pampered by and endeared to families in general. The choice for girls regarding the education, career, and marriage is less than that given for costume, fashion and even food. The higher education courses and institutes they join are decided by parents on account of distance, transport and hostel facilities than their aptitudes. The popular pattern of parenting in Kerala orients children to the career options of 'Engineering' or 'Medicine'. The kitchen is thrust upon as the ultimate vicinity of girls, disregarding their curricular and extra-curricular achievements. The kitchen-oriented marriages and the marriage-oriented lifestyle complicate the gendered personality development of the girls.

The girls are brought up for marriages than anything else in the state. The wifhood bears the heavy weight of culture and tradition on the principles of complete subservience to the husband in all the religious communities in Kerala demanding chastity, obedience and sacrifices from the wife depreciating her individuality. K.P. Salva asserts that the marriage/family relationship in Kerala is based on hegemony-subservience bond ("Pranayam" 65). Instead of love, care and concern, the husband's nature, character and the financial status determines the marital relationship in Kerala.

The marriage and marital relationship in Kerala are mistakenly meant defined and proclaimed as for the sake of children. The childless couples are sympathised and even humiliated. On the other hand, in the priority of living for children, the entity and significance of spouses get downsized in the Kerala context.

The parents with son/s are dignified in all the economic classes of family systems in the state. The subject position of Mother-in-law dominates the subject position of daughter-in-law in the patriarchal situations. The literature and films exaggerate, complicate and dehumanise the mother-in-law image set against the vulnerable state of 'daughter-in-law'. The good/bad, kind/evil binary of terrible mothers-in law and troubling daughters-in-law are the inevitable aspects of Malayalam films and Television channel melodramas. The negative agency in such representations complicates the woman-woman relationship in the households. The senior citizens living with their children and grandchildren, have voice and choice regarding the running of the family, sometimes powerful than the couple. In the changed social situations of Kerala, where women are employed more, the grandparents are assigned the task of babysitting as well. There are also many cases of couples exploiting, ill-treating and dumping the elderly after squeezing them of what they inherited.

There are diverse edges for the same occasion of marriage for the women. The ceremonious occasions like marriage space the bonding of multiple subject positions of the women. The family get-togethers become the spaces of social celebrations particularly for the unemployed women and ensure their voice in food and fashion. Beyond the male criticism of the futile chatters of women, the times together help women share their happiness, sorrows and dreams energising them to a great extent. The feminist

tools of education, employment and social activism fail to consider the agency of women in different subject positions in the family. The social spaces for the multiple positions of women detailed in the gender studies can format a gender justice-concerned society.

The first feminist movement in the state, the Breast Cloth Agitation (1813-1859) comprises a series of protests regarding the denial of permission for *Nadar* women to wear breast-cloths like the women of elite classes, Christian and Muslim communities. The casteist situation had resulted in the increased conversion to Christianity which made it a political issue in the kingdom of Travancore which was later turned in the favour of the demands of *Nadar* women by the pressures from the British governor of Madras. The Breast cloths agitation is analysed studied and glorified as a caste based issue than as a gender/feminist problem.

From the language and style to the politics of representation, the field of literature is not innocent regarding the portrayal of minorities in the state. The folk oral and literary actualisation of the different caste and religious groups had faced threats of extinction with the declaration, popularity and authority of the elite Malayalam, derived from Sanskrit, as the language of printing and publication in Kerala from the 19th century. The literary, social and cultural expressions of the minority groups were excluded from the elite mainstream spaces of literature even though they thrive in their exclusive spaces.

The novel as a literary genre was familiar to Kerala with the translated adaptations such as *Theerthadakapurogathi* (1840) by Joseph Pit, *Ghathakavadham* (1878) by Mrs Collins as well as the works like Archdikkan Koshi's *Pullelikunchu* (1882), Muhyuddeen Ibnu Mahin's *Chardarvesh* (1883) and Potheri Kunjambu's

Saraswathi Vijayam (1887) even before the original works in Malayalam (Hikmathulla 121). The women are portrayed, presented and discussed in experimental ways from the beginning of the novel tradition in Malayalam. The novels *Kundalatha* (1887) by Appu Nedungadi and *Indulekha* (1889) by Chandu Menon bear names of woman. Unlike the women of that time, the protagonist Indulekha in *Indulekha* is a modern and learned upper class lady of asserting ways and personality, which itself is a revolutionary visionary portrayal.

The literary space in the beginning of the twentieth century Kerala problematised the portrayal of women as embodiments of kindness, patience, tolerance and sacrifice in the male-written novels. The earlier critics countered the idolisings of women either as goddesses or demons, in the journals for and by women such as *Sudharma*, *Sharada*, *Laxmi Bhai*, *Mahila*, *VanithaKusumam* and *Malayalamasika* during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The journals had pages assigned for book reviews apart from the other articles of social and political interest (Geetha 51). The political perspectives on gender, caste, class and religion reflect in the pre-independence Malayalam novels of P. Keshavadev (1904-1983), Vaikom Muhammed Basheer (1908-1994), Thakazhi Shivashankarapillai (1912-1999) and Uroob (1915-1979). Social commitment is an important requisite to be a writer in Kerala. During the first half of the twentieth century, the fictionists Lalithambika Antharjanam (1909-1987) and K. Saraswathi Amma (1919-1975); the poets Balamani Amma (1909-2004), Sister Mary Benigna (1899-1985), Mary John Koothattukulam (1905-1998), and Muthukulam Parvathi Amma (1904-1977) had positioned themselves in the otherwise male-dominated world of the Malayalam literature.

The term 'woman writer' is a heavy coinage. It implies an escapade from the suppressing patriarchal social structures in the history of being and becoming woman. The long distance journey from scribbles to publishing books demands constant courage to withstand every sort of criticism from the male hegemonic world since they fear the writings of women. The writers who hesitate to be labeled as women/feminist writers believe that as distancing them from the male mainstream. The absence of the informal cultural associations of women, minimal participation in the social and literary clubs which are countless in Kerala and the unaccommodating public spaces exclude women from the mainstream. The women's liberty with the language, narrations and reference to class, caste, gender and religion are severely scrutinised by the male writers. The spectrum of plots and portrayals in the women's writing deconstructs the major prejudice of attributed autobiographical shades in the fictions by women.

Beyond the labels of feminist/woman writer, of the hundreds of women writers in Malayalam, Lalithambika Antharjanam, K.Saraswathi Amma, Rajalakshmi, Madhavikkutty, P.Vatsala, Sara Joseph and K.R.Meera have occupied the mainstream with the power of their inks. The critics impose feminist labels to them as if feminism is something alien and not potentially inherent in the women writers of Kerala. From literary endeavours ranging from the magazines by women to the fictions, twentieth century can be marked as the period of literary freedom struggle of women writers in Kerala. Though the number of women novelists is comparatively lesser than men still today, women's writing is accountable for towering the discussion of gender justice in the society.

The prejudiced representation of the minority communities has been problematised by the social critics in Kerala since the last decades of twentieth century. In the cases of the Hindu and Christian cultural portrayals in novels and films, the writers consciously or unconsciously balance with good and bad among the group themselves, whereas while picturing the Muslim culture the representation turns partial and negative. The male and female Muslim Malayalam writers thus have to begin with their own identity standpoints while writing supporting or opposing the stereotyped representations. The most memorable Muslim characters in the Malayalam fiction are authored by Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, who possesses the all-time best readership in Kerala. His canvas does not have the limitations of class, caste, religion and gender that he is not identified as a Muslim writer because being a male, as different from denoting the women writers with Muslim names in the literary milieu of Kerala. His fifteen novels and fourteen short story collections have deconstructed the conventional patterns of theme, style, structure, narration and politics of writing fictions in Malayalam. Portraying real life around, Basheer's plots advocate modernity-influenced reforms within the community in particular. In his novel *Ntuppuppaakkoranendarnnu* (1951), the old-fashioned and uneducated protagonist Kunjupathumma has been educated and modernised by her new progressive Muslim neighbour Aisha.

The critics of Basheer fail to categorise his works between realism, romanticism, mysticism and feminism. Beyond the concerns of religion, caste and superstitions-bound community, the poverty projects big in the Muslim life portrayals in the novels as determining the plight and destiny of the people. Thus Suhara and sisters of Majeed in *Balyakalaskhi* (1944) represent the anxieties and concerns of the economically insecure

families who are pressurised to marry off their daughters. Despite the economic insecurities, Pathumma and other women in *Pathummayude Aadu* (1959) are presented as living on everyday happiness and worries that their agencies and subjectivities in their family spaces do not incorporate into the conventional methodologies and tools of assessing women empowerment. Salva says that the current tools of analysis in sociology and anthropology regarding women in general and Muslim women in particular in Kerala should rethink the social agency of the women with respect to the religion, family and self-actualisations (Interview).

The secular mainstream focuses on sorting the criticism against the religion and Muslim society in the writings of the Muslim women for a larger Islamophobic society. The novels *Barsa* (2007) and *Athuram* (2010) authored by Khadeeja Mumtas (1955-) are appreciated discussed and debated only from the religion/secularism binary perspectives. *Barsa*, the first book to directly engage with Islamic texts has led to controversies for the antagonism from within the community circles and the related secular criticism against the community restrictions. The misogynist attitude of the society expose out in such criticisms against the women writing about religion since neither male Muslim nor non-Muslim writers get crucified for their discussion of religion or religious practises in the context of Kerala. Unlike Khadeeja Mumtas, the prominent male writers N.P.Muhammad, P.A.Mohammed Koya, Punathil Kunhabdullah, U.A.Khadar, Akbar Kakkattil, Shihabudheen Poythumkadav and K.P.Ramanunni are not criticised for their depictions of Islam and the Muslim society.

The modernist, post-colonial and feminist readings of *Mappilapaattu*, the music tradition popular among the Muslim community, exhibit the social political economic and

religious life of the Muslims between marginalisation, invasion, conversion, battles and resistance for more than four centuries. The political perspectives and consciousness of the male and female composers of *Mappilapaattu* can be concluded as sharpened by the history of the Muslims in Kerala. They did their part as historians, reformers and scholars while entertaining the people in the participatory and performance related song tradition. Within the genre, there are romantic, comic, tragic, historic, devotional and hymning lyrics. The Muslims of Kerala should not have been marked as backward and ignorant had the mainstream given importance to the *Mappilapaattu* and other literary genres of the community.

The presentation of women and Muslim women in films is still a problem area regarding the gender studies. The highly patriarchal patterns of plots and stereotypes of films play a vital role in shaping father-mother, husband-wife, brother-sister, parents-child and boy-girl relationships in Kerala society. Though occasionally there appeared powerful women characters and actresses, often they are made to succumb to the male superstars by scripts. The actresses are not presented as superstars and nor is the industry relieved of the male dominant styles, language and objectification of women. The archetypal pattern of hero-heroine-villain triangle with cliché patterns of good/bad binary is losing its vigour with the recently dominating experimental films. From the adaptations of the famous novels and short stories, the tele-serials/soaps in the Malayalam Television channels have evolved into an elite female dominant space. Portraying the facets of women as mother, daughter, wife and mother-in-law the plots revolve around illicit and extramarital relations as well as ornaments and dresses. The channels fail to portray the positive academic as well as amateur persona of woman in the society while the

melodramas set for four-five years consume the quality time of womenfolk. The absence of representation of Christian, Muslim and Dalit classes in the evening soaps is not debated in the public.

The feminism in India in general and in Kerala in particular is more functioning in the field of literature than activism. The feminist literature in Malayalam is based on the sociological anthropological and cultural praxis than theological or philosophical feminisms. Thus gender becomes the axial theme of every feminist article. Enlisting the women achievers and their achievements is a feminist activity in the state. The patriarchal pattern of praising the women achievers for managing their families and personal lives together de-genders the women. The strong undercurrents of prominent patriarchal systems convince the society that the theory, methodology and even the label of feminism is detrimental. The categorising of literary genres under feminism objects the scope of the women's writing and writings on women getting included in the mainstream literature. The problems with the influence of downloaded feminism from the West in a complete cultural context of Kerala and India complicate the perspectives and methodologies of feminism beyond the universality of patriarchy.

The Indian feminism detects the revered rules, rituals and ceremonies of the different castes and religions as causing problems for the women. Since the religious freedom-granting secularism in the country is different from the secularism of Europe, the methodology of directly engaging with the religion can be applied in gender studies. The revolutionary verbalisation of the female experience of religion and spirituality focuses the gender concerns in the religion-oriented societies. The Pan-Indian feminist theological literature contributes to the justice based restructuring of gender exercises in

the religion-regulated spaces. The religious societies in India have been subjected to the feminist criticisms on terms of the male hegemonic superstitions and gender unjust practises. The dominant rituals-based systems overpower the agency of women in worship, piety and spirituality aspects of the religions. The diverse range of religious literature dispossesses the books by the women writers whereas the secular movements celebrate the writings against the religious systems. In such attempts like *Amen* (2009) by Sister Jesme, the women revolt the patriarchal anti-women structures and systems of the religion than the religious texts and project their experiences of the religion and spirituality.

The 'miserable plight of Muslim women' is an active discourse in the religions-related feminisms in the country. The 'other' image of Islam is a reason for accusing, attributing and imposing misogyny in the Muslim societies. On the other hand, the influence of regional culture as well as the mistaken interpretations of the Holy texts position the Muslim men authorised over the women. The cosmopolitan nature of Islam though with differences in practises and rituals among Muslim societies has a single identity as 'Muslims' over the world, established also with the pace of globalism and technological advancements. More than religion and religiosity, the rise of terrorist groups post-cold war periods play a vital role in othering Muslims. After 9/11, every misdeed of terrorism gets attributed to the religion Islam and stains the Muslim countries in particular.

In her radio address in 2001, the then First Lady of United States of America, Laura Bush says, "...the Taliban and its terrorist allies were making the lives of children and women in Afghanistan miserable". Calling the attention of Americans to the plight of

women and children under Taliban terrorist regime in Afghanistan, she had boosted the gains of American military troupes in rescuing the Muslim women and children from the cruelty of terrorists for humanity sake. She adds, "Fighting brutality against women and children is not the expression of a specific culture; it's the acceptance of our common humanity, a commitment shared by people of good will on every continent" (Wallace). The Muslim women question until then active in Islamic feminist discourses, gained political momentum with the radio address of Laura Bush.

Islamic feminism comprises academic discourses and social political movements by or for Muslim women and directly engages with the religious texts and practises. The differences in the perspectives of the writers, though mostly Muslims and women, are influenced by the region they belong and experience. In the problem position between male authorities of the religion and the secular anti-Islam doctrines, the diverse standpoints of the Muslim women from criticising to defending the religion enrich the Islamic feminist discourses and impact the life in Muslim societies. The women engaging with religion is a not a recent phenomenon as instanced in the history of religions. The privileges and considerations for marginal groups including women in the Quran sustain in verses alone with the dominance of the patriarchy since post-Prophet times which discard the fundamental idea of justice in it. The Muslim women have roles ranging from religious teachers to warriors in every civilization though proportionally marginal. The scholarship of Aisha (wife of Prophet Muhammad), the pro-feminist life of Sukaina (676-681AD), the mysticism of saintly Rabiatal Adawiya (713-801 AD) and the visionary Fatima al Fihri(d.880 AD)-the founder of world's oldest existing University, display the spaces created and utilised by the women in the Muslim societies during the early

centuries of Islam. The renaissance crusades and the political movements of women in the Muslim countries, particularly in Egypt, have increased the visibility of Muslim women to the extent of cogent political positions between the coloniser and colonised. By the end of the twentieth century, the activism and academics of and on Muslim women are identified as Islamic feminism.

The modesty in clothing has evolved out as a characteristic necessity of the social gatherings of civilisations distinguishing the class, race, gender and religion of the people. Insisting modest clothing for men and women alike, the Quran suggests headscarves for Muslim women to distinguish them from women of other communities (33: 59). The different forms of headscarves such as *niqab*, *burqa*, *mafta* and *shawl* with varied wearing patterns and styles comprise hijab, which later tend to imply the pious religiosity than identity. The distinct reasons for the Muslim women to wear purdah and hijab range from the parental compulsion to individual choice. The generalising of the conservative compulsion as the sole reason for the dress code of Muslim women as well as suppression, advocates the removal of hijab as their way out to 'liberation'. The Islamic feminist discourses problematise the reducing of the problems of the Muslim women to hijab alone. Though women of other religions and tribal societies practise particular head covers, the criticism over hijab thus relate to the political location of the community.

The post-independence period in India witnessed the shift of the public focus towards the Muslim woman and the problems of Muslim women on political vantage points to degrade the rigid religiosity-bound community positioned as the other of secularism. The disasters like communal tensions impact the women in general and the

Muslim women in particular. The British-implemented distinct Personal Law system of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis and Christians had been incorporated into the Indian constitution with slight adaptation. The reforms in the personal laws have taken place because of the appeals by women against the anti-women nature of the Personal Laws. The Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937 was introduced in British India to rule the Muslims according to their culture and tradition. Though the discrepancies in the Act have been criticised from the beginning it is still followed in India on matters related to marriage, divorce and succession.

The arguments for and against the Uniform Civil Code raising on the occasions of court cases of the Muslim women upon polygamy and divorce, continue to polarise the people of the country. The frequent mishaps of communal riots in the remote regions create identity crisis for the vulnerable minority groups like Muslims. Raising the severe cases of rapes during the communal riots, Fasila A.K. problematizes the neglected aspects while discussing the Muslim women by the court as well as by the media (17). The leaders of the different male hegemonic sects within the community differ in their perceptions of reforming the Muslim Personal Law and discard the basic concept of justice for women envisaged by the religion. On the other hand, there are Muslims who shun Personal Laws arguing for the Uniform Civil Code to favour the secularism. The biased model of the Uniform Civil Code provisioned in Goa privileging the majoritarian communities, points to the complications of implementing uniform laws for the rigid diverse cultures and traditions in India.

The communal tensions in India reached its peak with the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992. The riots instigated insecurities among the Muslims not only in Uttar

Pradesh but all over the country. The occasions of Hindu/Muslim debates in India end up in threatening the Muslims to leave India for Pakistan. The Indian 'secular' mindset continue to other the country Pakistan even in sports to the extent that defeating Pakistan in cricket is considered ultimate than winning the World Cup. The post-Babri period necessitated organised social and political mobility within the community with the formation of parties and associations particularly in politically alert states like Kerala. The strategies and systems of such organisations blend concepts of justice and tolerance based on religion and the secular ideals of the Indian democracy. Over the turn of the twenty first century, the Muslim question became globally consequential with the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001.

The Sachar Committee report analysing the social political economic situation and status of Indian Muslims commissioned by the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2005 and submitted in 2006, projects, problematises and suggests solutions to the backwardness of the Muslim community. The seven member committee headed by Rajinder Sachar, the former Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court reported the miserable plight of Muslims of the country, rated as lower than the scheduled castes and scheduled Tribes based on 2001 Census data, National Sample Surveys, Banking data from different Indian banks, corroborative data from government commissions and organisations and data from various ministries, departments, public sector undertakings, universities and colleges. The major inference of the report is that though the Muslims constitute 14% of the Indian population, they comprise only 2.5% of bureaucracy. Though solutions in the report lag technically, it has created mass awareness within the Muslim community. In states like Kerala the seminars and debates over the findings of the committee have

resulted in various successful voluntary efforts particularly in the education sector to overcome the backward status of the Muslims.

The Reservation system in India enacted by the constitution for socially politically disadvantaged Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward classes including the minority Muslims has been crucial in improving their status, situations and representation in the country. The criticism against reservation is resisted by the theories of justice referring to the troubled past and vulnerable social and economic situations of the underprivileged classes. The Mandal commission/ Socially Backward Classes Commission report submitted by the team led by the Parliamentarian B.P. Mandal in 1980, which suggested 22.5% and 27% reservation in government jobs and other public sector undertakings for SC-ST and OBC respectively, had been subjected to widespread anti-reservation protests and criticism to the extent of self-immolations, when the government announced its implementation in 1990. Later, the people of reserved categories began to be considered as degraded on casteist terms by the upper classes in the country.

The Malayalam-speaking regions of southern most India were combined to form the state of Kerala in 1956 under the States Reorganising Act. The northern districts of Kerala- Kasargode, Kannur, Wayanad, Kozhikode, Malappuram and Palakkad, together known as Malabar, have the majority of the Muslim population in Kerala. Before the formation of the organisations, the individual reform endeavours had radiated in the southern and northern regions alike. Lately, the headquarters of the majority Muslim religious and political organisations are in Malabar, particularly in Calicut. The lifestyle of Muslims of Malabar and South Kerala exhibits considerable difference.

The popular media position Malabar and South Kerala on binaries as conservative/progressive and uneducated/backward. The recent research studies on the unmarked history and development of the Malabar region counter the stereotyped presentations of the Muslims in particular. The strong resistance to colonialism had earlier lagged the Muslims, particularly of Malabar behind in the British introduced education and administration systems of the state. The influence impact and evolution of the Gulf migration have restructured the social political and cultural identity of the Muslims of Kerala, Malabar in particular. Towards the late decades of the twentieth century, the better economic situations, political and religious activities and movements among Muslims have boosted up collectively to overcome the backward status of the community.

In terms of regions in the state, there is a clear indication that the worst average levels of well-being for both men and women are in the southern districts of Kerala. The average levels of well-being get increasingly better as one moves to the central and then, to the northern districts. (Mukhopadhyaya et al. 78)

Whether practising Muslims or not, the secular public demand explanations from the men and women of the community about the practises of polygamy, triple *talaq* and early marriage attributed to the religion. The Muslims of Kerala thus are made to take the stands-opposing, neutral or defending- in response to the public criticisms as well as against the bleak and negative portrayals of the community. The discourse of Islamic feminism has created the essence of gender justice concerns among the Kerala Muslims. Quoting Islamic feminists like Fatema Mernissi, Asma Barlas and Amina Wadud, the feminist scope of the religion is discussed and debated in Kerala today. Politicising their

own visibility, the Muslim women are upending their earlier objectified victim images in the religion as well as in the public.

The intellectual activism of the Muslim Women in Kerala is cased to research by analysing the subject position of select Muslim women critics who have studied gender justice, social position and objective readings of women in general and Muslim women in particular. The critics Khadeeja Mumtas, Shamshad Hussain, Fousiya Shams, K.P. Salva and Ummul Fayiza have analysed the Kerala femininity in their books as well as in articles published in the Malayalam journals and magazines. Their works are studied based on two perspectives- the social anthropological studies on women in Kerala society and the world Muslim feminist academic discourse. The research is based on the essays of social criticism written in Malayalam with the exception of the novels *Barsa* and *Athuram* which discuss gender and religion, with excerpts self-translated to English.

Purushanariyatha Sthreemughangal (2013), an anthology of critical essays by Khadeeja Mumtas discusses the problems of women in the society and in the Muslim community, though her standpoints lay scattered in all her works of fiction. *Neunapakshathinum Linga padavikkumidayil*(2009) by Shamshad Hussain is the first book in Malayalam written by a Muslim woman detailing the status of the Muslim women. A statistical study based on the social political critical cultural engagements of Muslim women of Kerala during the 20th century, the book illustrates the untold intellectual activism of the women of the community who were until then accused as 'illiterate ignorant and suppressed souls under orthodox patriarchy'. Her studies on the history, culture and the present minority politics of representation in literature and films

earlier published in different journals form the book *Musleemum Streeyum Allaathaval* (2015).

The essays published by K.P. Salva in the prominent Malayalam periodicals from 2007 and her column 'Kannadakilillathe' in the women's magazine Aramam Monthly for two years (2012-2014) comprise her concepts of gender justice to restructure the social systems to advantage the agency and subjectivity of women in general and Muslim women in particular. The articles of Fousiya Shams, the editor of Aramam Monthly since 2007 problematise the lack of spaces and reduced participation of women in the public systems of the state. Ummul Fayiza's academic essays on the political problem position of Muslim women and the studies on Muslim women published in the mainstream Malayalam magazines also represent the intellectual activism of Muslim women in Kerala.

Status of Muslim Women in India: A Case Study of Kerala (1961) written by M. Indu Menon is the first book to statistically detail the social status of Muslim women in Kerala. The book is based on the educational aspects of the Muslim girls including parental pressures, marriage, employment and restrictions in the name of religion concluding with the positive impacts of education on the Muslim girls favourable for the society in general and community in particular. The paradigm shift in the educational achievement of Muslim from the immediate post-Independence period as in Menon's book is graphed in the study *Educational Empowerment of Kerala Muslims* (2007) by U. Mohammed.

The books *Unequal Citizens: A Study of Muslim Women in India* (2004) and *Educating Muslim Girls: A Comparison of Five Indian Cities* (2005) written by Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon based on the nation-wide Muslim Women's Survey (MWS) focusing on the aspects of socio-economic status, work, education, marriage, mobility, media access, political participation, decision-making and domestic violence have been great references while graphing the intellectual engagements of Muslim women in Kerala. The survey which considers the heterogeneous nature of the identity 'Muslim woman' relates associates and categorises the Muslim women with women in general in the Indian context regarding the similar situations of patriarchal control than explicitly accusing it on religions.

The anthropological study *Social Mobility in Kerala: Modernity and Identity in Conflict* (2000) authored by Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella analyses the nature of modernisation in the twentieth century Kerala discoursed through the cultural practises of religion, marriage, mobility, labour and micro-politics. The unprejudiced, unbiased ethnographic research work which projects the prospects of modernity and the corresponding changes especially from the low-class low-caste crises is among the most referenced of academic texts on Kerala recently. Academician, social critic and bilingual writer J. Devika has published baronial works on the gender discourse in Kerala society. The book *En-gendering Individuals: The Language of Reform in Twentieth Century Kerala* (2007) analyses the gendered aspects of language and life reformed into the neo-patriarchal social structures in public sphere as well as in family life. She problematises the superimposing of the elite history of Kerala upon the histories of women, Dalit and other minorities. As per her study, the elite modernity reforms were highly impactful for

lowering the graph of the intellectual activism of Muslim community which had flourished during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Her Self: Early Writings on Gender by Malayalee Women 1898-1938 (2005) is an anthology of prose written by women critics of early twentieth century, edited and translated into English by Devika. This master-attempt projects the feminist discourse in Malayalam as well as the intellectual engagement of women deconstructing the stereotypes about readership, perspectives and literary profiles of the women during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hussain's research on the oral literary tradition and history of the Malabar Muslims is a similar attempt of rewriting the history. In the book, *Womanwriting=manreading?* (2013) Devika deliberates the attitude of male critics towards the women writers in Kerala with respect to the agency, subjectivity and literary profiles of the four major women writers of Malayalam fiction-Lalithambika Antharjanam, K.Saraswathi Amma, Madhavikkutty and Sara Joseph. Equally applicable for Muslim women writers, the book substantiates that the patriarchal nature of the literary criticism prejudices disapproves and condemns the ecriture feminine irrespective of the community distinctions.

Devika has co-authored the book *New Lamps for Old* (2012) with Binitha V Thampi, which is a detailed research on the spaces defined for and utilised by the women in the field of politics in Kerala. The study points to the fact that the differences of caste, class and religion within the identity of women overtly complicate themselves within the male hegemonic political parties. Her books in Malayalam *Kulasthreeyum Chandappennum Undayathengane, Sthreevadam* (2000) and *Pouriyude Nottangal* (2013) also problematise the gendered intricacies in the class and caste based society. As the

name stands, the book *Muslim Women in Kerala: Tradition vs. Modernity* (2014) written by KKN Kurup and E. Ismail, purports to the issues of women in the Muslim societies because of the influence of the patriarchal interpretations of faith and religion, from a secular perspective. The post-Independence social political turbulence in the identity of the community in general and the related impacts on Muslims women are detailed in this comprehensive study on the Muslim women in Kerala. Though equally problematizes the social system within and outside the community, the book mostly pertains to the cliché religion/secular binary.

The constitutional freedom of expression and freedom of religion as complicated within the identity of the Muslim women writers face more criticism from the community which accuses them as 'Islamic feminists'. The Islamic feminist discourse in Kerala is not directly based on the feminist interpretations of texts but on the gendered nuances within the society in general and the Muslim community, in particular, influenced by the academic texts of Islamic feminism over the world. The readership of the books about Taslima Nasrin, Nujood, Ayan Hirsi Ali and Malala Yousafzai in the state exceeds those on the feminist exegetical studies by the Muslim women theologians.

The works of the Muslim women critics can be related to the gender discourse in Kerala as well as to the larger Islamic feminist context. The theologian Amina Wadud, renowned for her feminist reading of the Quran in *Quran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (1999), explains her standpoints being a converted Islamic feminist and African American single parent in *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (2006) with reference to the controversies on feminist exegesis and Public ritual leadership. Her choice of religion, the acquired Muslim identity

and her works on Islam, counter the elite male hegemonic nature of interpretations, texts and patriarchal authority within the Muslim societies. *“Believing Women” in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran* (2002) written by Asma Barlas restructures the position of women within the religion by attempting the feminist reading of the misogyny-attributed Quran verses using the traditional methodologies of interpretation.

The anthropologist Saba Mahmood’s *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (2005) analyses the development of agency and subjectivity of Muslim women with respect to the Mosque movement in Egypt. The study is relevant in the context of Kerala where the visibility of the Muslim women is channelised through the mosques-centred Quran classes conducted by the organisations like Kerala Nadvathul Mujahideen and Jamaate Islami Hind particularly post 1990. The book *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil’s Resurgence, From the Middle East to America* (2011) by Leila Ahmed is one of the important works among the active discourse on hijab over the world. Like her, most of the Islamic feminists problematise the piety attributed to the hijab-wearing women and protest the governmental ban on Muslim women’s choice of wearing hijab simultaneously.

The books *Sexual Ethics and Islam* (2006) by Kecia Ali, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn ‘Arabi, Gender and Sexuality* (2013) by Sa’diyya Shaikh and *Feminist Edges of the Quran* (2014) by Aysha A. Hidayatullah are schooled into the second wave Islamic feminist discourse which acknowledge the gender differences towards the theory of justice. The wide academic and amateur discipline of Islamic feminism comprising the works by and on the Muslim women immediately correspond to the respective regions of

the writers or as mentioned as case studies. The present feminist studies in Kerala related to the religion are influenced by the European and Islamic feminist discourses though there was a pattern of Islamic feminist discourse in Malayalam flourished during the middle decades of the twentieth century heralded by M. Haleema Beevi in the print journal tradition.

The graph of social religious and knowledge agency of the Muslim women in the society and corresponding problems, impacts and influences are subjected to research through the lenses of the women critics Mumtas, Hussain, Shams, Salva and Fayiza. Their perspectives as well as the observations and analyses of gender justice power the title “Intellectual activism of Muslim women”. The writers have faced harsh criticism and severe objection from the community for writing about the religion in the beginning, but the debates, in turn, enrich the discourse of gender studies in Kerala. The online and virtual research spaces within the community play a vital role in moulding the technological generation politically gender conscious to take sides with women writers. The research is carried out by the analysis of the works of critics with respect to the texts of gender studies in Kerala and of Islamic feminism over the world and also on the basis of personal interviews with the writers. At a time of decreasing relevance of the imported Western feminist theories and methodologies, the pattern and variants of feminisms in Kerala are given in the backdrop while discussing the methodologies and tools of analyses of the critics. In the thesis, the term ‘feminism’ spans every assertive social physical intellectual movement of woman on account of the biological identity in particular, individually or in groups.

The first chapter “Feminist Praxis of Writing Religion” discusses the possibility of the feminist discourse in the Muslim societies corresponding to the Islamic feminist studies. The texts of Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, Margot Badran, Saba Mahmood, Leila Ahmed, Miriam Cooke, Sa’diyya Shaikh, Kecia Ali and Aysha Hidayatullah are analysed focusing on their methodologies of deconstructing the patriarchal anti-women situations in academics and public activism in the Muslim societies. They problematise the reduced spaces for women within the religions as well as in the discourse on religion and create space by feminist theologies and exegeses. The political location of the Islamic feminism between the religion and secularism is an important concern in the works of the writers.

The chapter details the influence of Islamic feminist discourse in Kerala. The secular public celebrates the texts referring to the criticism of the religion Islam but fail to acknowledge the agency, subjectivity and scholarship of the Muslim women writers. In the beginning, the authoritarian heads of the community discarded the term as an oxymoron and were schooling against Islamic feminism. The Muslim women in the state have started relating themselves to the Islamic feminism with the popularity of the original texts as well as the translations of academic studies, fictions and autobiographies written by the Islamic feminists. The Islamic feminist pattern of analysing the movements of the Muslim women, discovering the religious and cultural engagement of women in the past, observations on religiosity and interference in the discourse of hijab and purdah reflects in the works of Mumtas, Hussain, Salva, Shams and Fayiza. The chapter also problematises the controversial male interpretations of the verses of the Quran and presents the counter readings of the women theologians on the systems of polygamy,

uneven property division, divorce and hijab. The critics discuss the post-feminist and post-secular possibilities regarding the studies on the Muslim women, conscious of the dominating Islamophobia in the state. The chapter disclaims the accusation that the Islamic feminist discourse in the state as completely influenced by the Western Islamic feminist texts and projects the magazine tradition among the Muslim women during the pre-Independence decades to mark their literary and intellectual activism.

The second chapter “Gendered Spaces of Social Criticism” details the crises of the women fictionists and critics in the male hegemonic world of Malayalam literature. It focuses on the rediscovered histories of the feminist literary activism in Kerala during the late decades of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries and links the current feminist criticism in that tradition. The style, language and subject of the women writers then and now exhibit considerable similarities as they struggle to create spaces for themselves. The family-centred lifestyle in the dominant patriarchal Kerala situations prioritises homemaking over other individual actualisations of the women. The chapter looks into the male criticism against the women writers and their works.

The pattern of the male hegemonic magazine culture is analysed in the chapter problematising the minimal spaces for the women writers. The family-orienting pattern of the magazines for the women is criticised by the women writers. The magazines, publications and publishing houses of the different sects within the Muslims, which follow the mainstream pattern, fail to accommodate the women writers. On the other hand, the readership of the Muslim women is considerably influenced by the magazine culture within the community which is not in other communities of the state. The identity, subject positions, region, caste and class of the critics are as important and influential

regarding their standpoints on different social issues. The chapter briefs the profiles of the writers Khadeeja Mumtas, Shamshad Hussain, K.P. Salva, Fousiya Shams and Ummul Fayiza. The pattern of social criticism, analyses of gender justice and the language and style of the Malabar based writers diversify the discourse on and by the Muslim women. The chapter also discusses the criticism of the community against the agency of the Muslim women writing about the religion and Muslim society.

The third chapter “Re-gendering Social Justice” is divided into two parts- “The Inclusivity Question” and “Identity and Representation”. It analyses the standpoints and perspectives of the critics Mumtas, Hussain, Salva, Shams and Fayiza on the process of gendering in Kerala. The first part focuses on the observations of the critics on education, employment, public activism and the marriage-centred lifestyle in the state, substantiated by the sociological studies about gender in Kerala. They accuse the dominance of the patriarchal power structures for the gendered intricacies of the social institutions which limit the women even in the twenty-first century. The second part of the chapter discusses the identity and representation of the community in general and the Muslim women in particular in the Islamophobic secular situations of the state as problematised by the critics. The differences between the real problems of the Muslim women and those addressed and sensationalised as the problems of the Muslim women are the concerns in the chapter. It also details the attitude of the community towards the recent agency, subjectivity and visibility of the Muslim women. The solutions suggested by the critics for the gender injustices reflect their intentions of restructuring the social systems within and outside the community.

The concluding chapter problematises the reluctance of the mainstream to acknowledge the intellectual engagement of the Muslim women in the state. It discusses the problem position of the Muslim women between the community and the secular mainstream. The visible religiosity, the political presence and the advancements in the development indicators of the Muslims power their cultural actualisations in Kerala. The discourse of the Muslim women post 1990 is influenced by the alternate dynamics of the community. The dominant secular narratives of othering the Muslim community is analysed in the chapter. The social literary and cultural activism of the Muslim women corresponding to the gender discourse in the state, converging into the broad category of the Islamic feminism is marked in the conclusion. The agency, subjectivity and standpoints of the critics assert the intellectual activism of the Muslim women. Problematising the present tools and methodologies of marking the women in general, the chapter concludes with discussing the possibilities of ethnographic and anthropological studies on the Muslim women to deconstruct the negative stereotypes in the public.

The term gender justice in the research covers only the feminist discourse and excludes the third gender concerns. Focusing only on the print literature, the recent social media activism of the Muslim women as part of the fourth wave feminism is exempted in the study. The works of the critics selected for the research are published between 2007 and 2017. The time period as post1990 includes the major social changes of the people of Kerala in general and Muslims in particular. The post flood discourse of the Kerala model survival is not analysed in the study, despite the possibilities of the major restructuring in the social systems in the affected regions.

CHAPTER 1

FEMINIST PRAXIS OF WRITING RELIGION

The discourse of feminism deconstructs and restructures the absolute male nature of institutions and authorities of religions, exceeding the impacts of secularism, atheism and rationalism. From the exclusive status of reverence and sanctity, the study of religions evolves establishes and develops into an active academic discipline of social political and cultural significance since the post-colonial periods of the twentieth century particularly by the feminist criticism of anti-women religious texts and practises. The pattern of feminism within the spaces of Semitic religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam promptly scopes into methodological similarities with respect to different societies. The political position of the Islamic feminism between Islam and secularism engenders Muslim women as a debated subject over the world. The Islamic feminism, like Christian and Jewish feminisms, spaces the agency and subjectivity of women into the religious texts and practises. The spectrum of the Islamic feminist discourse comprises fiction and non-fiction in literature as well as social and political movements and organisations in the public. The general focus on the criticism of religion by the secular public descends the intellectual activism of male and female Islamic feminists.

The philosophy of religion and religious philosophies scheme the ultimate knowledge basis in all civilisations. The scholars and learners maintain the aura of reverence about their respective religions, Holy texts, exegeses, stories and histories. The binary scholars/commoners consign power dominance and authority to the scholars of the institutionalised authoritarian hierarchic structures of religion. Their interpretations

instructions and commands design the religious life of the people. Writing about the religious texts and practises create conflicts between reason and religion as faith and belief transcend the logic of material science. The authorities of religions are always alert to blasphemy, to the extent of anti-blasphemy laws in all the major countries of the world. The restrictive readings and male hegemonic systems inside the spaces of religion constrict the life of people whereas the secular politics and scientific studies pole the religion as other. The Islamic feminism, pertaining to faith accesses new spaces within the discourse of religion by critically engaging with Islamic literature and Muslim lives.

The reserved spaces for woman within religions range from agency in spirituality to the revered deity identity. The philosophical psychological and physical privileges for women regarding the biological potentials of pregnancy, delivery and mothering are misinterpreted as weaknesses and limitations of women. The preference to rituals and performances and the declining status of humanitarian and spirituality essence of religion thus enforce masculine terminologies. The twentieth century feminist rereading of religion instills the political output of women-inclusive doctrines and customs by deconstructing the patriarchal hegemony of religious authorities. The secular/religious binary is the key concern determining every political perspective of academic discourses. The secular states corner religion into private and personal where religious identities and rituals are considered as weak symbols of progressivity. The developments in science and technology have considerable influence over these transitions distinguishing the religion-chosen people as unprogressive. The ideological tenets of Islam which blend public living and private life, faith and rationality, self and crowd thus attribute the label

unprogressive to Islam. The exclusion of religiosity from secular public spaces necessitates Muslims to discard their religion to attain the secular image in the public.

The male-dominated religious communities earlier considered the new analyses of religious texts as inspired by secularism and were reluctant to accept even the elements of traditional exegetic method in them. Surviving the blasphemy label, these writings gained momentum influencing the Muslim societies. Mahmood says, “Modern Muslim citizens, raised in a culture of mass media and public literacy, have become increasingly well versed in doctrinal arguments and theological concepts that were hitherto confined to the domain of religious specialists (79). The identity-conscious political life and less constrictive liberal religious life in Muslim societies are the impacts of new readings of religion.

Emergent secular feminism insisted upon the implementation of gender equality in the public sphere while acquiescing in the notion of gender complementarity in the private sphere or the domain of the family...Islamic feminists promote gender equality along a more fluid public-private continuum, promoting an egalitarian model of both family and society. (Badran 3, 4)

The secular feminisms distance Islamic feminist activities for its religious domain and sideline the Strategic Essentialist possibilities of developing the discourse of gender. They criticise the choice of religion as a cultural imposition than a personal choice. Mahmood writes, “The pious subjects of the mosque movement occupy an uncomfortable place in feminist scholarship because they pursue practises and ideals embedded within a tradition that has historically accorded women a subordinate status” (5). The secular

liberal feminists placard the anti-women aspects of religion to disassociate with Islamic feminism whereas the Muslim women theologians and critics reject the attributed feminist label because of the elite nature, history and activities of western feminism. Referring to the Malayali feminists, their magazines and seminars, Ummul Fayiza says that those women who chose religion do not have space in the women-related public discourses (“Pothuvyavahaarangalile” 19).

The secular and Islamic feminisms impact in Kerala public sphere with their discordances discoursing in an Islamophobic political atmosphere. The Muslimophobia problematises denigrates and marginalises the specific social political cultural agency of Muslim community in Kerala than directly engaging with religious texts, ideologies and practises. Though theologians like Wadud, refers to the 1990s trend of feminist associating of Judaism, Christianity and Islam as daughters of Sarah and Hagar, the more grounding Islamophobic politics discourage such academic possibilities (*Inside* 122). Islamic feminism broadly includes discourses of and by those in hijab and not in hijab; men and women; practising and non-practising Muslims and non-Muslims. In academics and activism Islamic feminism continues to engage with every aspects of religion. Distinct of Third Wave feminisms, defined from and developed through different perspectives such as feminism, sociology and theology it constitutes into important trajectories of gender studies. Islamic feminists focus on religious literature and Muslim practises with respect to regional cultures and geographic locations. Ndeya Adujar writes, “Islamic feminism is an intellectually rigorous and socially transformative global movement that, through a variety of projects and initiatives, is advancing gender equality and empowering Muslim women in range of contexts” (59).

The Post-colonial Islamic feminism, influenced by Islamic revival in West Asian Muslim countries and first and second wave feminisms and self-supported by the Qur'an problematises class, caste and gender systems of male hegemonic authoritarian religious realms. The works of Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, Fatema Mernissi, Aziza Al-Hibri, Riffat Hassan come under the first wave Islamic feminism discourse, whereas those of Sa'adiyya Shaikh, Kecia Ali, Aysha A. Hidayatullah and Lila Abu-Lughod constitute the Second Wave Islamic Feminism. From the radical feminist criticism of male hegemony of first wave Islamic feminism, the second wave advances towards justice based readings of religious texts. The Islamic feminist criticism of misinterpreted misogyny in Muslim societies impacts in the agency and subjectivity of Muslim woman.

Margot Badran, one of the earliest to study Islamic feminism writes, "In the case of Islamic feminism as an emergent discourse, the name was bestowed not by its creators but by witnesses to something new underway" (325). The term 'Islamic feminism' is considered as an oxymoron by Muslim societies over two concerns. First, they argue that Islam is gender egalitarian by doctrine downsizing the need of attaching 'feminism' to Islam. Secondly, they are hesitant to acknowledge the Western construct of feminism affiliated to the sanctity of Islam. The secular discourses consider Islamic feminism as an oxymoron for relating the accused anti-women religion called Islam with feminisms which 'emancipate' women from patriarchies.

Miriam Cooke explains, "Whenever Muslim women offer a critique of some aspect of Islamic history and hermeneutics, and they do so with and/or on behalf of all Muslim women and their right to enjoy with men in full participation in a just community, I call them Islamic feminists" (61). Though they develop their re-readings of

Islamic texts and practises applying feminist methodologies and tools of analyses, the first generation women theologians resist attributing feminist labels to their works partly because of the white elite stronghold of first and second waves of Western feminism. Wadud remarks, “Despite how others categorise me, my work is certainly feminist, but I still refuse to self-designate as feminist, even with “Muslim” put in front of it” (*Inside* 79). The writers problematise categorising them under Islamic feminism for varied and personal reasons. Barlas asserts, “Mislabeling Muslim women in this way not only denies the specificity, autonomy and creativity of their thought, but it also suggests, falsely, that there is no room from within Islam to contest inequality or patriarchy (xii).

The twentieth century Islamic feminism cannot be postulated as the product of European feminism since the essence of Islamic feminism is not a twentieth century discourse. The second wave Islamic feminist discourse resorts to feminist labels as “they use a set of analytical tools to criticize male power and normativity”, and are determined to “use ‘feminist’ until it is in mainstream” (Hidayatullah 44, 5). The limited interaction between Islamic feminism and methodological and theoretical developments in gender studies persists as a problem area. As Sa’diyya Shaikh argues, “retaining the term „feminist” enables women to situate their praxis in a global political landscape, thereby creating greater possibilities for alliances, exchanges, and mutually enriching interaction among different groups of women” (qtd in Aslan et al. 18). The feminist movements in Muslim countries, Egypt in particular, have the history of resisting colonialism, influenced equally by the Islamic culture as well as European feminism.

Not only did eastern Muslims not borrow from the West, but as feminist nationalists they countered western colonialism, including the imposition of

colonial patriarchal policy and practises, while concurrently as nationalist feminists they struggle against the indigenous patriarchy that was embedded in the state, which had intruded into ideas of Islam and into enacted in the name of Islam in various locations, and which was simultaneously rife in the everyday life of family and society. (Badran 327)

The re-readings and writings of history discover feminist mobility in the ancient religious and historical texts. Reading back Islamic feminism into the period of Prophet Muhammad develops the discourse. The visible paradigm shift in social political spiritual status of women from the patriarchal rigidities of Arabia to the refined Arabia of the prophet is a significant event in the history of feminism. Zainab Alwani presents Aisha, wife of Prophet Muhammad in the book *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians* (2013) as the first to develop Islamic feminist methodology soon after the death of prophet. The instances of Aisha correcting wrongly interpreted verses and hadiths reflect her scholarship in religious subjects and vigilance to the reemerging male hegemony soon after the death of Prophet Muhammad. She writes, “Her strategies for laying claim to religious authority and firmly refuting misogyny serve as examples of how women can and should bring their critical perspectives to the constitution of religious knowledge” (56). The revisions of fabricated and deferred Hadiths by Aisha were compiled to books *Answer to What Aisha Revised from the Companions* and *Aisha’s Revisions* in the 14th and 15th centuries respectively. Sa‘‘diyya Shaikh, the author of *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy, Ibn Arabi , Gender and Sexuality*, presents the renowned 13th century scholar Ibn Arabi as a ‘theoretical and methodological guide of Islamic feminism’ for his gender egalitarian exegesis of Quran and *fiqh* even though apologising

the fact that “feminist reading of the past always raises the methodological specter of anachronism” (93,25). The increasing relevance of re-readings in all academic discourses overcomes such limitations of feminism.

Hidayatullah says “the historical backdrop of the works of the first generation is the rise of Islamic revival and Islamism in many parts of the Muslim majority world” (7). The twentieth century Islamic feminism is the impact of the revivalist reformers from the 18th century such as Shah Waliullah (1702-62), Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahab(1703-92), Jamaluddin Afgani (1839-97), Muhammad Abdu (1849-1905), Rashid Rida (1865-1935), Mohammed Iqbal (1877-1938), Hasan al Banna (1906-1949), Zainab al-Ghazali (1917-2005) and Fazalurahman Khan (1919-88). The second wave Islamic feminists project male and female feminist theologians from history in an unorganised but collective effort to track the tradition. Cooke notes, “Feminists committed to their Islamic identity are creating a transnational sense of belonging, resistance and steadfastness through their behaviour but also through the hermeneutical and historical texts they are producing” (108).

The Muslim societies, throughout the history, witness the exegetical intellectual activism of Muslim women. The scholars Rabia al Adawiyya (d.801 CE), Kadija bint Sahnun (d.883/4), Fatima Al-Samarqandiyya (d.1182/3), Zulaykha bint Ismail, Zaynab bint al-sha`ri(d.1218) and Fatima b. Ibrahim Mahmud ibn Jawhar (d.1300) were respected for their scholarship in Quran, hadith and *fiqh* as well as in declaring verdicts (*fatwa*) over social concerns. The Sufi tradition developed in the post-Prophet period principles gender-egalitarian actualisations particularly regarding the spirituality aspects of religion. The scholarly spiritual communities of Sufi women have upheld the

‘feminist’ life and exegesis in the Muslim societies for many centuries while on the other hand, patriarchy constricts confines and controls the life of women. The regional histories possibly archive women’s interpretation and experience of religions. Shamshad Hussain’s research on the early Muslim women writers in Kerala discovers the Islamic feminist and gender justice perspectives in their articles at a time even feminist discourse was not an acknowledged discipline during the pre-independence India. The Second Wave Islamic feminism encourages the recovering of ‘herstories’ for widening the domain of Islamic feminist studies, says Sa’diyya Shaikh (qtd in Aslan et al.18).

The theologian Amina Wadud’s ground breaking book *Quran and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Feminist Perspective* (1999) follows Islamic traditional hermeneutics of reading Quran with feminist perspectives. Braving the controversies for the exegesis as well as performing Khutba, Wadud who had converted to Islam in 1972, since then is deeply engaging with the religion. “Her foundational scholarship, spiritual largesse, and personal courage have inspired a generation of Islamic feminist scholars”, remarks Shaikh (*Sufi* x). In her gender justice-concerned work *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women’s Reform in Islam* (2006) she says, “The only reason I have been engaged in this jihad, the struggle for gender justice, is because that justice and full human dignity granted to us by Allah has been ignored or abused” (*Inside*262). The book which explains many of her stands, attitudes, in religious and academic life, also details the backdrop of controversies of her engaging with religion. She appreciates the gender just society and “those South African male progressives who were bold enough to orchestrate such an event” more than her Islamic feminist person regarding her first Friday *khutba* (*Inside*179).

The feminist readings of Hadith tradition in Islam by Fatema Mernissi and re-interpretation of Adam-Eve story in Quran by Riffat Hassan are highly influential in developing the discourse of Islamic feminism. “Muslim feminist scholars increasingly are foregrounding the importance of human vicegerency, or moral agency, a fundamental Islamic teaching, as part of the unfolding dynamic of gender justice in contemporary Muslim communities”, observes Shaikh (*Sufi* 24). The pattern of feminist interpretations from different parts of the world orients the global Muslim woman image.

Feminist exegesis of the Quran is a strand of contemporary Quranic tafsir, in contrast to pre-modern *tafsir* works, explicates the Quran not by proceeding systematically through entirety of the text but rather selects verses according to their applicability to the themes of interest to the exegete, who interprets the selected verses in conjunction with one another to shed light on the Quran’s broader treatment of the chosen themes. (Hidayatullah 4)

The traditional methodology of exegesis discourages subject-specific readings of the Quran for disturbing the totality and structure of the revelation. The active discourse of science with respect to Quran throughout the history and present of Islam and even *fiqh* but are developed from the subject-specific readings.

The most engaging of criticism in Islamic feminist studies after exegesis, is the discourse on hijab. There are diverse opinions observations and conundrums regarding the range of hijab as a marker of faith to the political symbol of identity. Though the Islamic feminist scholars approach hijab on different social cultural pious political perspectives, the individual choice in using or not using hijab is respected eminently.

Leila Ahmed in her book *A Quiet Revolution: the Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (2011) discusses hijab as the symbol of attributed piety in Muslim societies, while detailing the types and politics of hijab after 9/11 contexts.

The massive spacing of women into religious studies adds to their knowledge and constructs a cosmopolitan identity of Muslim women. The anthropologist Saba Mahmood (1962-2018) studies the „politics of ethical agency“ of Muslim women involved in the Mosque movement in Egypt in her book *Politics of Piety* (35). The research on coordinated and non co-ordinated movements and organisations of the Muslim women in different countries over the world presents varied dimension of Islam and Islamic feminism possible. Salva observes that the Muslim women leaders in the west are products of the liberty and social situations of the West (“Feminisathinte” 65). The academic engagements of Muslim women are advantaged by the excellent facilities in the West even though they are made to maintain their expatriate status lifelong because of the boycott and expulsion in their native countries.

The Islamic and secular academics and activists have confusions concerning the persona of Zainab Al-Ghazali (1917-2005). A Public activist and the founder of Muslim women's Association she had stressed on and taught the domesticity of women while she despised for herself a domestic life. Miriam Cooke relates her life to Sukain, the grand grand-daughter of prophet Muhammed for fixing specific conditions with spouse-ultimate freedom in married life, restricting any control from spouse (101). Pauline Lewis finds in her the Sufi nature of devotion to a spiritual leader (Hasanul Banna), having dreams of Prophet, considering herself as a saintly figure and believing herself as an exception to Islamic and state rules (18). Even though the male hegemonic Islamic

organisations hymn the works and person of Al-Ghazali, they do not discuss the familial model exemplified by her. Referring to the historic personalities of Aisha, Khadeeja, Fatima and Mary, Lewis concludes that “With this spectrum of female archetypes to emulate, it is clear that there is not, nor has there ever been, one “proper” role for the Muslim woman in Islamic traditions” (31).

The third Wave feminism has instigated the association of diverse discourses of Postmodern feminism, Womanism, Intersectionality, Transfeminism and Ecofeminism. The social cultural and political significance of the collective reference to the believers of Jews, Christians and Muslims as ‘the children of Prophet Ibrahim’ activates the academic discourse of Semitic religious studies. Hidayatullah discusses the possibility of developing Islamic feminist discourse associating with Jewish and Christian feminist theologies in the light of Wadud’s distinct usage of ‘daughters of Sarah and Hagar’, wives of Prophet Ibrahim (47). The Islamic feminist discourse includes the works of fiction with the backdrop of Muslim societies, criticising the patriarchal practises of the region. The writings of women problematise the misogynist practises continued in the name of culture and tradition. The influencing religious heads of the Muslim societies instead of engaging with the reality suppress the controversies by issuing fatwa against the writers and accuse their western-reformer attitudes towards Muslim culture. The secular public, on the other hand, focuses on the subject concerns of Muslim women writers almost discarding their agency and subjectivity. Therese Saliba writes, “Nawal El Saadawi and Taslima Nasrin get portrayed as lone crusaders against the patriarchy of their cultures, and not as part of larger intellectual and feminist movements” (5).

There are criticisms against the writers for staining the Muslim societies in their works in the larger political public context. While engaging with the Muslim women

discourse in Kerala, Fayiza argues that the criticisms against the Muslim societies advantage the secular public than the community (Interview). According to Shaikh, “To silence gender justice because of Islamophobia is a defensive and ultimately unproductive position (“Feminism” 25). When the journalist and activist V.P.Rajeena narrated a bad incident of assault happened and happening in *madrasas* (Muslim religious schools in Kerala) through Social media, the Muslim men were blaming her for staining the image of the Muslim society in Kerala. The majority of Muslim women were against such open criticisms. The attitude of Muslim women towards gender injustices results in the stagnancy of thoughts and actions inside the Muslim society. Waiting for anti-Islam issues to end to address anti-women problems inside the Muslim societies definitely is a foolish lagging.

The study of organisations and movements of Muslim women in specific regions is a common research area in feminist studies over the world. Badran’s research on the secular and Islamic feminist movements and organisations in Egypt records the eventful evolution of agency and subjectivity of women inside the Muslim societies. Wadud and Abu-Lughod write in detail about the organisations Musawah, WISE, WLUML, ASMA and Sisters in Islam appreciating their activisms in their respective political geographic locations (Wadud *Inside* 100; Abu-Lughod 179). Shamshad Hussain’s book *Neunapakshathinum Lingapadavikkumidayil* (2009) is the first to analyse the activism of Muslim women organisations NISA, MGM, KWF, JIH and Women’s League in Kerala (61). K.P.Salva writes that the space for social actualisations for women

inside the organisations favours the development of their agency (“Adayaalappeduthendathum” 41). The per cent of women learners in the Quran classes systematically organised by KNM and JIH increases post-1990 considerably. The ‘orthodox’ Sunni groups have started periodical religious classes exclusively for women recently, raising scope for new studies on Muslim women engaging with religion.

On the local level, we can mention the growing rise of different movements which are led by women: the daiyyath of Egypt, the muballighat of Indonesia, the murshidat of Morocco, the qubaysiyyat of Syria, the otin shalar of Uzbekistan, the nu ahong of China and others, these are female religious leaders, teachers, preachers and female imams. (Adujar 73)

The epic work *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (1986) by Kumari Jayawardane on the feminist movements in Eastern countries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries asserts the regional rise of the feminist movements in Muslim societies. The Muslim women of Kerala had held a convention at Thiruvalla in 1938, demanding the government’s immediate attention in avoiding school fees for Muslim girls, making primary education compulsory for girls and to give employment to qualified women (Hussain *Neunapakshathinum*96). The backdrop for that endeavor when there were no women’s organisations and with a less percent women associated even with the freedom struggle was the journals-activism of Muslim women. Though minimal, they were able to utilise and had utilised the spaces within the Muslim society.

While rewriting the history recognising the importance of the contributions of the critics Haleema Beevi, Aysha Mayen, and V.S.Kasim B Mistress, Hussain underlines that

the main source of energies of these Muslim women is their religious perspective with which they worked for their development as well as for the progress of the community strongly based in a Kerala social structure. She presents projects and propounds that as a good model for the activism of Muslim women in Kerala (“Keraleeya” 101, 103). The critical insiders of the Muslim society then and now have to address a marriage-oriented social structure and lifestyle unlike the individualistic lifestyle of the West. The majority of the Muslim societies believe that the Islamic feminists apply western hermeneutics on Quran and related religious texts. As made clear in such exegetical attempts, they are applying the traditional methodology of exegesis, along with introducing the possibility of subject specific readings. They acknowledge the fact that interpretations of Quran can never be ultimate nor could it equal Quran. Another important argument against the Islamic feminist methodology is about applying the deconstructed theory of feminism. Hidayatullah says,

If feminist Quranic interpretations has the tools of its own destruction already built into it, I am convinced that the way to keep moving forward is to trace the trajectory of its own undoing to its logical end, to understand its undoing in order to forge another path, and to examine the nature of its weaknesses in order to rebuild it in stronger ways (ix, x).

The writers strongly defend Islamic feminism even with diverse priorities and subject concerns. The crucial concern of African-American writers is Race and that of Indian writers is the caste based and marriage-centered patriarchal systems and structures. Within the feminist discourse, Secular feminism and Islamic feminism are positioned as opposing binaries. Badran’s study on Egyptian feminism asserts their mutually

reinforcing nature and that “Liberal and progressive women in the Muslim societies in the east are increasingly using both the arguments of Islamic feminism and secular feminism” (329). The discourse of Islamic feminism is enriched by men and women in different languages from different places. Muhammadali writes, “Defining Islamic feminism comprehensively is, however, almost impossible because there are multiple approaches to Islamic feminism” (41). The discourses of Gender studies in regional languages are more impactful than the necessity of downloading the style and pattern of Western Islamic feminism. In an interview given to Hussain and Ajitha, Wadud values English as the language of Islamic feminism to form the counter discourses on Colonialism and the Western world (Hussain *Musleemum* 140). Limiting the language of Islamic feminism into English constricts the periphery of the Muslim women studies.

Cooke’s definition of Islamic feminism as “not a coherent identity, but rather a contingent, contextually determined strategic self-positioning” gives more political weight to the discourse and movements (59). Anouar Majid argues that a “thoroughly redefined Islam in dynamic relation with other cultures is central to forming an Islamic feminist movement that resists both global capitalism and religious fundamentalism” (qtd in Saliba, et al. 7). The focus of Islamic feminism thus develops through hermeneutics, activating revolution inside institutional structures towards influential political interferences of the world. Ziba Mir-Hosseini who defines Islamic feminism ‘as the unwanted child of political Islam’ when referring to feminist scholarship says “It can tell us how and why Islamic legal tradition became as patriarchal as it is, how the tension between egalitarian and hierarchical voices and tendencies in the tradition played out; how by the time that the *fiqh* schools emerged, women’s voices were silenced in the

production of religious knowledge”. The apologetic tone of exegetes and theologians regarding some verses or Hadith marked as inconsiderate towards women has been debated by the second generation Islamic feminists, even though it complicates the discourse in the secular public. Hidayatullah says, “... if Muslim women are to come fully in terms with cases in which the Quranic text lends itself to meanings that are detrimental to them, we must begin to confront those meanings more honestly, without resorting to apologetic explanations for them, or engaging in interpretive manipulations to force egalitarian meanings from the text” (viii).

Recently, the Decolonial feminisms enlarge the discussion into the larger political context of race and Islamophobia. According to David Tyrer “Debates over Islamophobia do not only reflect questions about racial politics, but also present wider questions that are framed by a condition often termed post-politics” (14). The discourse of race incorporates into gender studies in the context of Islamic feminisms also. Hidayatullah says, “Drawing on many of the same principles, women-of-color theologians formulated a number of critical responses to the universalisms implied by white feminist theologians, addressing the multiple oppressions of sexism, racism, colonialism, and poverty” (52). Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) is considered as the foundational text in critical theory in this regard which first criticised the predominant prejudices of West over Eastern cultures.

Orientalism and Islamism act as two contradictory poles of desire/affirmation and aversion/disorientation and help reinforce a structured ambivalence within the notion of the ideal Muslim woman. Both poles essentialise the ideal Muslim woman and reduce her to the same symbols and icons. Orientalists offer

descriptive and devalued essentialist imagery of Islam as articles of faith.

Islamists, in contrast, address contemporary women's needs and present Islamically inspired solutions through persuasion and at times coercion. (Khan 311)

The prominent postcolonial concerns of African American writers and West Asian writers, race and religion respectively, act together complicating the context of Muslim African Americans. The post-colonial feminist discourses address the intrinsic issues of race, religion and gender. The neglect of Marxist feminists over issues of race has downplayed its dominance in postcolonial and Decolonial studies (Gilmore 21). The Liberal feminism which stressed on individuality and gender equality incorporating actualisations of women into male domains failed to accommodate the different lived experiences of women in non-Western context in particular, resulting in the emergence of post feminisms.

Referring to post feminism Judith Butler says, "...within feminist political practise, a radical rethinking of the ontological constructions of identity appears to be necessary in order to formulate a representational politics that might revive feminism on other grounds" (7). The feminism takes a more egalitarian euphemism of 'Gender studies' during the post-feminist periods by deconstructing binaries. Muhammadaliwrites, "Post-secular feminist framework detects the limitations of secular liberal feminism by challenging the normative ideals of female agency" (7). The exclusive subjecting of 'women' in feminism gives way to the studies on 'culturally constructed' masculinity and feminine, including situations of male, female and LGBT as well (Butler 8). The cultural contexts of the women in general and Muslim women in particular rise to relevance in post-feminist studies. Mahmood writes, "...if the ability to

effect change in the world and oneself is historically and culturally specific, then the meaning and sense of agency cannot be fixed in advance, but must emerge through an analysis of the particular concepts that enable specific modes of being, responsibility, and effectivity”(15).

The studies on agency of a particular group have shifted into critical theories of feminism in particular, where the evolving status of women’s being in the public is the central concern. As pointed out by Fayiza, the prejudiced binary religion/secular in connection with Muslim women studies is the drawback of the secular feminism (“Vaayanakalile” 48). The agency acquired by engaging with and within religion thus authenticates Islamic feminist discourse over secular feminist discarding of religion-based feminisms.

Even if we understand secularism in its most narrow sense-as the doctrinal separation of religion and state-it is worth noting that this separation has been negotiated in a variety of ways even in Europe and the United States. Moreover even in self-avowedly secular-liberal societies this doctrinal principle has not entailed the banishment of religion from the realm of politics, law and public life. (Mahmood 77)

The people of Kerala in general and Muslims in particular exhibit quasi-critical attitude towards the Western lifestyle. The Western feminist discourse grounds the academic field in Malayalam overcoming the accused status of being ‘downloaded’. Salva says that though we criticise western feminisms, we are accepting its tools and methodology for women empowerment, thus making education, employment and public

activism as the criteria to rank empowerment. She adds that knowingly or unknowingly an approach of keeping men in accused position, challenging them is in our consciousness (“Feminisathinte” 65). Post feminisms have discarded the concept of a universal patriarchy, but are alert to the Capitalist patriarchy problematised by Socialist feminism. In the light of Dual systems theory, Gilmore points to the impact of capitalist patriarchy as necessitating the domesticity of women for the continuation of the institution of family and therefore capitalism and patriarchy (23).

The feminist discourse in Kerala pertains either to the literary criticism or in relation to molestations and anti-women political issues in the public almost ignoring the serious issues of identity, representation and gendered injustices. Fayiza observes that the feminist theories and politics in Kerala are complicated with the presence of liberal Marxist radical Christian Muslim Adivasi Dalit feminisms though the discourses in Kerala public follow liberal elite Hindu feminist politics (“Pothuvyavaharangalile” 17). Due to the less percent of feminist studies in the Kerala context and the lesser influence of post feminisms, the feminist discourse lags behind in Kerala as evident in the case of Islamic feminism in particular. When over the world, Islamic feminism advances with post secular, post Islamic and post Islamism perspectives, the dominant secular public in Kerala is still in the ‘Islamic feminism of 80s’, remarks Fayiza (Interview).

The feminist narratives and lived experiences form an important aspect of post feminisms, of which considerable emphasis given to the oral literature and history with the possibility of increased female performance percent. The oral history presents feminist perspectives deconstructing the authority of male-written histories. Hussain’s study of the oral history of Malabar Rebellion (1921) asserts that unlike the public notion

that women cannot contribute in terms of knowledge regarding historic events like Malabar rebellion, being in the lineage of narrative tradition who had survived great losses, women's perspectives of the revolt deconstruct the notions of binaries good/bad, coloniser/colonised, national/regional (*Musleemum* 90). She adds that a group of people's perseverance, their rebellion, loss, sacrifice, tolerance, resistance become less important in written histories which record only the causes, beginning, end and the impacts of events for the authority. The post-colonial studies change the standpoints, methodologies and theories of the oral historian in particular. While discussing the "ethnographic postmodern", Mutman says, "New ethnography's discursive paradigm aims to include a plurality of voice in the text: poetic as well as scientific, allegorical as well as descriptive, and most important of all, the native's as well as the anthropologist's" (21).

The trend to assume a universal Muslim identity is debated in the secular political discourses. In fact, such an impossible identity is not proposed by the religion. In secular state v/s religion debates, Muslims are always asked to prove their nationalism, which has become an important requisite to live in secular countries like India where Muslims are the other. Tyrer writes, "Depending on how we are positioned within particular discourses with which we identify or are identified with, we occupy a range of subject positions" (13). Thus the notion of a fixed identity is deconstructed into different subject positions which may tend to change depending on region, religion and the like. Butler states, "The alternative perspective on identification that emerges from psychoanalytic theory suggests that multiple and coexisting identifications produce conflicts, convergences, and innovative dissonances within gender configurations which contest the fixity of masculine and feminine placements with respect to the paternal law" (91).

The Post feminisms propound theories on masculine and feminine instincts crossing into each other. Kimberle Crenshaw's Intersectionality theory (1989) of overlapping identities has given new light to the studies of race, class, sex, gender and religion. Defining gender as a „signification that an (already) sexually differentiated body assumes', “a complexity with permanently deferring totality”, “with no binary like male /female”, “a doing”, Butler says that “the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practises of gender coherence” (13, 22, 9,34).

The Muslim women are studied either under the religious category of Islam or with women in general. They are not fully identified with and accommodated into both the categories. The patriarchal authoritarian male hegemony of the religious tradition has not given space to Muslim women, whereas the secular public and feminism is reluctant to their religious affiliation. Islamic feminism spaces itself within the religion, associating Muslim women to the religious identity and develops the discourse into more political issues of race and gender by playing a major role in the politicization of Islam. The regional ethnographic variations in Muslim culture are focused in recent researches upon the cosmopolitan Muslim cultural identity.

Firstly, Islamic feminists need to continue a rigorous internal critique of sexism and gender inequalities extant in their societies and within Muslim tradition, in the same way that a number of other religious communities need to further develop more just and gender-egalitarian norms. Secondly, Islamic feminist must persist in foregrounding and reconceiving humanising aspects of Islam and Muslim tradition, recovering hidden histories of gender justice and human

equality... Thirdly, Islamic feminists need to steadfastly resist and critique the onslaught of “empire” in its many faces. (Shaikh “Feminism” 24)

The discourses of race get replaced by caste in the Indian context, with colossal problems ranging from poverty to patriarchy in the developing country. Kerala outperforms other states in social political economic indicators of development though less women-friendly in social spaces of family, education and employment. Salva problematises the labeling of feminist as the easiest way to discard a person who talks for women in Kerala where feminism and feminists are considered as something to be kept out of columns (“Feminisathinte”65). The fourth wave feminism channelised through social media is active in Kerala cyberspace with its participation percent, public attention and reactions to anti-women issues. The social political religious engagements and achievements of women get wide public recognition in virtual space which has been utilised to a great extent by women to restructure their agencies and subjectivities. The secular liberal Communist parties establishes themselves as bastions of Muslim women especially in cyberspace, creating anti-Muslim men sentiments in the public adding to the Islamophobic politics as in the controversies over Malala, V.P.Rajeena and K.K.Shahina. Fayiza criticises the political parties in Kerala for shouldering the guardianship of Muslim women putting Malala in front and never conversing with the discourse of Islamic Feminism which problematises the imperial feminist politics developed during America’s cold war politics (“Idathu” 56).

Feminist Exegesis

The Jewish, Christian, Islam, Hindu and Buddhist feminist exegeses are the intellectual engagements spacing women into an otherwise male dominant aspect of religious history, tradition and interpretation of texts. The rereading and rewriting of religion becomes political feminist moves in terms of religiosity and spirituality in secular states as well. The men exclude women from the theological and ritualistic aspects of religions because of the biological situations of menstruation, pregnancy and delivery, wrongly associating biological purity and spiritual sanctity. In practise, within limited spaces, women relate with faith more than men. The popular exegeses by men failed to refer the perspectives and experience of women. The feminist exegesis interprets the texts and historic events first from feminist and then from the perspectives of gender justice. The Jewish feminism demands roles for women in otherwise exclusively male Jewish rituals whereas the Biblical feminism attempts rereading the texts from positionality perspectives.

The concept that the Bible's readers understand the text differently due to their own particular circumstances is called positionality. Factors that can affect postionality are geographic location, time period, family, schoolings, nationality, race, religion, and the list goes on - included in this list is gender. (Gerstein)

The feminist exegetes deconstruct the attributed masculinity of God established with the usage of male pronouns and qualities. Butler says, "Within a language pervasively masculinist, a phallogocentric language, women constitute the unrepresentable. In other words, women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity" (13). The exegetes raise verses from the Holy texts asserting God as the creator of all humans to debate the masculine attributes of the God.

The writers subvert the accused biological „limitations“ of women in procreation as the major role of women, than men in one among the qualities of God called creation. Shaikh writes, “Woman is the means through which the divine primordial matrix manifests Its creativity and births the perfect form-that is, the human being. In light of these equivalences and correlativity, the feminine is considered existentially prior and preeminent, and women are seen to provide a more perfect witnessing of god than men” (*Sufi* 179)

This argument excludes childless women or those decided not to have children who are otherwise marginalised by the dominant patriarchal concept of motherhood and mothering defined as the only modes of actualisations for women. The presence of such women has been influential in extending the discourse to acknowledge the different facets of feminine. The feminist exegesis problematises the minimal discussion of women in religions. A background understanding of dominant works of exegesis reveals the fact that much of the problems of misogynist interpretation result from the influence of „prior text“ of the exegete regarding gender roles in their respective cultural context (*Hidayatullah* 79).

The histories and stories from the Old Testament and Bible influenced the earlier exegetes of Quran when interpreting the verses in relation to the Prophets and saints to the extent of incorporating hagiographies in their works. The feminist scholars point out the big fallacy in traditional exegetes for not acknowledging their sources. The issue becomes more problematic in relation to identity, agency and subjectivity of women as prescribed in the texts. Hidayatullah writes, “Wadud and Barlas hold that exegetes routinely insert historically determined views of gender into their interpretations of Quran

without acknowledging that these views belong to them rather than to the Quran” (79). The people prefer the exegeses and Hadith literature than the Holy Text, canonising the exegetes for their scholarship.

Hiba Ashraf notes, “So dependent are people on the works of the early Muslim scholars that thinking outside what they have written or said has become inconceivable” (93). The feminist scholars acknowledge themselves as propounding another perspective of interpretation asserting that there cannot be an ultimate interpretation. Barlas says, “...a reading of the Quran is just a reading of the Quran, no matter how good; it does not approximate the Quran itself, which may be why the Quran distinguishes between itself and its exegesis” (17). The new theologians develop the discourse beyond the feminist readings on binaries, emphasising the need of perspectives of justice while criticising those discard the fundamental message of humanity. The patriarchal notion of defining everything in binaries has been continued into earlier feminist discourses even when they advocated gender equality. The neglect of biological differences of women with men has created problems in managing private and public realms. Deconstructing the binaries into different gender actualisations accelerates the feminist discourse. In the beginning, the Islamic feminist scholars projected the Quran verses which explained men and women as equals before God in terms of spirituality. Stowessar says, “In faith, dignity and moral responsibility, male and female Muslims are now increasingly hailed as equals” (38). The ‘equality’ argument has been influential among women in Muslim societies and not in the secular groups.

Theoretically, the spirituality quotient enacted through religious performances of the genders only matter before the God beyond biological differences and material

familial social political roles. Barlas writes, “Quran does not privilege males as males, it does not use males as a paradigm to define women, and it does not even use the concept of gender to speak about humans” (11). The spirituality and sexuality are considered as opposing binaries. The Christian traditions positions sexuality as the opposite of spirituality and celibacy is the requisite to attain spiritual heights. Shaikh says, “This sexuality/spirituality dualism locates women in the sexual realm as the antithesis of spirituality, which is by definition, male” (*Sufi* 57). Analysing the Sufi tradition and history where men and women exemplified equal potentials in spirituality, Shaikh counters the popular misperception about religion.

The verses of the Quran address men and women specific and general. The earlier exegetes considered the masculine references as privileging men in religious matters. Wadud retorts, “Although each word in Arabic is designated as masculine or feminine, it does not follow that each use of masculine or feminine persons is necessarily restricted to the mentioned gender- from the perspective of Universal Quranic guidance” (*Quran* 7). The majority male scholars hesitate to allow women even inside mosques. The feminist exegetes problematised this interpretation on terms of spiritual equality and equal moral responsibility of men and women as vicegerents of the God. Referring to the theologian Ibn Arabi, Shaikh says,

Ibn Arabi explicitly links spirituality and social praxis, arguing that men’s and women’s equal spiritual potential has a number of practical implications: women can set legal precedents, can lead mixed congregations in prayer, can be teachers and leaders on the *Tariqa* with both women and men as disciples, can attain the

highest level of leadership by being the axial saint (*qutb*) of a period, and so forth (*Sufi* 214).

The absence of female prophets in the history and in Quran is a debated area in the feminist readings. Ali queries that “if men and women are not opposing binaries, be it Prophet-hood or Imam, why does equality matter?” (qtd in Hidayatullah 129). The feminist scholars find the possibility of women representatives among the one lakh of prophets sent to Earth by the God as reported in hadiths. Adujar says “A number of exegetes of great significance defended female prophethood, among which were Ibn Hazam, Ibn Arabi, Al-Ashari, Ibn Hajar, and Al-Qurtubi” (66). The exceptional human qualities of the prophets surpass their masculine entities. Wadud categorises Prophet Muhammad as an ‘exceptional male’ (*Inside* 214). The patriarchal societies define every actualisation of women as weaker than men. The Sufi tradition considers the physical weakness of women compared to men, in relation to the inherent nature of humans as weak before the God and accommodates women into the spiritual realms where weakness implies closeness to the God. Shaikh says, “Weakness is understood as an advantage since it allows the individual to perceive the reality of his or her dependency on God” (*Sufi* 190). The feminists tend to position women above men in religion with reference to the Quran verses (66:11,12) depicting two women, Farrah’s wife and Maryam as models for all believers (men and women) and the hadith which declares any believer’s immediate obligation to mothers thrice preceding the father.

The study of women characters in the Quran forms an important research area of Islamic feminist scholarship. Barbera Freyer Stowessar who details and distinguishes the different narratives on women characters in comparison with those in Bible, exegeses and

stories in her book *Women in the Quran: Traditions and Interpretations* (1994), stresses that the male exegeses and interpretations of the stories of female characters in Quran tend to condition women in Muslim societies (21). Riffat Hassan's interpretation of the verses about Adam and Eve deconstructs the attributed sinning nature of Eve disassociating Eve with the responsibility of the first sin as popularised through Christian traditions (110). The earlier male scholars refer to Jews, Christians and Muslims collectively as children of Abraham which the feminist scholars specify as Children of Hagar and Sara. Being the daughters of Hagar and Sara, the possibility of associating with Christian and Jewish feminists too is considered hopeful by Islamic feminists lately (Hidayatullah 47).

The new readings by scholars discover the diversity of feminine within the spectrum of women characters in the Quran. Being a single parent in a racist space, Wadud easily reads Hagar as a model for single parenting in the Quran, who had been abandoned in the desert by Prophet Abraham (*Quran* 125). The research on the social, political, intellectual participation of women during and after the Prophet enriches the discourse on Muslim women. The scholars conclude that there is no distinct role for women within religion as exemplified from the spectrum of different lives of women positively narrated in the Quran. Hadith, the grant compilation of words and deeds of the Prophet written down centuries after his death, prescribing the practical lifestyle of Muslims, has been an important problem area in the feminist studies because of its powerful influence over Muslim societies. The Muslim scholars have different opinions regarding the methodological approaches to Hadith because of the inauthenticity, validity of sources and the incorporated pre-Quranic customs. Hidayatullah says, "Even though

there is plenty of such evidence that the hadith canon is not built only on “strict historicity”, it has withstood criticisms by modern scholars and resisted any serious or systematic revision by Muslims to date; thus the six canonical collections remain intact and largely authoritative for most Muslims” (82).

The major criticism against the hadith texts is their misogyny possibly influenced by the social political attitudes and perspectives of the chain of narrators or Hadith collectors. Barlas writes, “it is ironic that even though there are only about six misogynistic *ahadith* accepted as sahih(reliable) out of a collection of 70,000, it is these six that men trot out when they want to argue against sexual equality, while perversely ignoring dozens of positive *ahadith*” (46). Later Muslim societies when ‘canonised’ these exegetes, the Hadith texts and interpretations have acquired dominance even over the Quran. The wrong preference to Hadith over Quran has prevented the feminist scholars from studying the Hadith tradition in the beginning.

In Islamic feminist debates, there are two stances: one opts to reject all those hadith which contradict the Quran (Fatima Mernissi), and another accepts that some hadith may be authentic, but insists that these must be placed within a historical context, reflecting of a patriarchal mentality (Sa’diyya Sheikh, Leila Ahmed). (Adujar67)

The feminist studies on hadith texts question the ultimate authority of the male exegetes criticising their anti-women attitudes and perspectives. Many men were accused for Hadith-fabrications but the women were not accused of fabricating even though “hadith scholarship was an area of religious knowledge where early Muslim women

flourished” (Alwani52). The hadith narrating the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib has been oft quoted by men to subside women. The feminist scholars easily deconstruct the hadith referring to women as lesser in intellect than men but find it difficult to convince the patriarchal Muslim societies. The hadith in which the Prophet talks about women as the majority percent in hell demands women to be more faithful and familial. The scholarship of the Prophet’s wife Aisha in religious matters had countered many fabricated hadith reports. She had accused the narrator of the hadith which associates women with donkeys and dogs as inauspicious for his careless reportage.

The fact that these reports which, in many respects, carry the characteristic of fabricated hadith, contain elements that are against many verses of the Quran, seems neither to have bothered the great hadith authorities who included them in collections of hadith that are called “sahih”, nor the Quranic exegetes who explained and commented on them in later periods. (Tuksal 139)

Though subject-specific reading of religious texts was not encouraged by the traditional scholars, they but had distinctly compiled a set of rules called *fiqh* (jurisprudence) developed from the verses of Quran which in turn made the Quran a mere book of laws reducing its spiritual importance. Aslan says, “When the prophet was asked about sharia, he listed prayer, zakat, and fasting. Islamic theologians on the other hand, constructed a rigid legal system from a humane religion; though Muslims knew that religion (din) and sharia were not to be equated” (41). Interestingly, the four schools of jurisprudence, Hanafi, Shafi, Maliki and Hanbali, named after the theologians of the 8th and 9th centuries are accepted, acknowledged and practised in Muslim societies irrespective of differences. Falsely instructed, followed and understood as the religion,

the texts of *fiqh* influenced by the pre-Islamic culture of the locale of theologians still continue to condition women on strict familial grounds. Referring to the authoritarianism of theologians, Hiba Ashraf says, “We are still following the same old traditional schools of law and not even making attempts at adding on to their legacy. We resort to quoting their interpretations of the texts when some of them are no longer even relevant to our time and age” (93).

Islamic feminist scholars distinguish *sharia* and *fiqh* criticising the prominence of ritualism. The presence of the four madhabs proves the flexibility of an otherwise strict religion in the public, though the “post-madhab character” of Muslims is problematised recently (Mahmood 81). From the very beginning of learning Islam, women in good percent, though comparatively less than men, have actively involved in the scholarship of Quran and jurisprudence. Juhi Gupta’s book *The Future of Indian Muslim Women: Fatwa v/s Feminism* (2012) mentions Indian *fiqh* schools for women producing hundreds of *muftiyat* per year (110). The scholars of Islam placard for the theological updating of the texts of *fiqh* recently. Shaikh is of the opinion that Sufi discourses which are based more on Quran than on *fiqh* can be relied for lessening the ritualism dominance over spirituality, the essence of religion (*Sufi* 224).

The Controversial Verses

The critics quote the verse from the Quran (2:282) which in legal cases insists either a man or two women as witness, to argue that man and woman are treated unequally in the Quran as two women are equaled to one man. The feminist theologians present alternate readings for this verse. Wadud asserts that one woman is witness; the

other is corroborator, which she says is due to the then circumstance where women had not excessively involved in financial dealings. She considers the possibility of the single female witness being physically forced to disclaim the testimony when they are not two (*Qur'an* 85, 86). The law becomes insignificant in the current situations where men and women equally handle finances. Sufi scholar and exegete Ibn Arabi reverses the situation to one female witness-two male witnesses in cases like determining the paternity of a child, or in concerning idda (waiting period after divorce) relating the testimonies to women's knowledge fields of experience (Shaikh *Sufi* 83).

The Quran addresses humans in masculine plurals in the gender-specific language of Arabic, which many find as excluding women. Pointing to the problems of masculinity and sexed representations of the God, Barlas says "Ironically, while Muslims reject misrepresentations of God as father/male, most see no problem in continuing to masculinise God linguistically and to propagate, on the basis of this view, theories of male rule/privilege over women" (99). Some feminist scholars deliberately use female pronouns for the God, while some others weigh the message of the Quran using both masculine and feminine pronouns. Barlas establishes from the verses of the Quran that the God cannot be a male since He is neither a husband (never a spouse) nor a father (never given birth) nor a son (not born) and rejects the possibility of any special affinity of God for males (98, 15).

The feminists discard the attributed sin-prompter image of women in theologies which had ousted the first parents from the heaven, with the Quran verse narrating God's announcement to the angels that Adam has been appointed as his vicegerent on 'earth' (2:30). The influence of feminist exegesis has propounded many alternate interpretations

for the creation of Eve (woman) from Adam (man)'s rib. Ibn Arabi who slogans for woman's *imamat* (religious leadership) presents women as superior to men in manifesting the divine and considers God's first human creation Adam as the entity from which male Adam and female Eve are created (Sufi 151, 163). Rediscovered recently by Shaikh, the feminist exegesis of Ibn Arabi is seen providing revolutionary interpretations in Islamic feminist discourse. Referring to the Quran which does not specify exclusive gender roles for men and women, Wadud counters the popular patriarchal misconception that only men can become religious leaders and full humans (*Qur'an* 8). The story of queen of Sheba narrated in the Quran gets a new gendered importance with feminist readings discarding the natural leader image of man from history. Barlas argues for the religious leadership of women with the sex/gender-neutral character of the term imam in Arabic language (115).

The biological procreative potentials debilitate women from the social political and religious spaces of the public. Defining woman only in terms of motherhood suppresses the individual actualisations and excludes those women who are against becoming mothers or are childless. The mothering had a different dimension in pre-Islamic Arabia as known from the historic narratives of prophet's childhood when, wet-nurse was arranged even to breastfeed him, for which no one then or later had accused his mother. It might be for this custom, Quran suggested, not insisted, to breastfed babies until they are two years (2:233, 31:14). The mothers are thrice revered over fathers in Islam. The domesticity of women is never an Islamic concept of family life, but a patriarchal imposing upon women. Wadud writes, "The Quranic reference is restricted to the biological function of the mother-not the psychological and cultural perceptions of

‘mothering’” (*Qur’an* 22). The domesticity of women is propagated and practiced on biological distinctions necessitated by the patriarchy for the sustenance of male hegemony and power.

The most controversial verse (4:34) which degrades women is popularly interpreted in terms of the raised status of men over women in Muslim societies. Criticising the popular assumption, Wadud grammatically retranslates the message that men have power (*qawwam*) over women only on terms of certain preferences when they support women from their means (*Qur’an* 70). She accuses the male translators for missing out the term *some* (*ba’d*) when *Qur’an* says some men are preferred over women, which is not universal in the case of all men, thus concluding that the preferred status (*daraja*) of men is relative (*Qur’an* 69). The feminist exegetes have conferred different linguistic explanations and social interpretations for the particular verse. According to Ali “Thus in a family where both husband and wife contribute to the household expenses, the husband would not be the wife’s ‘qawwam’ which is the new financial situation over the world” (119).

The Quran verse (4:34) permitting men to ‘beat’ women in cases of marital discord and disobedience is another controversial issue in exegesis, which popularly concludes women as the cause for familial discords thus legitimising punishments. The feminist exegetes problematise the semantic attributing of the terms *nushuz* (rebellious) and *qanit* (wrongly interpreted as obedience to spouse) only upon women and counter with the verses from Quran itself where *nushuz* and *qanit* refer to the masculine gender (Wadud *Qur’an* 75; Ali 120,121). The sword of Damocles called divorce (*talaq*), misunderstood as the power of husband, hanging on woman topples the Quranic concept

of marriage for the tranquility sake of the couple. Discussing the example of Prophet Muhammad, Barlas writes “The Quran did not force even the wives of the prophet to obey him, nor did he force obedience on them; nor, indeed, did he deal with marital discord by abusing or beating them” (187). The Quran uses the term *zawj*, (meaning partner/spouse) always when referring to the married woman and man and considers them equal with equal importance in married life.

The Quran verses which allows polygamy, sexual access with slave or captive women and the reference to the beautiful women as rewards in heaven concoct the reasons for the sexist image of Muslim men because of the out-of-context and gender unjust interpretations. Though considered negative in the secular public, the sexist image strengthens the masculinity of Muslim man who otherwise abstain (by doctrines) from conventional symbols of masculinity such as alcohol consumption and illicit relationships. Ali in her book *Sexual Ethics and Islam* analyses deeply the aspects of sexuality and religion projecting the fact that in Islam, sex too is coming under divine speculation(129). Problematising the involvement of married men in sex with captive women and polygamy, Ali reads the verses as not discussing the female sexuality and satisfaction. She gives a different dimension to these verses on terms of the essential Quranic message of justice in every aspects of human life by considering the feelings of the spouse as well as the captive women in the particular situation. She adds, “...that close attention to those Quranic verses that discuss sex can provide a new lens through which to engage in feminist exegesis. Quranic rules are gender-differentiated in intimate and familial matters, above all, with men seemingly given greater rights and responsibilities” (113). The assigning of responsibilities to men more than to women is

directly proportional to the accountability before the God as His vicegerents on earth. Polygamy is impossible on the terms of justice as mentioned in Quran. Wadud who is dead against polygamy argues that it is suggested in Quran as a just solution to sponsor the orphans (*Qur'an* 83). The complementary roles of men and women in marital relationships as defined in Quran expel the situation of polygamy.

The most controversial verses(56:22,23, 56:35-37, 55:58,55:70) narrate virtuous men being rewarded beautiful virgins in paradise for their good deeds on earth, the interpretations of which tarnish men and women alike. Interpreting in the contextual chronological order of descending of the Qur'anic verses which refer to hurulayn, Wadud substantiates that towards the end of the revelation period, Qur'an evolutionally talks of companionship than hurulayn.

At the first level is the hur-ul-ayn, which reflects the level of thinking of the makkan community described above. The second level, which is clearly depicted during the Madinan period, (and in no way similar to Makkan period) represents the practical model of Islamic community life. Here the Quran uses the term *zawj*. Finally, at the third level, the Quran transcends both of these and expresses a perspective of companionship much greater than even these. (*Qur'an* 54)

The Christian tradition believes, asserts and preaches virginity as virtuous. While referring to some of the wives of the Prophet united with him not in their first marriages, Barlas says that purity should not be confused with virginity, as the former are presented as pure and virtuous in the Quran (155). Menstruation is also considered as an impure factor to exclude women from religious spaces, which is understood today as the God

given excuse and relaxation for women in the physical obligations of religion. Quran's usage of *Harth* (farmland) (2:223) in talking about women in marital relationship has been read as reducing women to a substance for men's pleasure because of the traditional literal translations and interpretations. Instead of defining the word in terms of utmost care and attention constantly needed to maintain a farmland, the negative sexual connotations equating farmland and women has become prominent. The custom of female genital mutilation is associated with Islam from the above perspective. Ali reports, "The majority of Muslims do not practise any form of female circumcision and where it is common, it is generally performed by members of all religious groups; in Egypt, for instance, both Muslims and Christians practise female genital cutting (100).

Salva says that Islam does not instruct concrete dress code but the concept of clothing, which is equally instructed for men and women alike ("Mugham 12). Islam, with reference to some Quran verses, is accused of secluding women into strict dress codes misreading the concept of modest clothing. Barlas says, "The Quran does not single out women when it comes to the issue of modesty of dress" (158). The modesty is extended in male-female interaction in public when instructing to lower unnecessary gazes of both men and women (24:30-31). Wadud says, "The Quran acknowledges the virtue of modesty and demonstrates it through the prevailing practises. The principle of modesty is important-not the veiling and seclusion which were manifestations particular to that context" (*Qur'an* 10). The Islamic concept of dressing covers the body parts in the modest style of regional cultures.

The Quran's method of dividing paternal property among children is accused of treating men and women unequal (4:11, 12). Mumtas finds fault with the discriminating

property division suggested in Quran problematising the discriminations and the situations of childless, sonless parents or with adopted children (“Sthreevirudha” 22). The Quran has given women access to paternal property as a gradual step to status, at a time when women were considered as properties. The property division instructed by the Quran is one among many possible proportional arrangements of dividing property (Wadud *Qur’an* 89). The interpretations of these verses should be updated on the basis of theory of justice as given importance in the Quran and implemented justly. Regarding such verses of ‘male-female inequality’, Hidayatullah says, “the Quran uses a gradual approach to change entrenched customs, beliefs and practises, except in fundamental matters” (96).

The Muslim societies have blindly followed the earlier exegetes who had made books of rules and regulations from the revered texts, sidelining the philosophic spiritual humanitarian importance of Islam. Barlas in her book criticises the traditional „restrictive reading“ of religious texts in forming a strict patriarchal image for Islam (64). Instead of giving importance to the spiritual and philosophic aspects of religion, the traditional method continues to frighten the followers referring to hellfire and afterlife than exciting the pleasures in heaven. The majority Muslims do not care to read into the texts but follow the rituals and customs in the name of religion.

...the Qur’an comes in various dialogic forms: teacher versus student, imam versus follower, student versus student. Most importantly, its teaching is characterised by the “debating of argument and counterargument to clarify the basis for decision-making”; although dialogue does not exclude the inscription of

authority, still it demonstrates a resistance to taking authority out of the dialogic, face-to-face context. (Mutman 45)

The second wave Islamic feminists are never in haste to prove male-female equality nor are they apologetic of some verses giving more status to men than women. Jerusha Tanner Lamptey says, “Muslim women interpreters distinguish between two types of Quranic difference, lateral and hierarchial. Lateral difference is divinely intended and as such, never serves as a basis of evaluation. Hierarchial difference, on the other hand, is affiliated with, *taqwa* and is the basis of hierarchial assessment” (244). From rigid feminist perspectives, the Islamic feminist scholarship is relating to the theories of gender justice while analysing religious texts, practises as well as every aspect of life on earth. Ali writes, “Honesty requires me to concede the strength of some scriptural interpretations positing a privileged role for males in family and society” (151, 133). Developed out of the limitations of gender equality in exegesis and theology, the concerns of gender justice widen the scope of Islamic feminism into a larger political realm. Raja Rhouni refers to the Post-foundationalist Islamic gender critique as “engaging in dialogue with the tradition and applying contextual approach in order to expand the methodologies of exegesis, rather than undermining foundations and traditions” (qtd in Kynsilehto13).

The Quran establishes the concept of justice instead of becoming a mechanical manual to human life, necessitating the human rationale to work. According to Sara Salem, ‘Qur’an is post-patriarchal’. The Muslim women critics of Kerala discuss the concept of justice in their commentaries of the interpretations of the Quran verses. Ali says, “Treating the Quran as a document with some verses bound by context, but others

containing broad principles of justice that should take precedence over specific, time-bound commands, is one essential element of feminist and other reformist interpretation of scripture (55, 53). The feminist exegetical attempt of the Quran has not happened in Malayalam, though the Islamic feminist movements are active in the state. Wadud writes, “In the case of gender reform in Islam one underlying idea is women’s full agency, or khilafah, before Allah. This is spoken in terms of another underlying idea: justice and women’s full human rights.” (*Inside* 89). The religious scholarship of women, co-ordinated or not co-ordinated, either in secular academic milieu or in theology, counter the stereotyped negative image of Muslim women. From accommodating different gender actualisations to deconstructing the deep rooted gendered roles of men and women in social political religious life, the new studies in cultural studies think beyond gender, race, class and religion. The Decolonial feminist studies criticise the concept of gender itself as a coloniser’s construct to have control over the colony’s assets, identity and culture. Analysing the second wave Islamic feminist readings of Quran, Hidayatullah stresses on four important aspects of reading justice in Quran.

First, the trajectory argument lends support to the notion that the interpretation of each of the Qur’an verses must cohere with the whole Quran’s overall progression toward greater social justice for humanity. Second, it provides an explanation for the appearance in the Qur’an of certain verses that may negatively impact women or limit their agency, and the exegetes do not have to “discard” these verses in order for the Quran to be just to women. Third, the problematic meanings drawn from these verses are explained by the error of the reader who reads them in isolation instead of in view of the larger progression of the whole Quran. In other

words, the fault for such meaning lies not with the verses themselves but rather with the reader's shortsightedness. Fourth, the trajectory argument serves as a justification for the exegetes to depart from literal readings of the text that are problematic for women. (Hidayatullah 99)

CHAPTER 2

GENDERED SPACES OF SOCIAL CRITICISM

The agency and subjectivity of feminist writers and their perspectives of gender justice counter the male hegemonic nature of intellectual activism in written literature. The gendered spaces of literature are not subjected to detailed studies along with the gender injustices in the society. The discourse of discrimination engenders with the discussing of the terms 'woman critic', 'woman poet' and 'woman novelist' in the rarefied language. The standpoint narratives of the female writers critically engage with the anti-women situations in respective societies. Their subject concerns address, highlight and problematise the regional aspects of gendering than the accused generalised pattern of the criticism of universal patriarchy. The multiple subject positions-daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother, employed, educated, employer- complicate the identity of women in the male dominant family-oriented social structures of Kerala. The literary profiles of the women get cast out of the male assumed spaces of 'delicate' female actualisations as in music, dance, and painting. The label feminist is mistakenly considered as anti-men in the male mainstream. Unlike the women from other communities, the Muslim women writers constantly have to take stand regarding their choice of religion, attitudes and criticism in the secular/religion binary structures of the public. The books and articles of Khadeeja Mumtas, Shamshad Hussain, K.P. Salva, Fousiya Shams and Ummul Fayiza diversify the heterogeneous category Muslim women particularly in the field of literature.

The instinctive argumentative tradition of social criticism debates the theories and practises of justice in every aspect of life on earth. The form and framework of criticism, style and attitude of the critic as well as its effects and impacts upon the target together determine design and change the social discourse. Patricia Hill Collins locates intellectual activism at the impact point of social criticism in the society. She lists 'speaking truth to people' and 'speaking truth to power' as the two strategies of contemporary intellectual activism (xii). The solution-oriented social criticisms confining but only to different genres of literature delay the transformative impacts in the society.

The literary discourse of Malayalam, the Dravidian language with a history of disputed origin from mid-Tamil and influenced by Sanskrit in grammar and vocabulary, reflects social criticism. The writers express, emphasize, and project the aspects of social justice in fiction and non-fiction alike. The history of written literature is complicated by the deep social political cultural issues of class, caste, gender and religion. Though the pattern of social criticism impact in better development indicators in the state in comparison with other states of India, social injustices are not completely eradicated from the region. Scripted in Thaliyolas, *Ramacharitham*(12th century), *Bhashakautilyam*(12th century), translation of *Arthashastra*, *Doothavakyam*(14th century) and *Brahmandapuram*(15th century), *Adhyathma Ramyanam*(16th century) are the known classic works in Malayalam before the establishment of printing press. The classics in Sanskrit *Ashtangahridaya*, *Amarakosha* and *Panchatantra* had been translated to Arabi Malayalam. The genre of prose, which prominently subjects social criticism, had been influenced by poetry in style, language and technics in the beginning. The Christian missionaries had extensively contributed to the prose literature after introducing printing

press in the 16th century, with Bible translations as well as books over varied subjects of concern. The first travelogue in any Indian language, *Varthamanpusthakam* by Paremmakkal Thoma Kathanar (1737-1799) stands out important among these. Malayalam owes to Herman Gundert (1814-1893) for more than twenty books including Malayalam-English Dictionary and books on grammar, language and Kerala history.

The notable essayists of the 19th and 20th centuries, Kunhiraman Menon (1854–1936) Kandathil Varghese Mappillai (1857-), Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar (1861–1895), C. P. Achutha Menon (1863-1937) Appu Nedungadi (1866–1934) Appan Thampuran (1876-1942), B.Bhageerathy Amma(1890-1938), J.Kunjulakshmi Amma, T Ammukutty Amma, and M.Haleema Beevi (1918-2000) were social reformers in the context of pre-Independence periods of Kerala. They were literally constructing a developing Kerala, reflecting the turbulence of freedom struggle, spirit and the resistance. The male writers stressed on the political and economic changes in the society while the women writers distinctly problematised the patriarchal familial hierarchies, gender disparities and discrimination of women. From the last decades of the nineteenth century until the first half of the twentieth century, the social and political vigour of the society can be said as activated maintained and channelised by the magazines *Vidyavinodini*, *Bhashaposhini*, *Rasikaranjini*, *Kerala Chandrika*, *Kerala Patrika*, *Kerala Sanchari*, *Sudharma*, *Sharada*, *Mahila*, *Sreemathi*, *Vanitha Kusumam*, *MalayalaMasika*, *Bharatha Chandrika*, and *The Malabar spectator*. The tradition of periodicals serves the purpose of literary, social, political and religious discussions active in the public today as well with hundreds of magazines and the two score Newspapers in Malayalam. When the literature was the exclusive space of expression of elite men back in the history, women and low-

caste people were prohibited from learning. At least a few upper class women were accommodated later in the realm of reading and writing with the help of those men transformed by the renaissance movements and freedom struggle. They promoted learning and education among their fellow women in particular, but their efforts were unmarked unrecognised and neglected in the history books of literary and cultural movements written by men.

The actualisations of women were blooming in oral tradition of songs, hymns, lullabies and stories even when men dominated the world of writing. Preferring scriptures and written literature, the earlier historians unconsidered the oral tradition and thus minimised the possibilities of archiving them. The subject concerns of women writers in the beginning were directly related to their respective religions. They developed spaces for women on the basis of their readings of epics, classics and Holy Texts-the Bible, Qur'an and Gita contrasting the patriarchal anti-women interpretations and practises of religions. The men who were against the women writers were afraid to criticise them because of the religious themes, interpretations and expressions in their writings. Their piety and spirituality were in contrast with the then trend of men's atheism. Despite the increasing percent of women poets and fictionists, the sharp social criticism of women in non-fiction bothers men. The field of criticism is still considered as 'masculine' in Kerala with men authorising themselves in literary and social criticisms. The prominent among the Malayalam literary critics are Kesari Balakrishna Pillai (1889-1960), Kuttikrishna Marar (1900-1973), Prof. Mannikoth Ramunni Nair (Sanjayan)(1903-1943), Joseph Mundassery(1903-1977), M.P. Paul(1904-1952), S. Guptan Nair (1913-2006), N Krishna

Pillai(1916-1988), Sukumar Azheecode(1926-2012), M. Leelavati(1927-) and M.N. Vijayan(1930-2007).

The influence of the representations of women in male-written novels as household angels earlier confined the women within the domestic spaces. The women critics countered the 'noble' idolising of women in the journals *Sudharma*, *Sharada*, *Laxmi Bhai*, *Shrimati*, *Mahila*, *Vanitha Kusumam*, *Malayalamasika*, *Muslim Mahila* and *Bharatha Chandrika* published by women themselves. The literary reviews by women problematised the impactful intrinsic patriarchal pattern of gendering in the society. P. Geetha in her book *Ezhuthammamar* (2014), mentions B. Bhagirathi Amma who has written an article "Novel Vaayana" ["Reading Novels"] in *Mahila* in 1902, in which the latter asserts women as outnumbering men in reading novels. She inspires the women of Kerala by referring to the female novelists in Bengal and adds that the birth of novels and awakening of women are closely linked (262). The first generation of Malayalam women writers had succeeded in constructing the discourse of gender and feminism in literature. J. Kunjulakshmi Amma has voiced for 'a room of their own' for learned women in the article titled "Keraleeya Sthreekalkorupadesham" ["An Advice for the Women of Kerala"] published in the journal *Sudharma* in 1903, twenty two years before the publication of *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf (Geetha 261).

In a deliberate attempt to mark women's literary history, J Devika's book *Herself: Early Writings on Gender by Malayalee Women 1898-1938*(2005), translations of essays by select women from Malayalam, shows light on the range of subjects, debates and feminist literary discussions of twenty nine noted women essayists. Their perspectives, attitudes and suggestions regarding marriage, family, education, gender and

spirituality published in journals with lesser circulations, spaced a feminist tradition contributing to the renaissance awakening of the early twentieth century. The accused elite identity of the women writers was the impact of the failure of renaissance and nationalist movements in equally addressing the lower classes to impact in their reduced literary efforts (Geetha 50). Their womanist language, expressions and themes had influenced the nature, features and style of prose in Malayalam. The last decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century witnessed the active literary efforts of women, only to be unrecorded in history. If that tradition of literary criticism had continued and not disrupted, Kerala would have by now developed its own feminist methodologies and theories. The momentum of independence struggle and political changes post-independence had cracked down the literary activism of women critics during the middle decades of the twentieth century.

Hussain in her book *Neunapakshathinum Lingapadavikkumidayil* explores the literary life of Muslim women during the twentieth century in which she projects the critic and editor M. Haleema Beevi who had started the first magazine for Muslim women in Thiruvalla, *Muslim Mahila* in 1938 which was later renamed to *Adhunika Vanitha* for wider circulation (*Neunapakshathinum* 49). Due to the criticism from the community and economic reasons like hike in the building rent, heavy printing duty and non-co-operation of agents she was not able to continue with *Adhunika Vanitha*. From 1945 to 1948, with a strong political nature at the peak of independence struggle she had run the magazine *Bharatha Chandrika* with Vaikom Muhammed Basheer and Vakkom Abdul Kader as sub editors (Shams “Muslim Vanitha” 518).

Bharatha Chandrika had given importance for literature and the prominent Malayalam writers of the time like Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, Balamani Amma, Guptan Nair, O N V Kurup, Ponkunnam Varkey, P.A.Syed Muhammed and Vaikom Muhammed Basheer had contributed to its pages. The weekly which had become a daily newspaper was made to stop publishing for the head straight journalism and criticism of the state government ruled by Sir CP. After sustaining many troubled times and debts she founded *Adhunika Vanitha*, a magazine again in 1970 with an all-women editorial board. Though intended to address Muslim women alone in the beginning, with articles on women's issues in general, soon Haleema Beevi switched from being exclusively community concerned. Like their predecessors in the beginning of the century, the writer's guild consisting of Thankamma Malik, Rajamma Yusuf, V.S.Kasim B.Mistress, Ayesha Mayan, Ansar Beegum, B.S. Syeda and Sainaba stressed on the need for women's education and active social participation.

The renowned Malayalam short story writer K.Saraswathi Amma's (1919-1975) book *Purushanmarillatha Lokam* (1958) is the first book of feminist theory in Malayalam based on social cultural situations of Kerala. The five essays in this book discussing radical feminism and criticism of patriarchal constructs in Kerala were indeed her takes on writing and life as well, much mostly scattered in her stories (Kanakalatha 217). The biased male hegemonic field of literary criticism prompted M. Leelavati (1927-) to engage with the study of Malayalam literature. Though she had published eight books purely on literary criticism before 1980, her name was not mentioned in the book about Malayalam literary criticism, *Malayala Sahithya Vimarshanam* by Sukumar Azheecode published in 1981. The neglect existed even in the 1988 edition of that book (Geetha

209). She published *Malayala Kavitha Sahithya Charithram* in 1980, a book of history of earlier Malayalam poets, at a time when histories are mistakenly understood as exclusively male-written. Unlike her successors, Leelavathi's critical approach was not feministic though her later writings turn to feminism. It was she who first introduced Karl Jung into Malayalam (Geetha 216). The books in Malayalam and English on poets, poetry, history, feminism, representations and literary theory constitute her lengthy literary profile as a critic.

The impact of literature when categorised under Cultural Studies is seen in the books and articles of the later women critics Geetha, Devika, S. Sharadakutty and Hussain as they problematise social constructs, family roles and gender justice. Referred to as feminists than social critics, they demand space for women and restructuring of social positions. Influenced more or less by the western feminist movements, theories and methodologies these critics have discovered, projected and celebrated the oral and written literary expressions of women in Kerala. They also scrutinise the gender injustices in politics, popular media and culture. The articles of social criticism by these women writers in Malayalam magazines and newspapers and their presence in public debates in Television channels are well received. The feminist methodology of rereading the classic literary and religious texts has been integrated by the women writers in Kerala. *Sthraina Kamasoothram* (2012) by K.R. Indira, the feminist reading of Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra* (6th century BCE) is an example. Rosy Thampi's book *Sthraina Athmeeyatha* (2009) discusses female spirituality seeking the feminine in the revered masculine aspects of Gods. Devika, Geetha and Hussain contribute to rewriting literary „histories“ in their works *Her-self: Early Writings on Gender by Malayalee Women 1898-1938*,

Ezhuthammamar and *Neunapakshathinum Lingapadavikkumidayil* respectively. Though these attempts deconstruct the ‘father’ positions in different genres of Malayalam literature, as observed by Geetha, the intellectual cultural milieu of Kerala is not celebrating centenaries or anniversaries of women writers and their books (85).

Unlike in the early decades of twentieth century, the working editors of the women’s magazines in Malayalam are all men and they decide what women should and should not think, eat, read and wear. Tips to healthcare, beauty, cooking, parenting, and gardening are the permanent contents of the prominent magazines *Vanitha*, *Grihalakshmi*, *Mahilaratnam*, *Mahilachandrika* and *Aramam* along with interviews of celebrities to increase readership. Neethu Das says, “working in accordance with male gaze, ‘women’s magazines’ are rich sources of conventional ideologies of femininity” (250). The popular magazines which divert the intellectual growth of women commonly have a last page ‘society lady and her hen-pecked husband’ cartoons satirising women themselves.

A few notable women social critics write in weeklies like *Mathrubhumi*, *Bhashaposhini*, *Madhyamam*, *Deshabhimani*, *Pachakkuthira* and *Chandrika* and mostly they are approached to write on concerns and issues of gender. The highbrow magazines with reduced leadership of women reserve prominent cover stories of politics, economics and religion for male writers. At present, *Sangaditha*, run by Anweshi, the women’s activist NGO is the only magazine in Malayalam, where all the articles are contributed by women. The anecdotal anthologies by women on specific themes and experiences constitute the trending feminist discourse in Malayalam recently. The books *Penyathra* [Women-Travels], *Penchillakal* [Women-pals], *Penrathrikal* [Women-Nights],

Penpravaasam [Women-Migration] and *Ranimar Padminimar* [Ranis and Padminis], with male or female editors, are the feminist attempts to occupy the masculine spaces.

The active academic discourse of the feminist theology spaces in the religion-centered social systems of Kerala. The writings by Muslim women gain popularity as they problematise the anti-women practise of the community which is accused of orthodoxy, male hegemony and misogyny. The women writers in the middle decades of twentieth century Haleema Beevi, Ansar Beegum, Subaida P.K., Saida B.S., P.N. Fathimakutty Madaniyya, Sainaba and Maryam Beevi Marakkar had easily handled discussed and defined the role of women in religion (Hussain *Neunapakshathinum*59). Today, the magazines run by the Muslim organisations approach request and even compel women to write to defend Islam before the secular public. The patronising pattern is justified in the name of the religion where men continue to plan, arrange and organise the social activism of women.

Shams's article "Muslim Vanitha Masikakal" traces the history of magazines for Muslim women during the twentieth century. P.K.Moosakkutty's *Muslim Mahila* (1923), Idava Jamal's *Ponnumol*(1972), Thamarassery Muhammed's *Priyasakhi*(1974), M. Basheer Palakkad's *Mallika*, K.A.Malayali's *Madhuri* and *Suruma*, M.K.Pavannoor's *Mappilapennu*, Abdul Jalal Moulavi's *Sanmargam* were the male-editor magazines for Muslim women with articles on religious and familial responsibilities and stressing the need for individual education and learning (Shams "Muslim Vanitha" 516). The patriarchal purpose of conditioning women for family sake is carried out in the politics of separate magazines for women.

The family magazines and women's magazines are mistakenly equated to each other in Kerala. The change from individual-owned magazines in early twentieth century to the trusts-running periodicals is markedly visible regarding the gendering of women in the magazines of different sects within the Muslim community. The politics of the patron organisation reflect in JIH's *Aramam*, MGM's *Pudava*, AP Sunni group's *Poonkavanam* EK Sunni Group's *SanthushataKudumbam* and Chandrika group's *Mahila Chandrika*. The concentration of religious organisations and activities in the Malabar accounts to the establishing of the prominent Muslim publications and publishing houses in Calicut district in particular. Within limited circulation ranges, the contents of the magazines address the heterogeneous category of Kerala Muslim women and relate them to the religiosity identity of the Global Islam. The magazines for Muslim women potential the literary spaces of actualisation and social consciousness particularly for homemakers beyond the biological necessities and patriarchal situations.

Aramam is the only magazine with an all-women editorial board since its first print. *Aramam* and *Pudava* feature articles and cover stories of social importance, encourage the literary initiatives of women and celebrate women achievers, leaders and entrepreneurs. Habeeba Teacher was the only women editor of *Pudava*, who had served the magazine for more than ten years until the split in the patron organisation in 2002. The presence of women editors and writers, though minimal, positively impact the readership of the Muslim women which become significant since women in general are not actively included in the mainstream reading culture and public libraries of Kerala.

The induced pre-determined priorities for women's readership exclude the un-gendered aspects of knowledge, science, philosophy and theology. The magazines for

Muslim women in Kerala stress on domesticity and religion with majority articles addressing preaching and conditioning women on religious terms for family sake. The excerpts from Qur'an, Islamic history and jurisprudence exclusively concerning women and family form the subject range of the magazines for Muslim women. The patriarchal pattern of family-orienting in the articles written by men and women emphasise the domestic image of women, less-focusing on the biological social and cultural actualisation of women as individuals. The process of reading enhances knowledge, agency and identity and furthers the reading beyond the imposed domesticities.

Mahila Chandrika, the magazine for women from the Chandrika group which came into being in 1995 is different from *Aramam*, *Pudava*, *Poonkavanam* and *Santhushtakudumbam* in style, content and structure. It exhibits a secular character imitating the mainstream magazines *Vanitha* and *Grihalakshmi* in style and layout though the publishing patron is a Muslim trust. The readership of Muslim women activated accelerated and administered by these magazines are unrecognised in the secular mainstream of Kerala. The separate magazines for women in the accused anti-women labeled community of Muslims becomes highly relevant for providing spaces of literary actualisation for women which is still unconsidered by other religious communities. The encouragement for reading benefits the Muslim women and counters the popular argument that Muslim men deny knowledge access to women. The widening of frameworks, perspectives and contents of the magazines erase the anti-women image the Muslim community is always haunted with.

The first wave Islamic feminism has energised the writings of women and men channelising the feminist perspectives of Qur'an and other related texts with respect to

the social secular style structures of Kerala. The men-led progressive and orthodox Muslim groups condemned the concept of Islamic feminism in the beginning calling the very term an oxymoron. The rise, growth and development of Islamic feminism as an active academic discipline globally, deconstruct the male authoritarian attitudes readings and interpretations of religion in the Muslim societies. The Malayalam translations of the Islamic feminist studies by Amina Wadud and Fatema Mernissi have been well received in the mainstream literary spheres of Kerala as the criticism of Islam by the ‘suppressed’ Muslim women writers. The narratives of Nujood, Malala, Ayan Hirsi Ali translated to Malayalam line up with those of Taslima Nasrin, and are celebrated by the secular liberal public to other the Muslim community specifically Muslim men.

In its detailed foreword to the novel *Barsa*, popularly considered as the first Islamic feminist attempt in Malayalam, the critic A. P.Kunjamu celebrates the possibility of the discourse of Islamic feminism and concludes *Barsa* as the Islamic reading of feminism than the feminist reading of Islam (“Muslim” 16). The visibility of the feminist agency of the Muslim women writers as well as their literary efforts-fiction and non-fiction- graphs up in the Kerala public sphere since 2000. N.P. Hafiz Muhammed in his book *Keralathile Muslim Sthreekalude Varthamanakalam* (2013) emphasizes the need of increased sociological studies to deconstruct the secular liberal attributed ever-suffering image of Muslim women marking the trend, development and subjectivities of the Muslim women (18). The impactful subjecting of Muslim women by the Muslim women writers becomes the political statement of Islamic feminism in Kerala. The fast developing discourse based on the gender justice readings of Islamic texts and practises deeply empowers the writings of the Muslim women of Kerala. The living experiences of

women writers in the heterogeneous category 'Muslim women' undo the stereotyped sympathised and objectified image of Muslim women in the public. The Malayalam works of Mumtas, Hussain, Salva, Shams and Fayiza represent the post '90 politics of the Muslim women writing about Muslim women.

Khadeeja Mumtas

Born in 1955 in Thrissur district, Malayalam author Khadeeja Mumtas has settled in Calicut for her career as a doctor in Calicut Medical College. Mastered in Gynaecology, before retiring as a professor in Gynaecology and Obstetrics in 2015, she has been seriously into writing and has to her credit ten books including novels, memoirs, short stories and essays. The first female doctor-novelist in Kerala, her gender concerns as well as social criticism are set in the background of medical field like those of the renowned Malayalam writer Punathil Kunhabdulla. This passionate reader refers to her literary interest as the extension of her mother's scribbles. She asserts her courage to withstand everything as inherited from her mother Fathima, who even after her spouse's death gave priority in educating all her eight daughters, at a time women's percent in education and learning was very low (*Purushanariyatha* 132).

Her second book *Barsa* (2007) which has won Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award in 2010 accelerated her popularity among literary circles. The book directly engages with the tenets of Islam problematising the concepts and practises of misogyny in the texts. She admits the influence of Islamic feminist authors like Fatema Mernissi, Amina Wadud as well as Maryam Jameela in her religious perspectives (*Barsa* 8). The criticisms against *Barsa* and Mumtas from the Muslim societies reflect the frustrations of the male

hegemonic religious authorities over the writings of a Muslim woman. On the other hand, the Islamophobic secular public of Kerala dignifies honours and projects the stand-points of the writer.

In simple, lucid, straight and dialogic language, Mumtas explores and experiments novel themes and gender concerns in her works. With her religion midway to Sufism, the elite and selective ideals of Mumtas look down upon the Muslim culture and societies in her novels. Mumtas's political leaning towards Left Democratic Front influences her secular feminist framework of social criticism. Her feminist politics of writing religion impacts influences and empowers the identity of modern Muslim women. For Mumtas, beyond social commitment, writing is a time of self-expression to believe in and console herself (Fasila and Najda 61).

The first novel of Mumtas *Athmatheerthangalil Munginivarannu* (2004), earlier serialised in *Chandrika Weekly*, is a flat narrative based on her family's short-lived relationship with her son's friend (Fasila and Najda 61). Her second book *Barsa* (2007), a novel set in Saudi Arabia, subjects Islam, Muslim community and Muslim women in particular, discussing religious texts and practises. The loose narrative from a convert Muslim woman's perspective triggered controversies for criticising the religious texts from a feminist perspective. The absence of hijab, the mistaken symbol of piety and religiosity, also result in the criticism against Mumtas in the community circles while for the same, she is welcomed by the secular public. The book has won K.V.Surendranath Award in 2007, Cherukad Award in 2009 and Kerala Sahitya Akademi award in 2009.

The novel pictures the young doctor couples Sabitha and Rasheed working in different hospitals in Saudi Arabia. The protagonist Sabitha who has converted to Islam for her love affair and marriage with Rasheed always recollects her elite Hindu upbringing. In a first attempt of its kind in Malayalam literature, Mumtas projects the anti-women practises among the Muslims and deeply analyses the verses from the Quran and Hadith through the brainy convert. The title *Barsa*, which means a woman who has unveiled her face, refers to Sukaina bint-al Husain, a historic figure in the 8th century. The writer and the protagonist merge into one regarding the standpoints towards religion and community in the novel.

In the foreword of the book, Mumtas argues for the deconstruction of conservative interpretations and redefining of verses of the Quran in accordance with time and culture to create a better image for Muslims in the society (*Barsa* 7). The novel is criticised for the secular feminist framework of condemning Islam and its symbols as well as for the pointless comparison of cultures of Kerala and Saudi Arabia to the extent of racist comments towards the residents of Arabia. The orthodox Muslim men's reluctance to acknowledge women preaching or writing about Islam reflects in the controversies as they consider theology as an exclusively masculine area. Mumtas strongly believes that the Merciful, Compassionate God inside her heart would not lessen women second-rate to men (*Barsa*8). The non-meticulous presentation of the sensitive aspects of any live religion, its texts and practises accounts to severe criticism in religion-oriented societies. Hussain appreciates *Barsa* as a feminist criticism of Islamic philosophy, prophet's practises and Islamic history problematising the life of Muslim women but finds problem with its outside method of criticising Islam considering all the

aspects of religion bend for men sake as Islamic (*Musleemum*18,30). She has received personal letters critiquing the novel and was given Islamic books and references to imply that being a woman not in hijab she is ignorant of religious knowledge (*Purushanariyatha* 128).Salva says that though *Barsa* raises relevant questions about the updating of Islam and women's situations, it is not finding answers from Islam ("*Barsa* Thurakkenda" 64).

The author's way of positioning Islam and Saudi Arabia against a different nostalgic elite Hinduism-dominant tradition of Kerala and India reflects throughout the novel. The presence of a mystique character, who befriends Rasheed becomes a mouthpiece for Mumtas to criticise some Islamic principles and practises where the writer-critic becomes active in the novel. In his book *Barsayile Barsa*(2013), Haneef Pullipparamb criticises *Barsa* for fictionalising history and necessitates a gender unconcerned reading of Quran as well as Islamic practises while pointing out a pack of factual errors in *Barsa*. Her third book *Doctor Daivamalla*(2009), a memoir of a lady gynaec doctor portraying real lives in and around hospitals, becomes rare of its kind as a genre in Malayalam literature, and shows her flare for writing amidst hectic hospital emergencies as well as familial routines. *Athuram* (2010), her third novel and the fourth book presents the campus life of medical college for the first time in Malayalam literature. The academic, political and cultural moves of two time periods of the student community are captured in the novel which has Muslim life in its centre. The excess obsession for revolutionary party, the glorification of the Campus life of Kerala during the '80s, the way of speaking for all characters, the hasty storytelling and the scornful

attitude towards religious symbols have resulted in some aesthetic and technical fallacies in the novel.

Sargam Samooham (2011) a book of book reviews of some famous authors in Malayalam from a writing reader's perspective is her fifth work. The style of empathising with the characters, overwhelmed by the theme, language and the persona of the writers is the characteristic feature of her reviews of the renowned Malayalam works *Delhi Gathakal*, *Ormakalude Pagoda*, *Jeevithathinte Pusthakam*, *Akbar Kakkattilinte Naalu Novelukal*, *Manushyanu Oru Amugham*, *Kayar*, *Francis Ittikora*, *Vriddha Sadanam*, *Pathummayude Aadu*, and *Hiranyakashipu*. *Balyathil Ninn irangi Vanna Oral* (2011), a collection of stories revolving around motherhood and hospitals is her sixth publication. In the foreword of the book, Maina Umaiban observes the absence of embellished language, novel technicalities or any new streams of writing stories. She adds that the sharpness of words than their technical expertise astonishes the reader in the works of the doctor (10). Her seventh book *Mathrukam* (2012) is a collection of anecdotes of a gynaecologist who has the everyday experience of motherhood and maternity in all its forms. Salva praises the book which details in a beautiful flow the complex complications, diseases and disorders in pregnancy and childbirth followed by the unbound happiness or painful tears of mothers, as an expertise in writing craft where creative blend with medical knowledge ("Sughaprasavam" 64). The glimpses of a romanticised glorified motherhood from a scientific perspective lay scattered in all her works, different from the celebrated attributes of motherhood like 'ever-loving', 'extremely tolerant' and 'living for husband and children'.

Her eighth publication *Purushanariyatha Sthreemughangal*(2012) is an anthology of prose on varied subjects from a feminist perspective earlier published in weeklies. Divided into five sections, the book discusses the female faces unknown to men in families, politics, religion, love, science and society. Mumtas positions herself as a critical insider of the community even when she admires liberal feminist ideologies. The novel *Neettiyezhuthukal* (2017) and a collection of short stories *Naam jeevitham Chuttedukkunnavar*(2017) are her recent works. The critical stances of Mumtas while subjecting women, medical field, religion, spirituality and Muslim societies in fiction mark the characteristic peculiarity of her works. Influenced by feminism, her gender justice concerns are rights-bound even though she wrongly compares men and women. She associates with social cultural women's forums to fight gender injustices actively after her retirement from service. Her books project the problems of Muslim women in particular within the community ranging from child marriage to reforming personal law. She admires the teachings of Islam, rebukes the 'outdated' practises and rituals of the community and always flags for a blend of Islam and Hindu customs- neither Christian nor any other religions -for India. Mumtas refers only to specific regional Hindu practises and never to the religious texts of Hinduism while she identifies herself as an Indian Muslim, not an Arab Muslim. The concept of spirituality she puts forth is related to Sufi and Hindu philosophies (*Purushanariyatha* 129).

She is unconcerned about the patriarchal concepts of Hindu societies imposed on familial women like husband is everything, cooking is feminine and homemaking is art as modeled by Sabitha in *Barsa*, which by itself contradicts the women in Islam detailed in it (Hussain *Musleemum*57). Unlike Vaikom Muhammed Basheer who has subjected

Muslim lives beautifully in his works, she fails to realise that Muslims in Kerala, like Muslims of all other regions, are living their own blend version of Islam with regional cultures which is natural and possible in practise. Critiquing one culture with the tools and dimensions of another culture creates problems when she compares the Hindu concept of marital life as in India and the Islamic practise in Saudi Arabia (Hussain *Musleemum* 29). The most important theme in her writings is the romanticised motherhood which she celebrates scientifically as a gynaecologist and emotionally as a mother. These glorifications influenced by the Indian mother God concept conclude motherhood as the peak status of humane assimilating with the divine and exclude other feminine actualisations as well as childless women. Fayiza observes that like many mainstream Malayali writers, she is stuck with the first wave Islamic feminism of 1980s (Interview). The medical field based fictions of Mumtas contribute medical terms to the Malayalam literary arena. The Muslim identity significant as well as her designation as a gynaecologist attribute increased percentage of autobiographical elements in her works. Written vastly about the problems of early marriage, polygamy, marginalisation and orthodoxy in Kerala, the community criticism in the books of Mumtas lacks text-based or practical solutions.

Shamshad Hussain

Based in Malappuram, Shamshad Hussain (1972-), Reader and research guide at the Department of Malayalam, Tirur centre of Sree Sankaracharya Sanskrit University is the recipient of K.M.George Memorial Award for Criticism/Research in 2010. Renowned for rewriting histories from feminist perspectives, her doctoral thesis was titled *Malabar Kalapathinte Vamozhi Parambaryam* [*Oral Tradition of Malabar Revolt*], a study based

on the narratives of the survivors of Malabar revolt of 1921 by the people of Malabar particularly Muslims, against the British. She has worked as a field investigator with MH Ilias, Associate Professor at Jamia Millia Islamia New Delhi on “Documentation of Arabic Malayalam and Linguistic-cultural Traditions of Mappila Muslims of Kerala”.

Academically active since 2008, her first book *Neunapakshathinum Lingapadavikkumidayil* (2009), a statistical study based on the social political critical cultural engagements of Muslim women of Kerala during the 20th century, illustrates the untold intellectual activism of the women of the community who were until then accused as ‘illiterate ignorant and suppressed souls under orthodox patriarchy’. Her studies earlier published in different journals form the book *Musleemum Streeyum Allaathaval* (2015) and her article “Charithram Pennezhuthumbol” has been prescribed in syllabus for graduate students by Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. Her studies on the popular song tradition of Muslims, *Mappilapaattu* and the related performances of the community, as the cultural spaces of actualisations for women are the historic re-readings of the past from a feminist perspective. She welcomes the space created by Islamic feminism for women within religion though she is concerned about the Muslim culture in Kerala than Islamic texts and interpretations. The secular mainstream labels Hussain as a ‘fundamentalist’ for her standpoints supporting the Muslim culture and women. On the other hand, she defends the community in terms of identity politics even though she is accused as ‘irreligious’ by the orthodox Muslim groups particularly for her hijab-less appearance.

Hussain’s cardinal work *Neunapakshathinum Lingapadavikkumidayil*, is the first book in Malayalam analysing the social-cultural spaces of Muslim women in Kerala. The

cultural study politically marks Muslim women of agency and subjectivity in different fields, traditionally and on modern terms, and deconstructs the prejudices upon the Muslim women. As stated in the preface, the category Muslim women includes women from Kasargod to Thiruvananthapuram, practising or non-practising the religion and with or without hijab. Hussain's categorising of Muslim women by accepting the regional differences in culture and giving less importance to the Global Muslim woman identity is a characteristic feature of the second wave Islamic feminist methodology. She disapproves the stereotyped attributes of Muslim women as illiterate, religious and homely wrongly connoted as ignorant, non-secular and unprogressive. She blames the narrowed discussions upon Muslim women always around divorce, Mutalaq, polygamy and mosque entry (Preface). She, with the book, counter narrates the mobility, activisms and actualisations of the Muslim women during the twentieth century

She adduces singers and composers Maluthatha Kondotty, Jameela Beevi, P.K.Haleema as well as the religious educators Ustad Nabeesatha, Kunjatha, Fathimathatha, Aishathatha who had run single-teacher schools for Muslim kids during the middle decades of the twentieth century. Hussain criticises V.M.Kutty, the popular *Mappilapaattu* historian and singer for calling the Muslim women „*aksharamariyatha Mappilapennu*“ (illiterate Mappila women) neglecting their cent percent literacy in Arabi-malayalam and folk oral cultural performances. She marks Puthoor Amina, who had written *Kathupattu* in 1921 as launching a new genre in *Mappilapaattu*, which also spots light on a Muslim woman's freedom of choice as well as criticism of patriarchic family structure. The religion-based lyrics of prominent women composers of the time deferred

from the western influenced-reformer Muslim men who were conditioning women on patriarchal terms through societal institutions (*Neunapakshathinum* 22, 24).

The book canvassing dynamisms of the Muslim women post 1990 in literature and academics graphs the activities of Muslim women's organisations in Kerala. Hussain analyses in detail the influence of purdah, personal law reforms, debates over Shariat controversies, sexuality and the portrayal of women in films and literature structuring the Muslim women discourse in Kerala. She stresses on the need for reservation within reservation and criticises the mainstream minority feminist organisations for marginalising Muslim women. Hussain's second book *Muslimum Sthreeyum Allathaval* (2015) is an anthology of articles published earlier in different journals and magazines.

Hussain defends her research interest on oral narratives and the unmarked history of twentieth century Muslim women, flagging for feminisms and feminist readings of history ("Nilavilulla" 12). She substantiates that oral narratives rethink the notion of binaries of historians such as British-Commoners, enemies-warriors, children-adult, women-men, Hindu-Muslim and give importance to emotions. The rise of organisations and groups among Muslims post-Independence overruled the individual intellectual social political creative activisms and actualisations of Muslim women of the twentieth century otherwise entangled in the political crises of Independence struggle (Hussain Interview). The identity and representation of Muslim women and the community are the important subject concerns in the articles of Hussain. Her studies on the social political cultural mobility of Muslims, men and women, especially during the twentieth century based on oral narratives rewrite the „dominant“ histories. Influenced by Islamic feminism,

conscious of the internal politics of casteism, communalism, conversions and the regional variations of polyphonic Islam and Muslim culture, Hussain employs the methodology of cultural studies and discourses the recent past and present of the community than the religion.

K.P. Salva

The social activism-necessitated feminist writings of K.P.Salva (1979-) project problematise and deconstruct the deep gendered injustices in the society. Her noteworthy column in *Aramam Monthly*, from April 2012 to April 2014 discussed the diverse social political economic familial concerns of women in Kerala. Her subject positions as a homemaker, a mother of five children, the state president of Girls Islamic Organisation, a writer and a contestant in Panchayath elections determine the social criticism perspectives in her articles. She has almost paused writing since 2015 and is active in politics under the banner of Welfare Party of India.

Salva's first essay "Muslim Sthreyude Varthamanam" dissects the deep intricate problems of Muslim women inside the community and society from the perspectives of gender justice as well as Islam. Her sharp critical review of *Barsa* titled "*Barsa* Thurakkenda Vereyumu Mughangal" marked her as a writer in the public. Admiring the literary effort of Mumtas in subjecting religious texts, Salva criticises *Barsa* for its blend representation of reality and imagination, contradictory stands, loose conversations, illogical love for regionalism and baselessness in criticism. In a critical response to M.N. Karassery's article "Muslim Sthree: Padaviyude Purambokkukal", Salva's "Purdaye Pidi(ppi)kkunananthhin?" discards Karassery for limiting every women-emancipatory

discourse to Purdah alone. Asserting Purdah as a strong political cultural statement and manifesto of a new world order, she points to the many unaddressed social spaces unaccommodating women in the public as important gender concerns than purdah.

As the name stands, her article “Kudumbam Maattikurikkenda Bodhyangal” puts forth paradigm transformations in the present social structure of Kerala. Analysing the pros and cons of familial hierarchies in parenting, motherhood, foeticide, fatherhood, single parenting, childless families, old age, delivery-children-job, marriage, sexuality and co-habitation, she proposes more space for men inside families and more inclusiveness for women in the public sphere on mutual terms. Conscious of addressing men in her writings to trigger change, realising the futility of addressing the suppressed class of women, her gender justice dimensions prefer gender actualisations to gender equality. Her column in Aramam monthly ‘Kannadakilillathe’ (Sans spectacles) from April 2012 to March 2014 canvasses every actualisation of women in general and Muslim women in particular. The majority articles discuss marital situations in Kerala which she attributes to the highly marriage oriented conditioning of women closing doors over their social political actualisation and potentials. “Kalyanam Mudakkikal”, “Mysore Kalyanam”, “Pre-marital counseling” and “Pranayam Prashnamavunnath” discuss the negative orientations, priorities and beauty concepts in marriages determined by the sexuality concerns of men in Kerala. Salva lists these reasons as the real barriers of marriage for women, as the male-female ratio is marginal in the state (“Kalyanam” 65). “Pennungalillatha Nombuthurakal”, “Pennidangalude Prasakthi”, “Muslim Penninte Vehsavum Rashtreyavum”, “Veettujoliyum Kooliyum”, “Randu Doshakalkkidayile Samayam” and “Jeevithamezhuth” problematise the politics and space of women in the

social institutions of family, education, employment literature and media. The absence of spaces of creative social gatherings and the possibilities of structuring women inclusive public spaces project in the writings of Salva.

Associating henna to the Muslim women identity studies, in “Mailanchi” Salva attempts a cultural study of henna designs with its features of non-concreteness, joined structures, continuity in joining, repetition, vibrancy and complexity in relation to Islamic arts and actualisations based on the book *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (1986) by Ismail Raji Farooqi and Louis Lamya Farooqi(65). Salva presents spaces and actualisations of spirituality of women in the article “Bhajanamirikkal” to the piety, prayers and performing of *I'tikaf* as a spiritual pilgrimage of Muslim women during the holy month of Ramzan in a temporary relief from familial responsibilities which otherwise mechanise them for the rest of months (65). Gender actualisations, social spacing, marriage-centred family structures and community politics are the important subjects of concern in the works of Salva. Influenced by feminism, her arguments are theoretically supported by the verses of Qur'an though she does not engage in interpreting the religious texts. She writes in succinct laconic beautified Malayalam with undertones of sarcasm in meticulously crafted sentences. Salva discusses the category women in general to include concerns of Muslim women as well.

She studies the style, structure and functioning of the women's organisations in general and of Muslim women in particular in Kerala. In the article “Adayalappeduthendathum Adayalappedendathum” she praises the spaces and support for women within the Muslim organisations JIH and KNM and their women-inclusive pattern of conferences and meetings facilitated with cradle corners, feeding areas which

are yet to be considered and implemented by the mainstream „progressive“ social political cultural associations (“Adayaalappeduthendathum” 40). Though criticised for writing about gender, patriarchy, religion and Muslim women from outside and inside the community, her interests in gender debates makes her continue within the spaces of the community and organisation deliberately to reform from inside. The Muslim men of the community criticise the feminist arguments in her writings particularly for her appearance in hijab as if what women in hijab should or shouldn’t write are determined by them. This attitude distinguishes women in hijab and women not in hijab within the community.

Fousiya Shams

Fousiya P.M. the editor of *Aramam* monthly since 2007 writes under the name Fousiya Shams. Writing essays of social criticism from 2005, she occasionally contributes to the magazines *Pudava*, *Sangaditha*, *Poonkavanam*, *MahilaChandrika*, *Prabodhanam*, *Janapaksham*, *Bodhanam* and weeklies and newspapers *Madhyamam*, *Deshabhimani*, *Chandrika* and *Thejas*. At a time when even popular Magazines for women are managed by male editors with only a few women writing in even mainstream weeklies, her locus in the footsteps of early twentieth century women writers, editors and publishers in Malayalam is highly significant. K.K.Sreedevi, Asha Paul, Fousiya Muhammed Kunju, Aisha, Hamsheena, V.P.Rajeena and Qasida Kalam were the earlier editors of the magazine. Despite the president of the women’s wing of the organisation being the nominal chief editor of the magazine, Shams assisted by two other women in editing, designing and layout administer the complete making of the magazine. The task of the female editors is highly demanding yet unrecognised and unappreciated in the

public. Shams critically thrashes the patriarchal dominance in the societal institutions in her writings in the language of journalism alert to the events of social political significances.

Shams tracks the eventful bill of reservation for women in India in the essays “33 Shathamam Vanitha Samvaranam” (2005), “Vanitha Samvaranam” (Jun 20 2008), “Penninidamillatha Parliament” (April 2014), “Vanitha Samvaranam Engumethathe Poya Vanitha Dina Sammanam” (2014 March 8) and “Adhikarathinu Purathe Pennu” (May 2016). The political perspective of the essays “Vanitha Sangadanakal Kathukodukkenda Karyangal” (Mar 04), “Samoohya Nirmithiyil Sthreeyude Pank” (Mar 20) and “Navanirmithikk Penporattam” (May-Jun) surpasses the apparent feminist themes of empowerment. In a detailed analysis of the President election in America referring to the leads of the candidate Barack Obama against Hilary Clinton, “Karuthavane Poruppichalum Pennine Poruppikkilla” Shams projects the anti-women political scenario of the celebrated women-friendly developed country USA in contrast to the developing Asian countries like Sri Lanka, India Pakistan and Bangladesh with women at the top of governance (9). Party politics and governance politics are the important subject concerns of Shams who appreciates the fronting of women irrespective of religion and politics against the rivalry politics particularly in her native place Kannur in the articles about political assassins in Kerala “Prathikara Rashtreeyathinte Kanakkazchakal” and “Veetil Ninn Thudangam”.

The characteristic feature of the writings of Shams is the public politics-perspective of the gender discourse, preferred to the social and cultural aspects of women in general and Muslim societies in particular. Shams participates in the discourse over the

dressing of Muslim women in the essays “Arkkaan Purdaye Padi” and “Purdah Kand Njettunnavar”. From the identity of a Muslim woman, she discusses the controversies associated with Personal law reforms and Uniform civil code in “Muslim Personal Lawyum Muslim Sthreeyude Aakulathakalum” urging the scholars of the community to reform Muslim Personal Law which continues to stain the gender just concerns of the religion. Shams substantiates the angry social criticism over a wide range of subject concerns with reference to the sociological survey reports and statistical data. She discusses the political aspects of feminism, religion, reservation, laws, representation, social participation, assaults, assassins, education and curriculum reforms in her articles. Her criticism of patriarchy and male dominance bears a different dimension regarding her identity, existence and advocacy of matrilineal family system. The justice-based feminist social analyses of Shams are less Islamic, and address the society in general.

Ummul Fayiza

Ummul Fayiza (1992-), a PhD candidate in Jawaharlal Nehru University, belongs to the researcher community of young Muslim women in India. Political perspectives, critical analyses and sharp arguments mark the mature tone in her academic studies. Writing in social media and online magazines, Fayiza discusses the political aspects of current discourses regarding Muslim societies in general and Muslim women in particular. Her reviews of the new books on Muslim women introduce second wave Islamic feminism in Malayalam. The articles of Fayiza counter the secular liberal support to Muslim women outside religion and criticises the lagging of Malayalam reading public in engaging in the discourse of second wave Islamic feminism.

Fayiza discusses the possibility of post-secular politics relating religion and women while problematising the theoretical intricacies and nuances of feminism in general and Islamic feminism in particular. In a lengthy review of the book *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith* by Emma Tarlo (2010) “Chamayam-Chintha Chantham Charithryam”, Fayza pictures the new hijab discourse in the western world through fashion and politics. The studies of Fayiza present the global perspectives of regional discourses of religion, community and Muslim women. In the debate over ‘Hijabophobiakkalathe Campus’ her observations in “Sometimes a Hijab is just a Hijab, Sometimes it is Not” focus on the secular intolerance and micro-politics of hijab in Kerala with respect to the ban on hijab in developed European countries as well as the politics of choice and freedom of a double marginalised group.

She engages in the discourse of Muslim women with reference to the politics of identity and Islamophobia as in the article “Burqiniyum Muslim Sthreekalum” referring to the influencing and control of the French Patriarchal institutions upon the dress and choice of Muslim women, where Burqini is an Islamic swim suit designed for Muslim women instead of bikini. She employs the second wave Islamic feminist methodologies of discussing religion and Muslim societies. The complicated relation between religion and feminism, debates on first wave Islamic feminism, post-secular politics and possibility of second wave Islamic feminism discussed by Aysha Hidayatullah, Sa’diyya Shaikh and Kecia Ali comprise her article “Vayanakalile Sangarshangal”.

The possibilities of the political statement of Muslim women discussing about Muslim women reflect in the articles of Fayiza. The essays “Malalayum Sthreepaksha Rashtreeyathinte Prathisandhikalum” and “Idathu Mathethara Rashtreeyavum Muslim

Sthreekalum” in the book *Malala „Prathi” Vayanakal* (2014) edited by Mufeeda K.T. and Fasila A.K. problematise the limitations of the global and regional popular discourse on Malala YusufZai. The secular situation in India necessitates the Muslim women writers to explain discuss and problematise controversial subjects like polygamy, early marriage, Mutalaq and personal Law reforms. The essay “Vyaktiniyamam: Muslim Sthree-Adhikarangalum Sangarshangalum” tracing the controversies around personal law, urges planned political movements considering the diverse life situations of Muslim women, specialties of Islam and the laws and constitutions of the country Muslims are part of.

She advocates and prefers to address the larger politics of identity and Islamophobia than the anti-women patriarchal intricacies within the community. A detailed academic study of the complicated concerns of representation, agency and identity of Muslim women in public discourses in Kerala “Pothu Vyavaharungalile Muslim Sthree” positions Fayza as the strong voice of the new Muslim woman discussing Muslim women. Discarding the intellectual activism and subject ranges of women writers, the popular secular patriarchal media sensationalise the victim position of Muslim women, attributed to the male chauvinism of the community than the general gender injustices in the country.

In their subject positions as Muslim women writers, Mumtas, Hussain, Salva, Shams, and Fayiza restructure the discourse regarding the agency and subjectivity of Muslim women. Categorising Muslim women with women in general, their millennial subject concerns problematise the gendered injustices in the society in particular. The global Islamic feminism and the regional discourse on Muslim women intertwine in the writings of these social critics. The critical essays of social political cultural significance

mark their individual intellectual activism while the discourse on gender justice problematises the Indian situations of patriarchy.

CHAPTER 3

RE-GENDERING SOCIAL JUSTICE

PART I: THE INCLUSIVITY QUESTION

The perception of the influence of regional and cultural religious aspects of gendered social structures in the Kerala society enlarges the subject domains of the Muslim women critics beyond the peculiarities and problems of the community. They identify project and analyse social and political problems of Muslim women beyond the 'trinity' of early marriage, polygamy and *Mutalaq*. The diverse perspectives and feminist approaches of the critics demand gender just spaces for women in general and Muslim women in particular. The attributed feminist label on their works of social criticism limits the readership, reviews and debates in the public.

Gender implies a series of relations that appear „natural“ and also seem to eminently serve the purpose of social governance, integrating individuals into the collectivity (ie the community, Malayalee society, the nation, political parties and so on) through organising sexual difference. (Devika *En-gendering*294)

The male hegemonic power patriarchy structures stabilises and administers the celebrated women empowerment in education, employment and public activism; the different customary systems of marriage and family relationships as well as the individual actualisations in arts and athletics. The social critics begin with deconstructing the religions-defined docile domesticity of women. The present tools of assessing

empowerment such as education, employment and social activism fail to graph the individual and social actualisations of women in general and Muslim women in particular, necessitating new methodologies and approaches.

The system of considering education and employment as indicators of women's empowerment in particular has profuse limitations. The certificate-qualifications obtained from schools and colleges grade and graph the people in sociological studies and surveys. The methodology of ranking knowledge with educational qualifications excludes other diverse life experiences and situations of learning. The mechanised pedagogies in schools are subjected to criticism for distancing the philosophic aspects of every discipline, necessitating the concepts of alternate schools of learning. The education as a tool of empowerment becomes an unjust criterion in areas with reduced educational institutions as in rural or natural/man-made calamity hit regions in the case of developing countries like India. Philosophically and politically the ideals of alternate learning dominate in the writings of postmodern thinkers.

The West-influenced modern knowledge systems exclude the lived experiences of marginalised groups particularly women. The Post-colonial studies have discovered significant ethnic knowledge systems and practises countering the coloniality and structuring novel dimensions of culture studies. The researches on the epistemological possibilities of feminism in strictly regional boundaries are political phases in gender discourses. Influenced by poly knowledge systems, the Malayalam writers Shamshad Hussain, Fousiya Shams and Salva K.P. slogan for alternate ideals of learning and knowledge, though they are the beneficiaries of the present education system.

The studies of Hussain project the oral literature and history of Malabar Muslims, discussing their knowledge experiences which are unrecognised in the mainstream cultural milieu of Kerala. The narratives of the active social political literary spaces of Muslims during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Kerala as detailed by Hussain in the book deconstruct the stereotype labels of Muslims as backward, illiterate and ignorant. Hussain points to the drawbacks of the male perspectives of sponsored written histories and projects the oral narratives of the second generation of warriors of Malabar Rebellion fought against the British. She says that for history, the perseverance, rebellion, loss, sacrifice, tolerance and resistance of a group of people become less important, as it only tries to answer the cause and reasons for the beginning and end of the revolt (*Musleemum*89). The neglect of the mainstream in recording the memoirs of the minority groups has lagged their histories for almost a century. She points to the differences in the usage of terms referring to the event in Malayalam as the Commons never used the term riot/revolt/ rebellion for their active resistance (“Nilavilulla” 13). The alternate culture of particularly Muslims developed out of the less-assimilating attitude of the mainstream has sustained the stories songs and histories of the period through generations to a great extent.

Hussain criticises the misconception in the public that women cannot contribute much in terms of knowledge regarding great events like Malabar rebellion (*Musleemum*89). The diverse emotional, psychological and biological perspectives and articulations of the severely impacted group of women in all calamities complicate the discourse of oral histories. Cohen and Crabtree write, “Since the 'narrative turn' in the social sciences, narratives or stories have been the focus of considerable interest. This is

because researchers have come to understand that personal, social, and cultural experiences are constructed through the sharing of stories”. Inspired by the resistance of the community against the British, the women-majority of the regions shouldered the responsibility of raising younger generations in the absence of male-heads died in the rebellion. Hussain says that the leaders and reasons for the rebellion for people of the immediate region are different from those of mainstream narratives (*Musleemum* 89). Unlike in written history, the oral history projects not a few, but many a leaders including women for the rebellion.

Hussain points out the silencing of the active role of women in Malabar rebellion (“Nilavilulla” 12). The subject positions of women in the rebellion ranging from warriors in male disguises to brave witnesses withstanding the tragic events are unrecognised in the mainstream narratives. The feminist political writing back of Hussain positions the Muslim women inside the narratives of the community as well as in the history of Kerala. Hussain contradicts the normal pattern of writing history in binaries- British-Commons, enemies-soldiers, children-adults, women-men, Hindu-Muslims, with the non-binary structures of oral narratives. She substantiates the limitation of binaries referring to the admiration of some Muslim women towards the charm of British men (“Nilavilulla” 10, *Musleemum* 94). The elite status and authority of the written language over less-refined dialect versions of oral literature is the important cause for the mainstream neglect towards the folk tradition of Kerala.

The pidgin writing language Arabi-Malayalam has treasured the literary actualisations of the community until the establishment of Malayalam as the official language. Unlike the inaccessibility of the lower castes in learning the Sanskrit

knowledge systems, Arabi-malayalam was the popular language among Muslims with hymns, songs, stories, prayers, books, translations and social criticisms (Hussain *Musleemum*36). The male and female religious preachers taught Arabi-Malayalam in *Othupallis* and Madrasas, which were the basic religious education centers of the community until recent. When Sanskritised Malayalam rose to the status of official language, the regional dialects lost their cultural importance including Arabi-Malayalam, with a severe social impact of making those Muslims who were hundred percent literate in Arabi-Malayalam as illiterates (Hikmathulla 121). The literacy rate of Muslims in Kerala lagged behind other communities for their actualisations in Arabi-Malayalam, resistance to the language of British and also for the unaccommodating elite nature of Malayalam.

The lyrical expression of Muslim life in *Mappilapaattu* is a thriving cultural aspect of Muslims in the performance part of oral literature which has also played a vital role in creating a communitarian identity feeling among the Muslims of Kerala during the pre-independence period in particular. According to Hussain, *Mappilapaattu*, which is unique and different, is wrongly compared with Malayalam literature using the literary tools of Malayalam (*Musleemum*36). The nature of amalgamation of different ethnic dialectic terms in *Mappilapaattu* is underrated to the Malayalam poetry. Kurup and Ismail write, “Women’s reform in Muslim society owes much to the songs, particularly ‘sabeena songs’ written and sung by Muslim women themselves... P.K.Haleema, Malumma, Jameela Beevi and others were some of the composers and singers of such songs in the early period of ‘sabeenas’ and ‘malas’ (131).

The influence of the oral and performance spaces of *Mappilapaattu* in the mobility of Muslim women is an important research area recently. Referring to Arabi-malayalam as well as the works of P.K.Haleema (*Chandirasundarimala*), Naduthoppil V. Aishakutty (*Wafaat mala*), Kundil Kunjamina (*Sarabi's Khizza, Badarpada*), C.K.Kunjaisha, Puthur Amina, B.Aishakutty, K.Aminakutty, G.S. Jayasree says, "eulogising, critical, subversive, humorous and sometimes downright comical, it reinforced a woman sub-culture within the Muslim community in the first half of the twentieth century"(4). Deconstructing the restricted boundaries of knowledge and learning in reading and writing marks the lived experiences of the subaltern minorities who lag behind in the technicalities of modern reading and writing. Countering the singer V.M.Kutty's usage of 'illiterate Muslim women', Hussain refers to their creative engaging with *Mappilapaattu* and categorises them as Scribers as conceptualised by Europeans and substantiates that education is not reading and writing alone (*Neunapakshathinum*13,14). Earlier, the *Mappilapaattu* was meant for and performed on occasions like marriage, child-birth, and ear-piercing ceremony which were exclusively feminine spaces. Hussain finds the possibility of women taking liberty in the lyrics being their participatory area of performance as also in the cases of food-theme *Mappilapaattu* (*Musleemum*39, 40).

The studies on *Mappilapaattu* were mostly centered on the writings of Moinkutty Vaidyar, also known as the 'epic-historian of Malappuram and Muslims' (Hikmathullah 125). Hussain's studies of the involvement of women in this literary genre discover and celebrate the women composers of the community, which is followed by many academic and amateur researches. She projects the feminist history to deconstruct the popular notion that women of Malabar are weak and also to mark their personality and activism

area in the society even before the modernity of equality and actualisations (*Neunapakshathinum*13). Systematic religious learning centers are among the characteristic features of Muslim society then and now. Before the establishment of institutionalised *madrassa* systems by the different sects of Muslims, miniature *Gurukula* model *Othupallis* of single-teacher schooling were relied for religious studies in the state. Hussain says that if referring to the history of education we would be reaching back to the women Arabic scholars of Ponnani first, where they had used to take lessons and interpretations of Arabic texts in classes for women there (*Musleemum*115). There were professional women religious teachers revered for their knowledge of the basic tenets of religion.

Even though they had utilised the space inside the religion, Hussain focuses on how these earlier women religious teachers have become illiterate in the mainstream values (*Neunapakshathinum*15). The creative actualisations in *Mappilapaattu* and other literary genres, scholarly positions as *mollachis* (religious teachers) and the narratives of Malabar Rebellion and other events of freedom struggle constitute the oral literary intellectual activism of Muslim women during the 19th and the 20th centuries. Hussain reads that if there were singers and scholars from Muslim women during those years it meant such a possibility was there in that society (*Neunapakshathinum* 16). Notably, Hussain presents them in the names they were known in their locales discarding the European or Indian designations of Ms/Mrs/Shreemathi. The discovery of the feminist writings of the women writers and publishers in Malayalam and Arabi-Malayalam counters the dynamics of the downloaded Western feminism in the state. The feminist historians Geetha, Devika and Hussain project the works of the late 19th and the early

20th century women writers in Malayalam, detailing the latter's familial subjects, reformist educational ideals and political pre-independence positions tracing the roots of feminism in Kerala.

This is strikingly revealed in that most of the women who engaged in high intellectual and literary activity in the pre-modern and early modern period in Kerala—judging from the legends around the Kozhikode Manorama Thampuratti and much later from the works of Thottaikkattu Ikkavamma and Kuttikunhu Thangkachi—made it clear in their own ways that they were indeed situating themselves on terrain which was not given to them; they were clearing a space for themselves within an essentially male domain. (Devika *En-gendering*96).

Hussain problematises the renaissance spirits and the rise of political and religious organisations during the twentieth century which almost sidelined the individual literary and political voices and expressions of particularly Muslim women (*Neunapakshathinum* 16, Interview). Even though she appreciates the literary ventures of Muslim women, she criticises their Reformism-influenced attitude of educating women for family sake. She says that women should be educated only for children sake itself says she has no agency upon her knowledge or achievements (*Neunapakshathinum*33). Hussain storms against the constricted perspectives of earlier writers in propagating such definitions of mothering since they continue to dominate the gendered spaces of Kerala. Discussing the pattern of Muslim women's literature, especially in Urdu, Hasan and Menon write,

A spate of periodicals and magazines—the Sharif Bibiyani(Lahore), Tehzib e-Niswan(Lahore), Muallim-i-Niswan(Hyderabad), Khatun(Aligarh), Ismat(delhi)

and Jauhar-i-Niswan(Delhi)-were established from 1880s onwards. Although most of these journals were a mix of education, literature, practical information on health, childcare, recipes and good housekeeping, their main objective was to promote the cause of female education.... The overall stress was on domesticity and piety, and status improvement through better schooling and appropriate literature. (*Educating* 8)

The women writers of the pre-Independence periods shared a common characteristic of advocating domesticity though they themselves critically engaged with the society and the community actively in the public. Devika states that Patriarchy was not uprooted by the reformisms but actively redone (*En-gendering*297).

The unwritten laws regarding the choice of a course for a girl after matriculation prioritise teaching or medical field as the best options for them. The parents consider distance, transportation and hostel facilities than the skill, potential and the choice of girls while fixing a course for girls in particular. The crucial gender biased results of education surveys point to the less percent of female students in courses like mechanical, electrical and instrumentation engineering but excess percent in fields like teaching and nursing (Rajan and Sreerupa 45). The intervention of the male dominant society is the new pattern of the continuation of the restriction over access to education, afraid of the choice of the girl.

The preponderance of women in such courses give strength to the argument that higher education could be seen as a means to further 'marriageability' of girls

enabling them to make better wives and mothers and a potential contributors to the economic well-being of the family.(qtd in Rajan and Sreerupa 42)

The family oriented conditioning of girls drive them to the 'goal' of marriage where they are unrecognised as humans or individuals. The personal and possible scope of the courses clashes with the uncompleted courses of the girls post marriage. Salva says that "After marriage, husband or his family decides over a girl's education, job, creativity, social relations, activism and even food and dress which thus suppress the self actualisations of a Kerala girl" (Interview). The complicated situations of the pregnant girls in educational institutions, lead to the crises of dropping the course for physical reasons, lack of facilities in as well as for the denigrating attitude of the authorities. Swapna Mukhopadhyaya says, "From the perspective of an educated woman who can think for herself and would like to enjoy the basic freedom of making her own decisions, Kerala is far from the heaven on earth one may have been made to believe" (25). Simultaneously while celebrating the achievements in education, literacy rate and women empowerment, the strong undertones of patriarchy limit restrict and control the spaces of women.

The modern literacy awakening of the Kerala owes to the pattern of the Christian missionary schools during the pre-Independence period, where modern philosophies and sciences were taught along with theology. Unlike other communities, the Muslim community was reluctant to the Christianity-oriented modern education particularly in their politics of resistance to the British. The aversion to the British had resulted in graphing the Muslims in the immediate post-independence period as backward and lagging behind in education and in other indicators of development. The communal

tactics of the British continue to stamp Muslims as other and backward in the post-Republic situations in India. The communal politics attribute a negative image to the Muslim-populated Malappuram district regarding education in Kerala which ranks the highest in literacy rate among Indian states. The post-millennial political consciousness-prompted sociological surveys and studies present religion not as the cause of the backwardness of Muslim community in Kerala. Added to which is the educational achievements of particularly Muslim girls of Malappuram securing top ranks in University/State/National level exams and courses.

Muslim women suffer from community-specific disadvantages (as do Dalits and low-caste women) but contrary to popular perception, these do not arise from religion. Rather, income disparities, urban or rural residence, regional location and pervasive and persistent gender biases are responsible for low levels of educational achievement". (Hasan and Menon *Educating* 31)

In her essay, "Malappuram Jillyile Muslim Sthree Vidyabhyasam", Hussain projects the educational advancement of the Muslim women based on the report of Sachar Committee, Kerala Shasthra Sahitya Parishat, A socio economic survey of Muslims in Kerala and India countering the blunt accusation of religion as the reason for the backwardness of the community. She refers to the surveys pointing out the lack of schools, hostel facilities, lady teachers as well as scholarship as the reasons for the earlier negative image of girls' education in Malappuram than the religion (*Musleemum* 101,104). The reformer heads of the Muslim community has introduced Arts, science and Humanities courses in the religiosity-maintaining parallel institutions run by the different sects of the community to combat the backward status. The reality of the lack of

educational institutes and employment opportunities in the Malabar region in comparison with the South Kerala let out in the wake of Sachar committee and Paloli Commission reports has led the Muslim political organisations to petition before the Government seeking redressal for the step-mother attitude. The binary north/south as backward/forward lies strong in the intrigue social psyche of Kerala, which never attend to the lesser count of Government welfare projects, educational and employment institutes and infrastructure facilities proportional to the population density of Malabar, particularly in Malappuram.

Pointing to the lesser number of Government/engineering colleges in Malappuram Fayiza accuses the governments for not doing what Muslim organisations had done for the educational upliftment of the Muslims particularly women. She adds that even the best of schools in Malappuram are run by the Muslim community (“Pothuvyavahaarangalile” 19). The studies of Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon, Dr. L.R.S. Lakshmi and U. Mohammed detail into the importance of the educational institutions administered by Muslim managements particularly in the Malabar region. Hasan and Menon say, “One reason put forward for the (Muslim) league’s interest in education is that Muslims enjoy political power in Kerala” (*Educating*135). As projected by Fayiza, all these surveys and studies point to the lack of proportional governmental institutions in Malappuram, which is not yet considered as the reason for the attributed backward status of the Muslims, particularly women. The increasing visibility, social mobility and intellectual engagements of Muslim women from the last decades of the twentieth century deconstruct the stereotypes of backwardness though the mainstream hesitates to acknowledge that.

The educational empowerment of women in general has prepared them to desirable social changes. Today the Muslim women of Kerala are willing to discuss their problems openly in public forums without inhibition and analyse social problems in their own perspective... It can thus be seen that there is an overall appreciable jump upwards in the educational empowerment of Muslim women in recent years. This trend is on the rise even overtaking their male counterparts in many respects. (Mohammed 90, 91)

The Women writers of the community had demanded a consideration into the matter of women's education in 1938 at the Muslim women's conference held in Thiruvalla under the leadership of M. Haleema Beevi. Their proposals included eliminating school fees for Muslim girls, making primary education compulsory for girls, and they had also sought the Government for employment to qualified Muslim women (Hussain "Keraleeya" 96). The social political and intellectual activisms of the Muslim women pre-Independence period had been concentrated in the southern states of Kerala. Devika writes, "Along with nationalism, community reform efforts and community politics, and early socialist and trade union assertions, the 1930s also saw the articulation of demands made upon the government on behalf of 'women' as a group for job reservations, representation in political bodies etc." (*En-gendering*5). The disparity in educational status of man and woman in marriage has risen as an important concern in the community as pointed out by sociologists like Hafiz Muhammed (58). The pattern of reduced percent of Muslim boys in higher education but with the job opportunities in Gulf countries makes them financially sound but low profile grooms compared to the higher education profiles of the Muslim girls. The low educational status of boys is also

the reason for marrying off girls before the completion of their courses discarding the latter's dreams and academic achievements.

The recent trend of girls rejoining the courses they discontinued for the sake of marriage and family marks their determination to raise their status situations within the community as well as in the public. The advancement of the Muslim women in the field of education is unacknowledged by the dominant secular mainstream because of their religious affiliation. Following the popular logic of stereotyping Muslim girls, Khadeeja Mumtas problematises the religious affiliation of them as unprogressive in the novel *Athuram*. Set in the background of Medical college campus, though the Muslim characters in *Athuram* are either doctors, medical students or nursing staff, she presents them awkward for their religious symbols like hijab or beard. Criticising the demeaning of Muslim women for wearing hijab in spite of their educational growth and professional maturity in her novels *Athuram* and *Barsa*, Muhammadali inferences, "Both the novels unconsciously tell us that the Malayalee Muslim women articulate their subjectivities differently through educational development, professional skills, economic growth, social interferences and so on" (80).

The secular political parties in Kerala convene mass programmes to attribute the patriarchy of Muslim men to the religion to save the 'suppressed' Muslim women from seclusions. Fayiza writes that many books and campaigns happened for the sake of educational rights of Muslim women in Malabar in the background of Malala gunshot but none has come up to solve, support or suggest solutions to the strikes in connection with the backward status of the educational rights of Malabar ("Pothuvyavahaarangelile" 18). Projecting Malala, they shoulder the guardianship of Muslim women, never addressing or

considering neither the wake of Islamic feminism nor the intrinsic politics of Islamophobia. Fayiza adds that from American president Barak Obama to left secular youth movements in Kerala, all are trying hard to save Malala from Islamic patriarchy (“Idathu” 56). She criticises the attitude of political parties, who are almost deaf to the real problems of Dalit and other minorities regarding education and employment, for blindly relating the different cultural contexts of Malala and the social political situations of Kerala. The Islamophobic as well as the un-updated political knowledge and activism of the image-concerned political parties reflect in the educational concerns towards the Muslim community.

In a detailed article “Padyapadhathi Parishkaranam” on curriculum reforms, Shams discusses the challenges, problems as well as the scope and possibilities of better knowledge systems replacing the present methodologies of education to mould the coming generations for sustainable development (12). The visionary models of learning and knowledge should exclude party-politics and community concerns. She criticises the system of implementing curriculum reforms by the changing governments to inject their respective ideologies in young generations. She also problematises making the children of poor in the government schools Guinea pigs (“Samshayikkappedunna”).

In spite of high female literacy, as per the data provided by the quintennial surveys carried out by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), the state has among the lowest female labor force participation rates. Detailed interviews with women from varied socio-economic backgrounds under different contexts revealed that, contrary to popular belief, women do not enjoy the kind of

‘freedom’ that one would expect them to have given the high levels of human or gender development. (Mukhopadhyay 5)

The gendered prejudices regarding the employment of women in Kerala root in the House angel concept of Victorian morality-influenced British perceptions of family life. The employment of the women is directly proportional to the income and financial status of the families since Agrarian economies. The studies on the women’s employment in Kerala point to the mental physical aspects of ‘occupational hazards’. There are husbands in the Indian situations who consider their wives earning for the families as dishonor. Salva says that with men not involving in the domestic affairs, employment has turned out to be a double burden upon women (Interview). When women’s employment gained status among the people of Kerala, they are given limited options of employment in order not to topple the familial structures and responsibilities.

Shams says that job for women is not only part of economic dependency, but of sharing the knowledge she acquired as well as of social participation (“Vanitha Sangadanakal” 44). The space for self-actualisation, increased status within families and the pleasure of earning encourage the women of Kerala to contribute in labour force through mostly in professions like teaching and medical care /nursing. According to Salva, the girls who have enjoyed the spaces in college campuses consider the employment sector as their next option of social actualisations which is the reason why women are interested in being employed though there are many limitations and hardships (“Pennidangalude” 64). Taking on more responsibilities, the employed women of Kerala survive day-to-day occupational hazards ranging from physical problems to stresses, while accommodating themselves into the male dominant sector of employment.

...that the capacities attributed to ideal women had application in an ever-increasing number of institutions other than the home, situated in the public domain. This worked to make the neat bifurcation of space into domestic and public domains less important in reckoning the order of gender. In practical terms it justified the entry of women into the public domain, particularly into institutions such as schools, hospitals, charity organisations, reform institutions or orphanages. (Devika *En-gendering*173)

The rendering of women as teachers or in medical field thus becomes the extension of the gendered family spaces attributing to the women characteristics of kindness, love and dedication required for the profession. According to the study conducted by Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon, more than 60% of teachers in Kerala are women” (*Educating*31). The progressive organisations in the state also prefer teaching as the best option for family women in Kerala. Salva reasons that teaching is preferred for women not because the profession called teaching accommodate feminine nature but there are more leave benefits in it to take care of home and children (“Pennidangalude” 65). The employment opportunity in the field of teaching corresponding to the increased percent of educational institutions in Kerala encourages the families and women to pursue teacher training.

Professional employment is ungendered, allowing women to participate without necessarily losing status; low-status work is highly gendered and is thought to say something about both the type of woman who does it and the type of family she comes from. Male or female, lawyers, doctors, lecturers and school-teachers have their personal name and status augmented by gender-neutral titles (advocate,

doctor, saar). The prestige of professional occupations is so high-as is the existing social status of the women involved-that negative effects are limited; significant material benefits render professional women largely indifferent to criticism.

(Osella and Osella 41)

‘Equal wage for equal work’ is not practiced in low-status jobs. Shams points to the hazards of housemaids as well as other workers in low-status service who belong to the unorganised sectors and are mostly exploited by their agents (“Samoothyanirmithiyil 38”). *Thozhilurapp* project under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and missions of Kudumbashree under state Poverty Eradication Mission provide daily wage and entrepreneurial opportunities for less educated housewives in their own regions, redefining their earlier poor economic status to the terms of empowerment.

Salva points out that the employed women are recognised in families as income/wealth is a base for respect in society too, which is the reason why women are going for jobs overcoming the double burden of house chores and anxieties over children (“Veettujolium” 64). The employment sector is the space where gender inequality is highly visible regarding the negative attitudes as well as the lack of infrastructure facilities attending to the biological needs of women in particular. Contrasting to the agrarian lifestyles in the history of Kerala where farmer women worked in the fields even when pregnant and were able to attend to their kids close to their work area accommodating the biological actualisations of women, Salva says that the employment sectors today does not fully accommodate women and never pregnant women (“Ithra” 65).

The patriarchal situations continue to constrict women in employment sectors in developing countries like India instead of facilitating and accommodating women into the employment sectors as in the models of developed countries. Shams problematizes the Pregnancy extension bond which Multi-National Companies get signed from their female employees thereby promoting an employment culture where women have to put aside her biological actualisation including motherhood (“Samoohyanirmithiyil” 41). The biological concerns of women are mostly neglected in the society to discuss and derive at solutions. Rethinking of societal gender structures should include the objecting the natural actualisation of women in pregnancy particularly in IT companies, says Salva (“Kudumbam” 53). The income earned by women is an important aspect of gender discourse in Kerala. According to Islamic teachings, the earning woman should not be asked to spend for the family from what she get, says Shams (“Vanitha Sangadanakal” 44). Only minimal instances of economic freedom get reported in Kerala for the stronghold of husband figure in the patriarchal family structure. Kunhammad writes,

The mother’s mothering responsibilities remained the same while the father’s concerns about the family income were considerably eased. In most two-career homes, the wife’s transfer of salaries into the husband’s accounts became a unique mode of seamlessly integrating sanitised modes of gender subjugation into contemporary life (74).

The influence of the Hindu religious concept that whatever a woman has is for her husband, dominates the present familial scenario in Kerala irrespective of religion or class, limiting the choice of woman to spend the money she has earned for her sake especially in the middle-class situations of Kerala. According to Salva, when family is

considered as women's-only responsibility, doors for women to go outside the families and for men to get inside the families close (Interview). She continues that men and women should be partners in employment, politics, market, academic social spheres, family, home, children's care, kitchen to assure practical mutuality in relationship. The women-unaccommodating tendency of the public corresponds to the distancing of men from domestic affairs.

While mentioning the importance of being employed, Hussain says that if Muslim women do not come to the employment sector, they get avoided from social/public sector (*Musleemum*110). Analysing the data tables of literacy rate and employment percent of women she adds that when literacy rate of Muslim women in India decrease, their employability also decrease (*Neunapakshathinum* 8). Though the situation of Muslims in Kerala is different from other Indian states, comparing to employed women of other communities the percent of Muslim women in employment sectors is very low. The misinterpreted concept of declaring women's primary responsibility as within the family, which is wrongly attributed to the religion, is an important reason for the less percent of Muslim women in employment.

Moreover economic marginalization, gender discrimination in the labour market, occupational sex-segregation and the falling demand for female labour, technological obsolescence, mismatch between labour demand and supply have been cited as reasons for low levels of work participation among females". (Rajan and Sreerupa 48)

The impact of religious syncretism, where Hindu religious beliefs dominate the cultural context of India, define familial responsibility for wives which but is slowly changing regarding the families of employed women in work sectors other than teaching in particular. Salva problematises the concept of *Veettamma* (Housewife) in the familial situations of Kerala where there is no *Veettachan* (Househusband) referring to the unwritten law that women should be shouldering the household chores irrespective of caste and religion (“Veettujolium” 64).

The government of India had plans of financially empowering housewives by provisioning salary for them from their husbands, which but was criticised by critics all over India for its generalising of familial situations and practical impossibilities. Salva sarcastically queries who will provide salary for domestic work in houses where there are unemployed men or no men?; who will provide salary for those men who do house chores? and Will they be accessible to other benefits like increment, VRS and pension ? (“Veettujolium” 64). The studies on the post millennial gender situations in Kerala seek public attention, government schemes and healthy debates with respect to the social political and educational advancement of the state. Mukhopadhyay says that the indicators of female literacy, life expectancy and income of women are „best in the state but not the condition of women accordingly” (6).

Devika defines public interest as “an arena of contested meanings from the beginning; more importantly, it did not guarantee equal access to all, and indeed, excluded many groups” referring to the emergence of the public sphere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Kerala (*En-gendering* 6, 7). The pattern of occupying the public for women includes literally spacing in the terms ‘people’,

'popular' and 'mainstream'. Salva says that public places like streets, worship centers, employment sectors, festivals and fests have not accommodated women ("Pennidangalude" 64). The channels of public activism defined for women are limited, marginal and are discouraged in the name of status and familial responsibilities. The designations as a writer, member of a political party or at least a teacher are the requisites to become activists in the public sphere in Kerala. The fear of the imbalance in patriarchal familial structures restricts women from public activism advantaged by the misinterpreted religious texts. Speaking out the lesser role of women in active politics, Devika and Mukherjee mark,

...the silence was broken only in the late 1980s with the emergence of feminist groups. In the 1990s, these grew into full-fledged feminist politics, and with the fresh visibility gained with the coming of satellite television (which multiplied the sites of enunciation of gender issues), they challenged the sexism of the political organization including the Left (116).

As the public sphere is dominated by political parties, diverse activism fields neither for men nor for women gain momentum in Kerala, except occasionally. Though girls massively take part in social political activism in campuses of Kerala, they only minimally associate with the mainstream political parties. Salva criticises that popular political parties accommodate women only to hold banners in processions, to offer welcome/vote of thanks in programmes, to sit as audience, to give garland to guests and contest in reserved posts in elections ("Purdaye" 48). She adds that those women who were earlier part and parcel of the prominent political parties get gradually ousted when they question the male hegemony inside or of less/no roles within. The priorities of the

male hegemonic political parties discard the agency and actualisation of women except in the public relation campaigns on women empowerment.

The left movement in the state could have been a natural ally of feminism, since both ideologies are built on the premise of unequal power relations in society.

Historically, by turning a blind eye to gender-based inequities, all political parties in the state have not merely denied women a legitimate foothold in the political arena, but have lost a potential for their own growth and regeneration as well.

(Menon 26)

The political parties determined structured and controlled by power and money hesitate to accommodate women except nominally. The feminist movements over the world have not succeeded in occupying the masculine spaces of the political parties, whereas the latter fail to consider the feminine. Referring to the Left politician Brinda Karat's negation of pregnancy for the sake of activism and party, Salva says that Brinda has been made to take such a decision because of the unaccommodating spaces for women's actualisations within the parties ("Purdaye" 48). The critical case of nominal space for women in the political parties is not considered as an important gender injustice issue in the country.

The problems women face and the issues feminists address slightly differ in the social political economic and cultural contexts of India. There are limitations in generalising the gender injustices in different locations of the country. The regional feminist movements and political parties can estimate the status of women in their respective geographic and cultural contexts. The culture of attending to the real issues

and solutions of gender sensitivities lists the relative priorities of women empowerment with respect to the social communities. The feminist literature in the country significantly accelerates the changes in the male dominant social structures and spaces on national levels.

Indian feminist's domain of activity includes issues like individual autonomy, women's rights, freedom and independence and mutual assistance, non-violence and non-discrimination, domestic violence, gender stereotypes, sexuality and sexism, non-objectification, freedom from patriarchy, right to an abortion, reproductive rights, control of the female body, right to divorce, equal pay, maternity leave, breast feeding, prostitution and education. (Gupta 221)

The feminist movements and organisations fail to stand in solidarity even on issues directly concerning women because of the male-dominant political party culture as well as of the corporate influence. Shams criticises the inability of the current women activists and leaders to take action in issues destroying the whole family system such as alcohol, insult to womanhood, rapes and dowry also when the political leaders are accused as culprits ("Penninidamillaatha" 28). The organisations for and of women in Kerala together lacks the voice and strength to analyse, demand and protest over the basic problems of women. Salva writes that in Kerala where more women travel daily, issues like toilet facility have not crossed the agenda of women's organisations ("Pennidangalude" 65). Though not into active politics, hailing from Kannur, Shams's articles on the political scenario of India, vision the political arena as an inclusive accommodating and less-violent space for women. In politically notorious cities like Kannur, she urges that women should protest to stop the political killings as done by

women in Kodungallur (“Veettil”). Beyond the annual commemoration by political parties, the death of the party members impacts the grievances of the family. Mumtas suggests replacing the rivalry politics of men by the simple logics of women with more love and kindness (*Purushanariyatha* 56). The increased percentage of women possibly restructures the field of politics in Kerala in particular.

Shams observes that being part of the rule is the best way to come out of social backwardness (“Vanitha Sangadanakal” 44). The power-presence of women in key positions in Indian politics fails to upgrade the marginalised status of women in general in political parties locally. Shams compares the developed countries and apostles of feminism like USA and France lacking women in apex positions of governmental or political administration with the accused anti-women Muslim countries with women as Presidents and Prime Ministers (“Karuthavane” 7). An ardent supporter of Women’s reservation bill, Shams has been tracking the events related to the presentation and aftermath of the bill in the two houses of the parliament. She stresses on the implementation of the bill though she realises that even a 33% of women in parliament would not be able to solve the problems of Indian femininity (“33%” 18). With men themselves competing for seats within political parties, women are sorted to the reserved posts. Though all parties slogan empowerment, power and participation for women, but when elections near they are not seen as giving much representation for women in a country with 260 million female voters (2014 parliament election), blames Shams. She adds that in the fear of losing power, instead of passing the bill, men increased the number of seats in Loksabha not to dwindle their seats when the percent of women increases (“33%” 18).

Though philosophically, justice and human status should be preferred to women's reservation bill, the thoughts, activism and representation of the women groups in the public with the increased percent of women parliamentarians is an immediate necessity. Justice Rajindar Sachar in his article "Women's Reservation Bill – A Social Necessity, National Obligation" writes,

An ILO Study shows that 'while women represent 50 % of the world adult population and a third of the official labour force, they perform nearly two- third of all working hours, receive a tenth of world income and own less than one per cent of world property'. Therefore, reservation for women is not a bounty but only an honest recognition of their contribution to social development.

The discourse of the reservation system and Women's Reservation Bill are different in the Indian context. Shams pities the situation that men of all political parties wish to fail the bill. She wonders why the country which had contributed a woman Prime Minister who raised best ever foreign policy and best non-alignment movement still did not have the mind for that generosity ("Vanitha Samvaranam"). The heterogeneous nature of the category women accounts to the complications in the discourse of women's reservation bill. Though passed by Rajsabha, the protest of minority political parties demanding reservation within women's reservations was the reason for not passing it in Lok Sabha, which otherwise would be benefitting the elite class women, says Shams ("Vanitha Samvaranam Engumethathe").

The reservation within reservation is a debated subject in the country. Hussain writes that the argument for reservation within reservation is propounded by neither elite

nor minority/backward feminist groups but by political parties representing minority/backward sects which imply that such a necessity is not felt by feminist groups on their own (*Neunapakshathinum* 89). The participation of women in the field of governance politics can be made possible in different ways. Shams proposes that each political party should reserve 33% seat for women while declaring candidates for the elections (“Vanitha Samvaranam”). The activism, management skills and political enthusiasm of otherwise low profile homemakers in leadership in local governance bodies and offices backed by the regional political parties is one of the recent subjects in sociological studies in the state. Even as a mainstream political party Muslim League, which clings to the patriarchal systems of secluding women, has confusions regarding the participation of women in public politics. Compelled to include women because of the raised percent of reservation, the release of the code of conduct exclusively for women by the party has triggered controversies in the secular social situations of Kerala.

Despite the fact that Kerala Muslim women are doing better in education than their counterparts, the subordinate role of Muslim women in the public sphere is visible in contemporary Kerala society. By considering the women and their public appearance, the party has clearly marked a „boundary” for women and treating them as subordinate to men by using religion as a tool. It is interesting to see that the IUML has never elected by any women candidate either an MLA or an MP in their last seventy years of political history in the state. At the same time, IUML strategically using the possibilities of women for gaining electoral support and to fill only the reserved seats which is also fully under the control of the party, even after the 50 per cent seats have been reserved for women by the

parliament act in 2009 as a follow up of 73rd and 74th amendments of the constitution. (Ramseena)

The Muslim women within the peripheries of the party and outside the party display differences in agency, subjectivity and social consciousness. Salva criticises the League's pattern of encouraging women into public spaces under compulsion, managed and subjected to codes of conduct ("Adayaalappeduthendathum" 36). The party schools in general and of Muslim League in particular fail to address, accommodate and alert the women in active public politics. Devika and Thambi write that the women members of League are justifying the code of conduct as an "informal bit of advice by men to guard themselves against the 'westernised life' that erodes internalities" (153). The limitations of imitating the mainstream political parties in the pattern of accommodating women reflect in the activism of the Muslim organisations and political parties.

In the wake of reformism and revivalism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the organised moves of the Muslim women had given priority to the education and employment of Muslim women demanding free education and other facilitations from the Governmental authorities as proposed by them in the women's conference held at Thiruvalla in 1938 (Hussain "Keraleeya" 96; Devika *En-gendering*5). They raised the issues on behalf of the Muslim women in general though their literary and journalist activism was concentrated in the Southern part of Kerala. Hussain projects that as a good model for Muslim women activism today ("Keraleeya" 103). The emphasis for group dynamism in the Muslim organisations KNM and JIH has impacted in the absence of the Muslim women scholars and public speakers in the state. According to Shams, women organisations inside the community are inactive ("Vanitha Sanghadanaka" 44).

Hussain briefs the recent activism of Muslim women with reference to the organisations Nisa, Mujahid Girls and women's Movement, Kerala Women's front, Women's wing of Jamaate Islami Hind, Girls Islamic Organisation and Kerala State Women's league (*Neunapakshathinum*61). The increased activism of the organisations for Muslim women as well as the studies on the style, structural and pattern of these organisations can widen the discourse on Islamic feminism in the state. Referring to the role of women in religious organisations, Salva says that this system which widely organises Muslim women in discipline makes possible three kernels of empowerment- accepts and encourages women's leadership and power to decide; make active their intellectual knowledge sphere; and many openings happen for women for self-development and actualisation ("Adayaalappeduthendathum" 38). The secular public devalues neglects and scorns the recent religious spaces of actualisation and activism of Muslim women. Saliba writes, "...that through their participation in religious and nationalist movements, women often achieve some form of political agency, self realisation, or self-representation, as well as a sense of community, even as the patriarchal values and discourses of the movements limit this agency"(4).

The system of patronising women's wings and organisations by men curbs the former's intellectual social and political growth. Apart from the structural and infrastructural spaces for women inside, Salva criticises the pattern of organisations regarding the activities for women such as minimal works like speech, addressing only women, teaching morals and values, thus to have no single scholarly woman within to mention (Interview). The problems of Muslim women are attributed to the principles rather than the patriarchal orthodox interpretations and practises of the religious texts. In

the Indian context, the problems of the Muslim women are directly related to the gendered social political contexts and the culture of religious syncretism. The natural social activism of Muslim women in particular, is considered as radical liberating stepping out of the religion, and thus progressive in the public. Hussain says that if Muslim women appear as possessing agency, then their position will be outside the class Muslim. On the other hand, to gain socially active and progressive subject positions, Muslim women have to criticise religion. Hussain adds that the popular narratives could not even dream still today a Muslim woman with community life, fighting for rights and freedom of women in the public (*Musleemum*49). The secular situations insist the Muslim writers and activists in general to take stands on their religious affinity, which is not imposed upon those in other religions.

Criticising the exclusion of Muslim women's mobility and diverse activism in the book *Keralathinte Sthreearithrangal Sthreemunnattangal* (2016) edited by C.S.Chandrika, Fayiza notes that women writers even in the post structuralism and much developed research ranges, have impoverished imagination regarding Muslim women ("Pothuvyavahaarangalile" 17). The case of Muslim women who practise their religion taking on its symbols and rituals, particularly hijab is negatively problematised in the mainstream. Fayiza adds that though all type of feminists get stage in public discussions organised by Muslim women, the latter are not given stage in most feminist activities. Even when the hijab discourse is positively prominent in post secular discourses, those prefer religious identity to national identity are considered less progressive particularly when they are Muslim women. Though there are non-generalisable variations in the

intention as well as styles of wearing hijab amidst them, the hijab makes the Muslim women different.

Fayiza argues that with the secular perspectives, the lives of Muslim women who consider Islam as important cannot be understood as it disagrees to see power structures like caste, religion, government, economy, region, affecting the lives of Muslim women. She adds that with this approach it is impossible to consider Muslim women lives fighting with other power structures staying within the community (“Pothuvyavahaarangalile” 18). The social crises of Muslim women comprise the confusing positions between religion and Muslim men; religion and secular public apart from the issues of gender injustices women face in general.

The discourse on Muslim women is controlled by the Islamophobia politics in the state. Fayiza says that the criticisms raised by Muslim women staying within the community are easily hijacked to organise the public discourse against the community (“Pothuvyavahaarangalile” 18). The present crises in identity and representation of Muslim women raise the practical necessity of post-feminist gender just restructuring of the society. Hussain stresses on the need to discover a new language and methodology to mark the resistance and reactions of Muslim women in different fields (*Musleemum* 50). The minorities in particular are conscious of the elite, suppressing and unaccommodating mainstream which continues to marginalise the former’s advancements. Fayiza points to the developing of communitarian women’s politics where relating the Muslim women problem with different Dalit communities and female politics is possible (“Pothuvyavahaarangalile” 21).

The patriarchal situations curtail the instinctive actualisation of women in social activism prioritising ‘honour’, femininity, safety, religion, family and children. Salva says that if employment itself becomes double burden for women with complete domestic responsibilities, then public activism turns up as triple burden for them (Interview). The spaces of education, employment, and activism as the indicators of the development of women have limitations. Salva adds that when education, employment and activism are considered as tools of assessing women, other actualisations and talents of women are unnoticed. Salva mentions the limitations as an impact of adopting the western feminist methodology and criteria of women empowerment in India (“Feminisathinte” 65). The women writers recently realise the necessity of tools to assess women in Indian contexts in religious as well as secular terms.

Referring to the active women workers of Muslim organisations, Salva argues that the existing religious/secular social structures lack the space or are not yet prepared to include and utilize this group eventually making them invisible. On the other hand, much energy and time of those women and the organisations are spent to defend themselves before the religious secular feminist critics, says she (“Adayaalappeduthendathum” 38). The religious activism of Muslim women in post 1990 Kerala accounts to the paradigm shift in the agency, subjectivity and visibility of them even though the public discourse on Muslim women stamp them as suppressed inside the religion. Muhammadali says, “The progressive movement developed by Malayalee Muslim women community is persistently ignored in the mainstream parlance of Kerala discourses” (73). The bonding of women in gender issues beyond the mainstream party politics incorporates increased percentage of women who are otherwise reluctant to affiliate with any particular party.

As proposed by Fayiza, regarding Muslim women, instead of falling silent thinking of colonial political tactics, bonding with those really understand the problems of Muslim women is better as by creating such blends, the stereotypes in public discourses can be hoped to be challenged (“Pothuvyavahaarangelile” 21).

Marriage and Family System

The family systems, whether joint or nuclear, continue in the line of male hegemonic power relations advantaged by the male interpretations of the holy texts through generations. The patriarchal family structure and marriage centred lifestyle in Kerala, sideline other individual and gender actualisations of men and women as humans. The gendered intricacies within the sanctity attributed to the system of families extremely burden women, associating the domestic responsibilities of women as their obligation in respective religions. From education, employment and savings everything corresponds to marriage in the Indian context in general for men and women.

For all Malayalis, marriage and parenthood are requirements of mature adult status, while a primary duty of the household group is to „send away” its daughters in marriage. The major goal of those with least wealth and prestige is simply to see their sons and daughters married, the marriage itself being an end rather than a means to further benefits; but among the majority of families, arranging a marriage is also a chance for mobility and prestige through strategic alliance and expenditure. (Osella and Osella 81)

The marriages in the state are contracted on the basis of caste, class, religion, region, economy, beauty, education, employment almost together. The deep-rooted caste feelings

dominate over the philosophical and biological realisations in marriage. Marriage which is an institution effecting individuals, families lands and cultures have greater role in blending cultural symbols such as language, food, customs and practises (“Pre-marital” 64). The marriages outside the ‘norms’ like ‘Love-marriage’, inter-caste marriage are severely criticised discouraged and discarded.

The anxieties of parents and relatives to marry off their children promote ‘arranged’ marriage and disagree to ‘love’ marriages. To this crisis, Salva points out the reason of considering love and marriage differently as the problem (“Pranayam” 64). The personal choices of girls and boys in choosing their life partners dismantle the pseudo-familial apple-carts structured on material benefits and calculations. She problematises the public consciousness disagreeing to love marriages for the sole reason of loving overcoming the hegemony, power and rights of parents and family, even if there are umpteen possibilities to accept them (“Pranayam” 65).

The society’s pseudo-attributing to traditional values outcastes the couples of love marriage or inter-caste marriage and even implement honour killings. The strictly one man-one woman relationship structure in the Asian families believes the out-of-the-norms marriages as not lasting. Salva writes that love marriages fail to meet many basics of adjustments as in arranged marriages and also because of the needs of more sacrifice and compromise even lead to the extent of loss of identity and breakup (“Pranayam” 65). The support from families and relatives advantage the arranged marriages unlike in love marriages. Marrying a stranger is not at all considered as a problem in Indian communities in general (Osella and Osella 90). The choice of individuals is overpowered by patriarchal prejudices in love marriages but is welcomed in arranged marriages.

Menon asserts, “The identity ingrained in the Indian male is that he is superior to the woman” (12). The men have ample choice of selecting women in marriages with concepts and concerns attributed to tradition. The absence of choice for women implies the status of them as objects for the pleasure of men. Salva ridicules that many men would have stood unmarried at homes had women the same freedom of rights of choice in selecting a women by men (complexion, size height, age, education and employment (“Kalyanam” 65). The male dominated society propounds and prompts men to have (beauty) concepts about the bride-to-be as established through popular films and literary genres. Analysing this, Salva writes that women’s height, size (not color) and age should be lesser than men is a consideration evolved out of patriarchal power basis, which is a social construct and not biologically existing (“Kalyanam” 65). The improper pre-marital concerns on height, size and age establish themselves as another area of male hegemony.

Referring to the reverse situations in histories of religions, Salva argues that ‘women should be younger (5-6 yrs.) than men in marriage’ is a male centered reading (“Kalyanam” 65). The influence and impacts of the male hegemonic concepts is harder in marriage-centred societies in particular. The parents of boys accomplish to beauty concepts and economic concerns whereas the parents of girls raise their daughters to meet the demands willingly or unwillingly. According to Hasan and Menon, “the issue of marriage is one such- women are socialised, groomed, and sometimes compelled into acquiescing with or consenting to a decision that has already been made by elders, by social pressures and cultural expectation (*Unequal* 247). The group of unmarried women, not men, is looked down upon in the marriage-centered societies. As projected by Salva what gets discussed here is all male sexuality neglecting the silenced sexuality of women

(“Kalyanam” 65). The love marriages and inter-caste marriages are not innocent regarding the choice for women.

Even though marriage is a universal norm, nevertheless one-fourth of upper caste Hindu women and one-fifth of Muslim women in the rural south have never married, and the percentage rises in direct proportion to higher socio-economic status. The rural south also reports the highest incidence of second marriages.

(Hasan and Menon *Unequal*239)

The parents' range of selection of partners, earlier confined to respective castes and religions, is now closed within the sects of religion as well as to the political leanings. Salva questions the situation that when even blindness, deaf, stammer, physical disability and mental retardation does not obstacle men in marriage, many women continue to be unmarried even though male female ratio is marginal (“Kalyanam” 65). Analysing the system of marriages in Kerala, Osella and Osella write, “Families with boys to marry commonly accept hypergamous marriages for sons in order to raise the dowry necessary to send daughters ‘up’” (94). The intrinsic gender injustices related to marriage systems rely heavy on women in general and Muslim women in particular. Salva problematises the latitude where there are more unmarried, divorced, widowed, co-wives among women than in men as also there is scarcity for grooms, though there is only minor margin in men-women ratio (“Kalyanam” 65). The male hegemonic dream concepts of life partner suppress the biological self-realizations of woman and in turn limit her social actualisations. Salva presents such concepts as the real *kalyanam-mudakkikal* (marriage-blockers) (“Kalyanam” 65). The minimal percent choice in education and employment of women recede to choice-less status regarding marriage as

well as in choosing the partner. In her detailed survey of the status of women in Kerala, Menon infers that,

As some of the case studies in this volume suggest, this could be a result of the perceived absence of any fallback option outside marriage, however abusive it may be and the fear of perceived transgression from the prescribed societal norms that a woman must be married. To that extent, it may be a time-tested survival strategy for the woman, honed and sculpted by generations of experience and propelled by the credible threat of a world outside, which could be far worse than an abusive marriage (13).

The necessary evil of marriage designates women option-less in premarital situations and voiceless in post marital life. Pointing to the trend of mass weddings (*Samoohevivaham*)—the events of charity organised by persons or institutions to marry off girls of poor economic situations, which happen on and often in Kerala-, Shams writes that they are making women scapegoats with the whole event pitying their situations (“Vivahangal” 38). The mass wedding as an act of charity have not been subjected to criticism by any social groups in Kerala even in minority politics. As problematised by Shams, the superior status of the organiser positions opposite to the humiliated status of the couples, especially upon the brides, being women. The critics unravel the patriarchal hegemonic intricacies within the wide canvas of marriage-centred life exposing the complicating tiring and suppressing situations of women. Salva pities the state that a girl is considered as human only in relation to a man and blames that for bringing up girls marriage-oriented (“Mysore” 64). The priority with marriage turns to parenting even after choosing a partner with better qualifications. The children-centred

family systems affect the individuality of women after marriage. According to K.P. Salva, the marriage /family relationship in Kerala is based on hegemony-subservience bond (“Pranayam” 65).

The concept of a powerful male head called husband and a „household angel“ called wife despises the individual in both, living for the sake of families and less for themselves. Kunhammad writes, “The relationship structures in the family such as parent and child, adult and non-adult, elder brother and younger brother, are grounded, not in values that apply to all in equal measure, but on hierarchies based on the sovereign state of exception” (73). Whether married or unmarried, the women receive respect from society when designated to the care of father, husband, son or uncle. Anthropologist Dr. Gabriel Vom Bruck marks,

“...that upon marriage, gender becomes more central to women’s identity, marked by the transition from bodily concealment to adornment and embellishment, and is fully developed upon producing a child. ...thus unmarried women are “less gendered than wives and mothers, and feminity is achieved rather than given” (qtd in Saliba,et al. 9).

The confining of the spaces of women to familial responsibilities restricts their outdoor actualisations where the public means men. Salva defines marriage as an institution opening doors to family, children, society, religion, culture, economy and sex (“Pranayam” 64). The home making skills of the girls are preferred to their high academic profile and career in the state. The sharing of familial responsibilities by the couple, necessitated by their employments is not mutual, gender-concerned or balancing.

The necessity of mutual respect is not taught in the conditioning process of marriage for men and women (“Pre-marital” 65). The Christian communities effectively implement premarital counseling through their system of church. The Muslim community strongly believes that premarital counseling is meant only for girls, notes Salva (“Pre-marital” 65). The marital life is defined in the terms of adjustment than attachment particularly upon women. Salva says, Girls are not brought up as perseverant respected humans with freedom of thinking and decision making but to the goal called marriage. The hurdle called marriage or the situation she reaches after (spouse house) should not be reckoned for a girl’s self-confidence and growth, protests she (Interview).

The encouragement to girls during their school days to become achievers to create history topples with marriages dragging them down to the unwritten laws of the society. Salva argues that in the fear of losing good proposals we are polishing not only the education, talents and possibilities of girls but also their bodies and minds (“Kalyanam” 64). The discussions, debates and articles analysing the problems of women, always tend to correct, counsel and advice only women even though they are the victims. The crisis costs the lives of generations of women. For a better gender just society, Salva urges to destruct many walls made by the society in relation to marriage (“Kalyanam” 64). Implementing the changes in approaches from the predominant style of addressing women than men is herculean. The system of addressing men can make paradigm shifts in the status of women in the society. Salva states that in reality, premarital counseling will be of use to men more (“Pre-marital” 65).

The system of marriage with its varied customs and practises is not strictly exclusive regarding different communities with the religious syncretism. The Hindu

concept of *thali* as in golden/diamond necklaces and the Muslim practise of Mehendi are generalised in the Kerala context. Salva writes that more than to Islam, in the matter called marriage as in many others, the concepts, priorities, experience and stands exist in Muslim community are related to the society (caste based), family (male-centred), consumer culture (body-centred) structures (“Kalyanam” 64). The importance given to family life in Islam and the supporting verses from the Holy text discussed in the society positively as well as in negative, stamps only the Muslim community as marriage centered. The customs and traditions of the Muslim community are ridiculed as barbarous in the public that early marriage, polygamy and triple (oral) talaq persist as evergreen subjects of controversy in the mainstream.

Problematising the age of men in marriage, Shams argues that the misinterpretation of hadith has resulted in men choosing young girls in marriage (“Vivahangal” 38). The fixed age for marriage is neither an Islamic concept nor practical in any society. The critics of the religion refer to the early marriage of Aisha with Prophet Muhammed and not to his first marriage with the middle-aged Khadeeja. The gold, silk and dowry as the prerequisites for marriage complete the commoditization of girls, instead of the simplicity of ideal marriages. The young age of girls for marriage concludes the mere body-centered processes of relationship. The festive mood and colorful celebration of marriages create wrong concepts among girls. The umpteen casteist and sectarian matrimonial websites replacing the earlier regional marriage brokers covertly seek wheatish/white slim girls and demand economic sustenance from girl’s side overtly. Shams criticises that the TV channels and business companies are

shaping the concerns of women (“Malayali” 34). The wedding packages by jewel shops and textiles define, present and limit women in terms of ornaments, dress and show.

Shams writes that though marriage before the age of eighteen years is a crime as per Indian constitution, it happens without any block in all caste and communities (“Vivahangal” 34). The holiness and sanctity attributed to marriages in relation to religions is the reason for the continuing child marriages in rural and tribal areas. The influential category of astrologers as well as black magicians in India prescribes marriage of humans with animals or trees in order to get rid of evil eye, evil spirits or to please or thank gods. Shams says that in parts of North India, Haryana, Gujarat, Varanasi and Haridwar children and adults are made to marry dog, frog or trees, which is considered as part of culture and tradition and is unquestioned, but the marriage related actions of the Muslim community are only criticised (“Vivahangal” 34). The secular public refers to early marriage, polygamy and Mutalaq to accuse and abuse the Muslim community. Hussain reports that Muslim girls are married earlier or not married earlier cannot be generalised (*Musleemum*119). Being a Muslim populated district of Kerala, Malappuram is severely tarnished for early marriage within the community. In his article “Number of child marriages in Kerala on the rise” in Deccan Chronicle on the basis of 2011 census, T.Sudheesh reports,

The districts that exceeded the state average in child marriages are Pathanamthitta (0.808 pc), Alappuzha (0.735 pc), Thiruvananthapuram (0.730 pc), Kollam (0.667 pc) and Kannur (0.665 pc). While Malappuram had a 0.594 per cent incidence, Thrissur had the lowest figure of 0.493 per cent.

The marriageable age for a girl in India is different according to different Marriage Acts until the passing of law raising it to eighteen years for girls, later complicated by The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 aka POCSO, a non bailable offence, which considers marriages with brides below eighteen years a crime. In her detailed analysis of child marriages in India, Shams argues that regarding child marriage other communities suffer more than the Muslim community (“Vanitha Sangadanakal” 42). In an effort to reduce the age of marriageability to sixteen, to sanction marriage certificates for girls subjected to early marriage, the heads of the community have drooped into controversies recently. The generalised fixing of rules and regulations is not practical and possible for diverse cultural and ethnic groups of the country. The systems of Personal Laws as for the major religions should be established particularly for cultural groups and tribes. The elite perspectives of patriarchal mainstream culture tend to degrade the customs and rituals of other cultures. In the eyes of the public, there are ‘unmarried mothers’ in Tribal colonies, whose spouses are jailed disrespecting their social cultural systems of marital life, writes (*Musleemum* 29). Though early marriages are accused from the biological immaturity concerns, even toddlers are brutally raped irrespective of caste and religion in the country. Shams blames that men are not concerned of making love with minor girls (“Vivahangal” 35).

The marriages as occasions of cultural blend are also occasions of ideological conflicts and contradictions in all social systems. While the bride is made a puppet, many other women rise to voice and space in decision making in families though for the sake of celebration sake simultaneously. Hussain says that the chances and spaces on the occasions of marriage were well utilised by Muslim women earlier, as evident from their

actualisations in the form of *Mappilapaattu*, *Oppana* and other performances (*Musleemum*36). Apart from the agency of Muslim women in composing *Mappilapaattu*, the basic style of the songs in general define the community on and over marriage. The marriage-themed *Mappilapaattu* embellishes the material aspects of marital life ranging from detailing the description of bedroom of the couple and first night to relating girls even to the heavenly beings. Importantly, the popularity of these marriage-centred *Mappilapaattu* is influential in the marriage oriented conditioning of the Muslim community.

Shams argues that the procession of marriage related customs- pre-marriage parties, pre delivery post-delivery treats and receptions, varying from region to region, mostly imitating Hindu cultures impact the economically insecure families in particular, which is indeed the failure of the Mahal system (“Vivahangal” 39). The status and dignity of the family of the bride are gauged with their financing of the marriage ceremonies. The otherwise effective Mahal system of the Muslim community associates with the patriarchal anti-women practises, even though being the apostles of a Holy book which has not privileged men. Despite the highest literacy rate and other positive indicators of development, dowry continues to be a prominent practise in Kerala. Shams projects that according to the Islamic principles, a woman can demand mahr (bride price) as she pleases but what happens here is that she does not have even a voice in her own marriage (“Vivahangal” 38). *Mahr* is the right of a bride in Islam which she can decide and demand. The *mahr* as a woman’s choice is not practised in Kerala but instead incorporates the dowry system of Hindu tradition, giving excess bounties for grooms by the bride’s family. The marriages settled on dowry discarding the voice or choice of girls,

subsiding the bonding and love becomes a financial undertaking controlled by wealth, money and power. The horrendous dowry system in India in general causes fatal disasters for women even after the feminist advancements in social structures.

The payment of dowry has long been prohibited under specific Indian laws including the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 and subsequently by Sections 304B and 498A [9] of the Indian Penal Code, Protection of women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. Though banned by law, this happens with the loophole of Article 3 of The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 specifying the penalty for giving or taking dowry as not applied to presents given at the time of a marriage to the bride or bridegroom. Even with advanced modern education, awareness and social changes in the society, the families are compelled to consider daughters as financial liabilities because of the dowry system. According to Indian National Crime Records Bureau, dowry-related crime causes the death of a woman every 90 minutes, or 1.4 deaths per year per 100,000 women in India, which is excluding sex selective abortions and female feticides. Ummul Fayiza says that how dowry acts in different women situations need to be studied deeply (“Pothuvyavahaarangalile” 20).

In Kerala in particular, the status of the families is assessed by the quantity of gold worn by the bride on the day of wedding. Shams lists the reasons for the failure of Anti-dowry Act as men’s greed to earn money without sweating as well as the increasing craze of women for gold and jewels (“Pandithanmar”). She adds that even those modern Malayalees who praise the development and lifestyle of Europe and America have not started imitating the gold-less dowerless marriages there. In Kerala, even though all the men associate with at least one political, religious, secular or cultural organisation, they

are not hesitant to accept dowry and other bounties from the brides' home. The bribing tendency and corruption deep-rooted in the Indian system from offerings to Gods, bribing politicians and educational institutions legitimise the concept of dowry.

Referring to some Muslim organisations taking strong stands against dowry by boycotting its members who have married accepting dowry Fayiza asks whether political organisations like DYFI and Youth congress had dared to take such stands ("Pothuvyavahaarangalile" 20). The dowry marriages in Muslim community are comparatively lesser with the influence of the anti-dowry campaigns within reformist organisations though the orthodox sects have not declared anti-dowry statements in the public. Salva says that though they know it is disastrous, like the government do not ban liquor, religious heads do not ban dowry for the same reason ("*Barsa* Thurakkenda" 63). The Mysore-marriages become a terrible option for poor families in Kerala who consider marrying off their daughters to places where dowry is comparatively lesser. The Mysore alliances become controversies in Kerala because of the religious links. Beyond the hubbubs, Shams says that supporting the victim or safety of women are not the true concerns, but to make a particular religion the convict ("*Vivahangal*" 36). She is of the opinion that because of the community's indifference, Muslim woman has to set off home with a man whose language or place she does not know ("*Vivahangal*" 39). The systems of the community distancing from the religious principles of justice complicate the problems of women. Salva says that the community has to interrogate within, that how does getting married, by any means, have become a necessity ("*Mysore*" 65).

The community alone cannot be accused for the mishaps, as its customs and cultural practises except in matters of worship, are highly influenced by other religions of

the region. According to Fayiza, C.S.chandrika's observations of Mysore marriage and Arab marriage as the (ir)responsibility of muslim orthodoxy, have many limitations. She writes that in this (Mysore marriage) social injustice, factors like economic structure, social political organisations, religious as well as secular ways of patriarchy act ("Pothuvyavahaarangalile" 20). The economic and social concerns act in issues like dowry and Mysore marriage than religion in the Kerala situation. Salva says that the families of girls are ready for that (even Mysore marriage), because they feel and it is true that a divorced or abandoned woman receive more respect and protection than those unmarried in the society ("Mysore" 64). Even though familial life is distressful in general for married women for the patriarchal hegemonies, the unmarried women are casted outside the social communities.

In their sociological study, Osella and Osella report that marrying a foreigner is considered as a prestige in Kerala (116). Marrying a foreigner does not bother the public except in the cases of Mysore/Arab weddings. Shams says that the brides or grooms from America, France and Germany are celebrated in Kerala ("Vivahangal" 34). The mainstream accuses the Islam and the Muslim community instead of probing into marrying off girls to the poor circumstances of Mysore. Geneticist and Anthropologist Spencer Wells in his book *Journey of Man: The Genetic Odyssey*(2002), says that the travels and shift of women after marriage (to the spouse's house) is of great importance in population Genetics and evolution studies as their genetic markers forms into more vivid DNA combinations (175).The concerns of the society in marriage equal its concern in the matter of divorce. The present patriarchal social system considers divorce and divorced (only women) as taboos. The adjustment of women, wrongly considered as the

essential requisite in family life is generalised as lacking in the cases of divorce. Shams mentions that unlike in other cultures where women are ever tied to men or should live with the man to whom she gave her chastity, are not in Islam (“Muslim Personal” 43). The marriage related customs evolved out of patriarchal systems and cultures in Muslim societies attribute Islam the label marriage-centred religion. The Muslim woman is provisioned with agency in divorce according to the Quran and the prominent religious interpretations. Shams adds that there are provisions with the religion that those who hate can divorce beautifully in Islam.

The complicated procedure of divorce for men in Islam takes almost a year whereas the divorce for women is easy with a word. If a man is initiating divorce even after failed counseling talks with intermediaries on both sides, he can pronounce *talaq*, the period valid for which is three months (three menstrual cycles), during the time they can live as couples. If it is not reconciling, he can pronounce the second *talaq*, with the same set of rules and time period. Only with the third *talaq* followed by the same time period, the divorce becomes valid. The male derivation of Mutalaq, pronouncing three *talaqs* together, is validated in texts on Islamic jurisprudence. Shams reports that divorce *idda* (time between 2 *talaqs*) is not practised here (Kerala) (“Muslim Personal” 43). The Muslim women hesitate to use the power to divorce with *Khul*”, *Fasq* and *Li'aan* due to financial insecurities.

Salva says that Islam does not promote divorce but Quran’s teaching is that even a breastfeeding baby should not stand a reason for continuing a relationship of hatred (“Feminisathinte” 65). With or without reason, the divorce impacts the women in the Indian context. Shams questions that why only women have to say “innocent divorcee”

(“Vivahangal” 39). The male power in divorce regarding the family and social life gets authenticated with the usage of the term ‘innocent divorcee’. Cautioned from the days of conditioning girls for marriage, the sword of Democles called divorce hangs over the future of the girls as well as upon the status of the family. The influence of Hindu traditions such as *pathivrathyam*, *Sati* and *bhrasht* are still pivotal in determining the status of the women in relation to men. The system of Mutalaq authenticates the male hegemony in Muslim societies, which men use to threaten women discarding the gender just principles of the religion. In the Indian context, every discussion on Muslim women gets centered on Muslim Personal Law, provisioned during the British, in which Mutalaq and polygamy are validated.

A clear articulation of the separation of the public sphere from the personal or private domain was made by colonial law which proceeded to enact a common criminal code for India, but codified customary practises with regard to marriage, inheritance, adoption, divorce, and maintenance in accordance with religious percepts. By implication-and also by law-the public space was designated as secular, the personal as governed or regulated by tradition, convention or religious injunction. The post-colonial state retained this legal separation of private and public through the continuation of personal laws, even though they are in direct contradiction of the fundamental rights of citizens guaranteed by the constitution. (Hasan and Menon *Unequal* 243-4)

The constitution-provisioned set of rules regarding the rituals and customs of every religious community and the documents of Personal Laws sustain cultural diversity of the country. Salva urges the need to reform personal laws and solve the real problems

of Muslim women (“Shah Bano” 64). The controversies over MPL degrade the advancements of Muslims as a minority community and as the citizens of the country. Hussain notes that even when discussing polygamy, divorce or even clitoridectomy, the sexist image of Muslim men is getting projected (*Neunapakshathinum* 79). The political tactics of sustaining the controversy over MPL helps the power-concerned political parties during elections. Mumtas opines that she may welcome Uniform Civil Code to be implemented than the unreformed, anti-women Muslim Personal Law (“Sthreevirudha” 23). The impossibility of implementing the Uniform civil Code happens because of the diverse cultural and religious situations in the country. A positive impact of the Shariat and MPL controversies and communal polarisations is the rise of counter public sphere with the formation of organisations within the community such as INL, PDP, SDPI, and Welfare Party beyond the community party of Muslim League, notes Salva (“Shah Bano” 66).

The expected flexibility with the four *madhabs* (texts of jurisprudence) turns out to restrict limit and confine women. Shams says that when the community hesitates to take personal law reforms as it may spotlight the sectarian differences, the leaders of the community do not realise that this may nourish the hidden agenda called Union Civil Code (“Muslim Personal” 43). The discourse on MPL within the community exhibits minority anxiety, communal tensions and the politics of Islamophobia. Regarding the criticism only over Muslim Personal Law, Gupta writes, “this is strange enough that this plea is always made in case of Muslim Personal Law and it is maintained that it is part of Islam and cannot be interfered, even as many Muslims themselves confess that all provisions of the so-called Muslim Personal Law do not conform to the spirit of Islam”

(10). The popular discourses on Muslim women regarding MPL discard prejudice and suppress the critical engagement by Muslim women writers and activists. While marking the Hindu Muslim polarisation as more impactful upon Muslim women in the Indian context, Hussain argues that personal law and religious symbols chain her with all the more power (*Neunapakshathinum* Preface). The secular public demands reforms in Muslim Personal Law to release Muslim women from the clutches of Muslim men, implying the latter as the only misogynist patriarchal group. The attributed misogyny in the Muslim community is also the impact of the influence of other religious systems in the country.

Hasan and Menon writes, "...but it should be noted that personal laws represent only one aspect of women's subordination; even if all such laws were reformed or changed, Muslim women's material conditions (poverty, communal politics, patriarchy) would continue to be oppressive" (*Unequal* 243). The crises for Muslim men comprise reforming the Personal Law as well as defending the religion and task Muslim women with equally criticising and defending the Muslim men in the public. The controversies over Shah Bano case impact in the realisation of the public and the Muslim political parties about the existence of a reactive group of Muslim women, reads Salva ("Shah Bano" 67).

The reference to polygamy in the Quran cannot be consolidated to criticise Islam as barbarous in the 'modern' civilisations. Mumtas considers polygamy as old as marriages itself and sees it as an evolution of patriarchy. She asks why polygamy is always attributed to Muslim men though in history there were Hindu kings and emperors with many wives (*Purushanariyatha* 12). The sexuality discussions on polygamy in the

secular public conclude portraying Muslim men as lecherous. The mainstream notion makes Muslims uncomfortable with the verses regarding polygamy in the text. Mumtas says that the Quran discusses polygamy into its gradual eradication but this law is not updated or made rule in many Muslim countries (*Purushanariyatha* 15).

The contextual provisioning of polygamy in Islam with respect to the crisis situations like war is misread, misinterpreted and authenticated in patriarchal Muslim societies. The system of polygamy suggestively compensates the situations of orphaned families and the imbalance in male-female ratio by social and financial support. Mumtas writes that her concerns over Prophet's polygamy, for which the religion is excessively criticised, received the satisfactory explanation with the possibility of his wives being his female disciples (*Purushanariyatha* 73). There is a spectrum of studies regarding Prophet's polygamy in Islamic feminist discourse in particular. Referring to the wives of Prophet, Stowessar notes,

Although their status and importance, of course, never matched the prophet's the women's Quran-established rank, also their role as the prophet's helpmates and supporters in his mission to preach and implement God's truth, and, finally their intimate involvement with the righteous prophet in all of the minutiae of daily life elevated them even during their lifetime to a level of prestige above the community's other females (105).

The justice-based regional updating of the religious laws should respect the gendered economic and geographical situations. Amina Wadud deconstructs the popular male readings of polygamy pointing to the specific situation of the revelation of verses

provisioning that and also projecting the concern of justice to be done to the orphans, for which, earlier there were no other systems (*Qur'an* 83,84). The different practises of polygamy and polyandry in the Indian culture are not debated in the public while discoursing on the polygamy within the Muslim societies. Referring to the Muslim countries like Egypt and Tunisia where polygamy is restricted legally, Mumtas praises such timely updating of Quranic verses on terms of justice (*Purushanariyatha* 14). Kerala owes to the modernist reforms within the Hindu community for eradicating the controversial polyandrous Nair alliances. According to Salva, discussing polygamy or the presence of *hoooris* for men alone as mentioned in Quran in Kerala will get affected by the present patriarchic system (“Jeevithamezhuthu” 65). The public debates on family systems in Kerala still exclude the customs of the tribal communities.

The Roles inside the Family

Early reformers, ranging from missionaries to community movements sought to redo Malayalee family and marriage practises along the lines of what they perceived to be the ideal high-Hindu form. This form was often perceived as being simultaneously ‘Indian’ and ‘modern’... It has been argued that this paved way for a specific form of patriarchy, ‘conjugal patriarchy’ in twentieth century malayalee society. (qtd in Devika and Mukherjee 103)

The patriarchal lessons of gendering happening within families are revered in the name of religion and tradition. The influence of feminism is comparatively lesser in families than in other social institutions in Kerala. Kunhammad writes, “It is in the family that children learn that men are ‘more equal’ than women and that it is only natural for

‘the female of the species’ to be subjected to differing modes of oppression” (73). The very term homemaker fixes the lifetime responsibility of women and stereotypes them as uneducated, unemployed, sitting idle, un-earning and non-creative. According to Devika and Mukherjee, “for the majority of women in Kerala, active domestic agency remains either an unfulfilled promise or holds immense burdens” (121). The domestic engaging demands a homemaker’s complete health, wealth, time and space for the sake of family.

An informed reading of the history of social reforms in the state from a feminist perspective suggests that while all social reformers have emphasised the importance of female literacy, the proposed „emancipation“ of women has invariably looked upon as an instrument that is to be used for the benefit of the family and society, not for the benefit of the woman as an individual in her own right. (Mukhopadhyay 15)

The imposed aims of education with marriage and family life for girls less-prioritise career, knowledge and self-actualisations. The marital relationship in the Indian contexts is hierarchal than mutual with men standing superior to women. Critiquing the Victorian concept of household angel and traditionally attributed responsibilities of childrearing, husband care and home management, Salva says that, within families, dependency is possible not only in terms of hegemony-subservience bond but by respecting each other (“Veettujolium” 64). The concept of mutuality in every aspect of marital relationship is a distant dream in the state.

...Kerala women strongly favour orthodox gender ideology, even more than Kerala men. It is possible to hypothesise then, that the potential accorded to

women by high literacy may have been utilised, not so much in questioning norms of male superiority, but in internalising the message and consolidating it in their lives. (Menon 17)

The domestication process of women accounts to the religious communities irrespective of the achievements in education and employment. Salva criticises that women are allowed some expressions which does not affect the family such as stitching, gardening, catering and painting (“Veidakangalile” 33). The women in general and homemakers in particular in the state are criticised for their lesser intellectual exercises in the public. The absence of social spaces for women and unaccommodating public structures discontinue the actualisations of the girls in educational institutions beyond that. Referring to the loss of talented girls in the campus because of the lack of space in Kerala public sphere, Salva urges the need for groups and spaces by and for women to discuss everything under the sun, to actualise their talents, to get recognition and respect all so as to increase self-satisfaction and self-confidence (“Pennidangalude” 65). The vibrant virtual spaces and activism compensate the social interaction of women in the public. The experiments of cyberspace intellectual activism of women in general and Muslim women in particular contribute to the changing pattern of gender discourse in the state.

The structure of social discourses are not formed fore fronting family, though it is cliché, saying family is the base unit of society which is the reason why women are marginalised in social discourses, says Salva (“Veettujoliyum” 64). The subject themes of popular women’s magazines in Malayalam range from effective parenting, fashion trends, health tips, culinary experiments, homemaking techniques, architecture and

interior designing as well as stories, novelettes and misogynist cartoons and jokes, constricting the readership of women. Referring to the male accusation that women do not read newspaper, Salva retorts that issues concerning women are excluded in them that women cannot find themselves in. As public libraries and reading rooms are not inclusive of women, she suggests that regional Anganvadis (Government child care centers) can be turned to libraries or women's spaces ("Randu" 64). The en-spacing of women into already existing social centres can accelerate the public life of women.

In Kerala context, the stage of writing for a woman is determined by familial and social factors. Salva argues that whatever a woman writes, Muslim woman in particular, is an activism or social engaging because of the family concerns ("Jeevithamezhuthu" 64). If 'excess reading' is not at all encouraged for women, the 'writing woman' image is never appreciated by families beyond 'scribbles'. Pointing to the inside-home space where a man or his encouragements not reach as well as the public spheres which do not include femininity, Salva writes that unless democratising these two watertight compartments, the reading, research and writing of a homemaker would be difficult ("Veidakangalile" 34). The writing spaces of men within homes are unbothered by the domestic responsibilities as in the case of women.

Hussain writes that the sexuality of women is always considered as a sin but of men never (*Neunapakshathinum*79). The men boast about their pre-marital, marital or extra marital sexual relationships and often even underestimate the sexuality of women. Deconstructing notions about sex and sexuality, *Sthraina Kamasuthram* written by K R Indira becomes the first book in Malayalam to detail woman's sexuality. In her article, "Kudumbam Maattikurikkenda Bodhyangal" Salva says that as in many other issues,

Women's agency is not considered in sexuality, as sex is taught as a man's right and woman's duty (55). The suppressed female sexuality adds to the physical and mental stresses of women. Salva adds that for family planning methods, instead of safer, less complicated process of vasectomy, women are made to suffer more by undergoing tubectomy. The typical attitude of men in discarding vasectomy is related to the power, sexuality as well as the patriarchal notion of becoming lesser men.

Salva continues that the primary responsibility of a woman is considered as the family but of a man it is not family ("Kudumbam" 51). Such conditionings reach to the extent that crying or not earning men as well as strong and decision-making women become out of columns in the society, says she. The present social structures including family fail to completely accommodate the natural biological emotional actualisations of all genders. Referring to the first generation women critics who had not rejected the male-centered ideological values regarding families, Hussain explains that those women were not trying to attain individual freedom but respectable position within family and community (*Neunapakshathinum*58). The social construct of the celebrated sacrifice image of motherhood, generalised through literature and films, establishes that mothers should live for the sake of children.

For the most part, feminist critics concerned with the psycho-analytic problematic of identification have often focused on the question of a maternal identification and sought to elaborate feminist epistemological position from that maternal identification and/ or a maternal discourse evolved from the point of view of that identification and its difficulties. (Butler 90)

As deconstructed by the feminist studies, mothering is of different types and even impactful of social and economic circumstances. Hussain argues that women are not meant to live in reverence to men or children (*Neunapakshathinum* 27). The women are not given the choice of having or not having children and neither is childless women accepted in the society. Reviewing the book *Mathrukam* written by Khadeeja Mumtas, Salva writes that the term *Sughaprasavam* (easy delivery) is a cruel translation for the word normal delivery (“*Sughaprasavam*” 64).

The lesser role of fathers inside families complicates the process of mothering particularly for employed mothers. The critics like Shams and Salva problematise the ‘No Pregnancy bond’ in IT sector getting signed from female employees which compels them to abandon or extend motherhood for the sake of work (“*Samoohyanirmithiyil*” 41, “*Kudumbam*” 53). The contents of the magazines for women today include effective parenting and childcare tips to ease the stress and tension of educated and employed mothers. The practise of addressing the fathers in family magazines can include men in the domestic affairs. The pattern of parenting in the state is a problem area in the sociological studies. Salva says that it is as if not children but their future is the concern of parents today (“*Kudumbam*” 50). Bank loans, insurance schemes and even higher education entrance coaching centers target young children in an urge to ensure a safe future for them.

It is a strong observation that family relationships in Kerala get go on either for the sake of children or no children, says Salva (“*Feminisathinte*” 65). There is a tendency to present the pattern of parenting in the Indian culture as superior to the western familial structures. Salva adds that western families unlike ours are not big or bonded in

hegemonic-subservient ties. With no better claim in familial relationships in the country, Indians in general and Keralites in particular continue to criticise the western family structures. In academic discourses too, instead of analysing western feminism we criticise west in the name of increasing broken relations, family ties, adds she. The society moving on the strings of money is not bothered about marriages and relationships. Salva argues that being marriage oriented is the reason why women get stopped by reaching that goal and thereby their talents and potential (Interview). The familial life of Muslims in Kerala is related to that of other communities in Kerala, though they are approached with a different dimension by the secular public. On terms of the Quran's teachings, Asma Barlas "locates the family and marriage in Islam at the juncture of the private (individual) and the public (communal), the religious and the social" (172). With the religious obligation for parents to marry off their daughters, early marriage, polygamy, Mysore/Arab marriages and mutalaq complicate the marital life of Muslim women in Kerala.

Salva says that neither Muslim women with the expressions and responsibility of the status *khilafathullah* (vicegerency) nor with human status could be find in Kerala, but only those with family as the first responsibility and mothers with heaven-underfoot image ("Feminisathinte" 63). The discourses within the community establish mothering and motherhood as the ways of religiosity. In his book *Islam and Gender Justice: Questions at the Interface* (2005), Ashrof emphasises "Each sex has the ability to contribute to successive generations as implied by the term 'Caliph'(vicegerent) in Qur'an 2:30. But that does not limit a women's vicegerency solely to bear or rear children" (59).

The late motherhood of Sarah, the single parenting of Hagar, the wife of Pharoah mothering the adopted son Moses, the special pregnancy and parenting of Maryam and the childless wives of Prophet Muhammad titled as Mothers of Believers present the different dimensions of motherhood in Quran. Regarding the concept of motherhood in Quran, Stowessar writes, “it may be to imply motherhood is relational not always biological” (85). The attributed divinity to motherhood established through literature in the context of Kerala is the impact of the influence of Hindu texts and traditions. Barlas argues, “The Quran however does not define women in terms of their role as mothers since we cannot assume that all women will, in fact, become mothers” (179). During the period of Prophet Muhammad himself, wet-nursing was a typical Arabian system which might have necessitated the Qur’an to suggest breastfeeding babies for almost two years. Quoting the verse (2:223) which states wet nursing is not a sin, Wadud says, “thus the basic nurturing of the very young child is optional” (*Qur’an*90). The choice in mothering for women in feminist and post-feminist situations deconstructs the imposed attributing of women to motherhood.

Hussain projects that women of Malappuram are more respected (*Musleemum*112). She adds that *jaarams* (Darga) for women indicate the height of reverence for Muslim women within the community. The recent sociological studies on the history and culture of Malappuram deconstruct the negative imaging of Muslim women in the secular public. The dimensions of motherhood activate the agency for women in general and Muslim women in particular in the public with respect to Gulf migration and the absence of fathers.

The impact on women left behind at home may also be positive depending on the level of autonomy enjoyed by them and the exercise of their agency... they start handling large amounts of money and engage in various activities outside the house like opening accounts in banks, going to different offices, hospitals and doing work in the absence of their husbands. (Rajan and Sreerupa 59)

The studies on the community as well as the discourse of gender studies neglect the agency, visibility and travels of Muslim women in Kerala post-1990. Hussain asserts that studies of Geetha and many others deconstruct the notion that women of Malappuram district are helpless beings living surrendered to patriarchal values and religious rules (*Musleemum*114). The secular mainstream pattern admires the religious criticism within the Muslim community and neglects the social political and cultural advancements of the latter.

Referring to the celebration of Malala by the secular public, Fayiza points out that Malala's father Ziaudhin Yusufsai leading a very patriarchal family life or a Muslim household as patriarchal institution, never bothers liberal feminism who otherwise criticises such aspects ("Malalayum" 37). Even while appreciating the achievements of Muslim women, there is a tendency to present the contrasted patriarchal character of only Muslim men in the society. She adds that those discuss Malala as an American product or a symbol of liberation does not see the complicated representations of Muslim women constructed through several power structures like family patriarchy and masculinity ("Malalayum" 38)

Despite the general patriarchal pattern of food culture in Kerala, only the Muslim community is accused as food-bound and confining women within the kitchens. Salva argues that our food culture is anti-women (“Pennungalillatha” 64). The recent situation of agency of women in discussing the tastes and choice in cooking is the impact of variety cookery shows in TV channels and recipe-rich women’s magazines which lessen the gender disparity in the public. The non-vegetarian and vegetarian system in the state is structured by the availability of the food materials than the religion and tradition. In her article “Pennungalillatha Nombuthurakal” Salva criticises the excess importance given to feasting than fasting in the form of iftar. Public iftars organised by parties and religious organisations exclude women, says she (65). The iftar meets conducted in public in the name of social gatherings exclude women denying the nights for them. Though the religious and other organisations competitively conduct Ifthar meets, the custom was neither practised by the Prophet Muhammad nor mentioned in the Holy texts.

Urging the need to renovate the structure and content of families, Salva says that we should declare that family is one among the self-expressions of human beings and the basis of its relations are mutual reliance, cooperation discussing together and compromise (“Kudumbam” 56). Instead of overloading familial responsibilities upon women, the society should orient in the inclusion of men as well as sharing of responsibilities. She urges to correct the Kerala minds to say that humans, men and women, have many other self-actualisations and family should be encouraging them. Unless the family structure and reserved duties get re-constructed, no sooner change from the second-rate status of women will be possible.

PART II: IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION

Muslim women are so diverse in terms of class, geography, ethnicity, age, marital history, and education that generalizations about our “status” are meaningless. Even if one limits the application of the term to the realm of ideal rather than women’s lived experience, the presupposition of an idealised and uniform tradition dramatically oversimplifies a complex and heterogeneous intellectual and textual legacy that spans nearly a millennium and a half. (Ali xiii)

The bearing of Muslim identity can be considered as the most important concern and anxiety of women with their increasing visibility in the public marked by Arabic names, black purdah and hijab in the context of Kerala. Osella and Osella write, “In Kerala, communism, literacy, social reform and an outward orientation (characterised for eg;- by a longstanding culture of migration) have all entwined to make self-conscious Malayali modern identity putatively superior to Indians of other states” (333). The Muslims of Kerala are different from the other states of India for the reasons including social political geographic and religious situations. The restrictions imposed over women in general and Muslim women in particular are the influences of Victorian morality over British modernity with its impact over the Malayali modernity. Hussain points out that for a Muslim woman this is a stage where religion has started influencing more upon her stands of gender status. Wider discussions have made them estimated as a unitary and strong religious sect (*Neunapakshathinum* Preface). Withstanding the criticisms by engaging with them in varied ways, the identity politics of Muslim women gets structured

by their daily presence in the media and public. Kurup and Ismail write, “The minority feeling and the wide propaganda that “Muslims and their culture are under threat and insecurity” also work well for the embarrassment of the community and naturally, as the weaker sex the women, are the worst hits and thus strive for their own identity in whatever measures possible” (140).

The discourse over Muslim women is a growing academic, amateur and activist discipline in Kerala. According to Fayiza, the analytical complication of two entities- Muslim and women is the critical situation of talks about Muslim women (“Vayanakalile” 48). The majority studies on Muslim women are based on their object positions in relation to the religion in theory and in practise. Hussain says that the most studies have considered Muslim women as either in the category of Muslim or in the common column of woman. She adds that some recent studies have gone for estimating the social situation of Muslim women separately (*Neunapakshathinum*8). The discourse on Muslim women in the public is carried out by the secular mainstream as well as the community than the Muslim women themselves. The secular mainstream is determined to save the Muslim women from the clutches of religious patriarchy whereas the Muslim men are vigilant to guard them from the secular influences. Surveys report that “the Muslim women of the present day society are not a separate entity in our social fabric and they have to be read with the other women of India who too suffer from gender inequality with religious and social disabilities” (Kurup and Ismail 41). The absence of space and scope to associate with women of other communities makes the Muslim women rely within the male authoritarian domains of the community.

Salva states that 'Muslim' is an acquired identity and 'human' is a biological identity; but when talking about Muslim women/women it gets narrowed to the biological actualisations such as pregnancy, delivery and breast feeding only (Interview). The concerns of the prominent Islamic feminists over the world are different from the marriage related problems in India and Kerala, thus necessitating the intellectual activism of Muslim women in Kerala. Shams situates the Indian femininity between two distinctions- the elite class who decides and controls and the other classes always to be in tolerance and patience, which she criticises as the 'greatness' Indian democracy has achieved for its womankind ("Navanirmithiyil" 52). The polarising in the name of religions, class and caste retards the growth and development of the marginalised groups misbalancing their mental physical emotional and social rhythm. The strength and energy of the minority communities get utilised to defend their values and traditions. According to Salva, the talks about women should start from their status as humans, not from their rights and duties, do's and don'ts in religion. She adds that discourses over women always fail to consider their status as humans ("Veettujolium" 65).

Marking the essential changes happened in the literary field of Kerala after 1990s, Hussain projects that the rereading of literary history, discovering women writers, and novel methodologies and tools of analysing their importance in respective study areas breaking the conventional frameworks have let out the real women's writings and activism (*Musleemum* 32). The better democratic situation in Kerala corresponds to the active feminist engaging in the state. Hussain asserts that Muslim women issue has much influenced the contemporary gender theory (*Neunapakshathinum* Preface). The Malayalam publications, particularly weeklies carry out the discourse of gender on par

with the feminist activism in the public. Fayiza says that in the ongoing social discussions over education, employment, dress, marriage, marriage age, body, sexuality and sociality of Muslim women, the main factor deciding the agency of Muslim women would be religion, community or Muslim men. She adds that the Muslim women are represented in public discussions as either not fighting within community and thus victims, suppressed by the Muslim men or alone fighting the community and Muslim men (“Pothuvyavahaarangalile” 17). The Muslim women are not affiliating to the category ‘women’ as they do with the community. The category ‘women’ in general excludes the Muslim women for many reasons. Fayiza urges the need of different political social frames to see Muslim women (“Pothuvyavahaarangalile 21).

The Muslim women of Kerala show big disparities from north to south to be categorised as a single entity, differing in dialects, dressing, political leanings and familial lifestyle. As observed by Hussain, there are many categories in the term Muslim women (*Musleemum*101). Unlike the Muslim men, the Muslim women do not actively associate with different sects of religious or political organisations except minimally. The women of other religions at least have the choice of keeping away from practicing faith, but those Muslim women who have chosen that way fail to get accommodated completely in the secular political or cultural spaces except for the moments of media sensationalism. Hussain has started studying Muslim women because of the prevalent prejudices upon them as religious, inside-home beings, uneducated and thus not secular, unprogressive and ignorant. She asserts that ‘Muslim woman’ is a heterogeneous category and never a watertight compartment (*Neunapakshathinum* Preface). The deconstructed pattern of generalising the problems of women in the name of Universal

patriarchy acknowledges the diversity among the group of women in general and Muslim women in particular.

In the postcolonial period, at least two misunderstandings have dominated academic discussions and debates on Muslim women. First, it is commonplace to view Muslims and Muslim women as a monolithic category; writings on Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular, make broad generalizations about what is, in reality, a highly differentiated and heterogeneous community. (Hasan and Menon *Unequal* 1)

The reformers of the nineteenth and twentieth century had addressed the women for the larger community sake with respect to the political turmoil of the period. Hussain says that like most other renaissance movements, the leaders and spokespersons of the Muslim renaissance were generally considered as only men (“Keraleeya” 95). Though there were many Muslim women active in every reformative effort within and outside the community during those periods, the mainstream histories have not given popularity for them being women. Hussain’s study is the first to consider such women with reformer status. She details about the participation of women in organisations, educational institutions, newspapers and journals which had played important roles in the reformer activism in the society (*Neunapakshathinum*35).

When the male reformers like Vakkom Abdul Kader Moulavi, Chalilakath Kunhammad Haji, K.M.Moulavi and Saidalikutti Master called for the modernist awakenings of women inside the community, the women writers like Haleema Beevi and Ayesha Mayan with their publications, were setting the models for public activism of

Muslim women based on Islamic perspectives. Referring to their religious perspectives as the main sources of energy of the reformers Haleema Beevi, Aysha Mayen and V.S.Kasim.B.mistress, Hussain writes that the women stars of the renaissance period worked for their own uplifts as well as for the uplifts of the community, strongly based in a Keralite social structure and Islam (“Keraleeya” 101,103). The impact of freedom struggle, Malabar rebellion and the corresponding rise of Muslim renaissance movements when shaped the identity of Muslims in the first half of the twentieth century, the post-Independence activities of political parties and religious organizations, the controversy over Shah Bano case and Babri Masjid problematised the Muslim identity all over India.

Social commentators have observed that the gendered politics of minority location have become more acute and complex in the last 15 years, following the intensification of communal politics in India and the consolidation of fundamentalist factions across religion in the wake of the Shah Bano controversy in 1985-6, the Deorala Sati in 1987, and the tragedy of the Babari masjid in 1992. (Hasan and Menon *Unequal* 3)

The role of social critics like M.N.Karassery, N.P.Hafiz Muhammed, Hameed Chennamangalore and Hussain has been vital in sustaining the Muslim woman question throughout these periods, which has been necessitated upon them because of their Muslim names beyond their secular standpoints. There are women taking stands on and for Muslim Women beyond organizational politics. According to Fayiza, the outside-community academics like Flavia Agnes and Nivedita Menon, inside-critics like Khadeeja Mumtas, research groups of Muslim women and the scholars inside the community address the Muslim women question effectively (Interview).

The social status of Muslim women is measured in terms of different roles she performs in society. In operational terms, her social status can be measured by the degree of freedom she enjoys in the following: 1-to get education, 2- to choose and hold a job, 3-to have say in spouse selection, 4- to participate in family decision-making including family budget, education, and marriage of children, acquisition and disposal of consumer durables, real estates, etc, 5- to use one's income in her own way, 6- to participate in extra familial activities (religious, cultural, political), 7- to go out without male escort. (Menon 31)

The Indian model secularism associates with the majority religions as religion is not private unlike in most developed countries of the world. In the discourse on Muslim women, the secular mainstream positions Muslim men representing the community as the accused. Fayiza writes that there are only lesser modernists who have not fallen for the equation victim Muslim women -aggressive Muslim men ("Pothuvyavahaarangalile" 20). The accusation on the Muslim men helps bail off the patriarchal situations of all the other communities. Shams blames the media for not giving ears to the powerful words of purdah clad women but to her tears only ("Vivahangal" 36). Even when the male hegemony continues to restrict, the women of the other communities get privileged being not Muslims. Fayiza argues that there are public discourses distinguishing the secular restrictions over the Muslim women as good and religious restrictions as bad ("Pothuvyavahaarangalile" 20).

The choice of practising religion is not considered as a choice particularly for Muslim women but rather as a religious imposing. The secular dominance of the cultural spheres is reluctant to admit and accommodate who chose, observe and practise Islam

even though their secular pattern is highly influenced by the Hindu culture. Criticising this, Fayiza writes that the secular concept of impossibility of woman as Muslim and woman at the same time actually follows the religious fundamentalist logic that woman's life is not possible inside religion ("Idathu" 56). Though rivals in position, the male hegemonic nature of secularism and religion in their respective spaces are hesitant to accommodate women. In their haste to criticise the religion to rescue Muslim women, even the seculars are casting Muslim women out of the community to nowhere. Shams says that those issues which affect women in general are scattered due to caste and religious consciousness is the situation in Kerala ("Penninidamillatha" 28). The reduced enthusiasm of the secular public in addressing the problems of women in general contradicts with its energy in accusing the religion in the case of Muslim women. Fayiza wonders that why the denial of women's rights always gets attributed to Islam ("Idathu" 58).

The problems of Muslim women accounting to regional peculiarities are falsely generalised in the public as unitary. The problems of Muslim women even in farther remote locations of the world will be of relevance and importance to the media and public in Kerala. Instead of blaming and problematising the stands of the community, neither the seculars nor the feminists are coming up with solutions within or outside the community. Fayiza writes that the feminist readings are often seen as giving themselves up to the 'secular logic' of religion as a Muslim's mistake ("Pothuvyavahaarangelile" 20). The situation in Kerala cannot be considered as guaranteeing social status for women in general and for Muslim women in particular to conclude that religion is not the primary issue of Muslim women.

Fayiza is concerned that only when those object Muslim women are the men from the community as in the case of Malala and not as when Asma Balthaji and Habib Ahmed were shot dead by the secular police of Egypt, the seculars jump to criticise and take stands against the community (“Idathu” 59). Though there are thousands of deaths including those of Muslim women executed by major political powers of the world, turning the spotlight only upon the Muslim community continue to terrorise it. Referring to the political scenario of Kerala, Fayiza says that thus in the very same style of global politics, the media here constructs orientalist stereotypes of Muslim women (“Pothuvyavahaarangalile” 21). As mentioned by her, the arguments of Fayiza tend towards the post secular Islamic feminist politics. According to Fayiza, in the anti-fascism discourse, the secularists wrongly realize that only by putting out the attacks done by Muslims over the world, the secular criticism of fascism will be complete (“Pothuvyavahaarangalile” 20). To this they add the Muslim women subject as the fascism of the community, says she.

Muslim women in Kerala formed a heterogeneous cultural group having their own vertical and horizontal divisions by way of following the traditional Islamic law in the premise of traditional and customary cultural traits. In spite of these dichotomous divisions found in the life of Muslim women in Kerala, an additional element of a pan-Islamic core also could be seen added in recent years. (Kurup and Ismail Preface)

The subjectivity of a particular group will be empowered when it define realise and values itself but confining into boundaries imposed by others, whether religion or secularism, retards the growth of the group. Shams writes that in a religion which has

raised the status and nobility of women, they are now assaulted in the public due to the inefficiency of the community leadership (“Muslim Personal” 43). Even though there are different organisations inside the community with and without women members, the structures of these organisations being modeled on the then political organisations of Kerala on patriarchal lines fail to en-space women completely. Hussain questions the community conventions that when talking about rules of religion, its benefits are always for men whereas its symbols and responsibilities upon women (*Musleemum*121). To this point she seeks clarification from the spokesmen of religion whether they have this attitude in relation to women while quoting the popular attitude “*iracheem pathireem aanungalk, nombum niskaravum pennungalk*” (Beef and *Pathiri* for men, but namaz and fasting for women).

The ways of the community leadership, particularly of the Sunni fractions are always subjected to criticism in the Kerala public. The tradition of criticism is considered as updating the systems of Islamic civilizations. In the lineage of earlier women reformers and critics who had criticised the community for mistreating women, the current Muslim women critics have serious blames against the community unfortunately for the same reason. Fayiza asks whose interests are coming out as the choice of religion and who is determining the religion and its choices (“Pothuvyavahaarantalile” 19). For the outside and inside criticisms against the community, the Muslim men are compelled to defend Islam in the public projecting the better roles of women in the history of Islam. A.P. Kunjamu sarcastically refers to this as ‘Muslim man’s burden’ (“Gender”).

In truth, the majority Muslim men do not let raise or even wish to uplift the Muslim women. Hussain criticises that what women are and what they need are always

used to be determined by Muslim men to the extent that Muslim men alone represent the class Muslims (“Musleemum” 17). The subjectivity of Muslim women inside the community is becoming more influential. Gupta notes, “Muslim women in India have started opposing wrong practises imposed onto them in the name of religion and tradition” (xi). The position of Muslim women between the community and the secular public impact the standpoints of the former. Fayiza blames that mostly what Muslim women speak and write is not what is read (“Pothuvyavahaarangalile” 21). Getting into the debate culture of the community, the Muslim women writers and activists protest the gender injustices practised in the name of religion. The secular public degrades the religion by referring to the community criticisms of the Muslim women. The Muslim women are confused how to develop the language of community criticism different from the colonial politics, but the fact is that that confusion is making them silent, says Fayiza. The women criticising the community face severe out casting. Fayiza adds that most people though wish to, but keep silence in Muslim women subjects (afraid of controversy) (“Pothuvyavahaarangalile” 21).

The social situations object the rise and growth of women in general and Muslim women in particular than the reasons accounted to the religion. Shams questions how the Muslim women could rise without reservation in a patriarchal country, comparing to other communities (“Vanitha Samvaranam Engumethathe Poya”). She adds that those secularists and political parties who cry for Muslim women sake should have realised the situation of the Muslim women, if they are sincere in their motives. While talking about other backward castes Shams adds that along with the reservation in Assembly seats, the political parties too should reserve posts for minorities and women within. The social

scientists should contribute in reengineering the societal structures instead of complicating the discourse. Hussain urges the need of reservation for different classes within reservation for women which will be a possibility for Muslim women to be active and resistant to the male hegemonic values within the community as well as to show diversity within feminist movements (*Neunapakshathinum* 90).

In the Indian situation, where Muslims are continuously demanded to prove their patriotism, the identity of Indian Muslim woman is complicated being Indian, Muslim and woman.

Secularism in India is deployed in three main ways. First, it is deployed as a way of marking India off from Pakistan...Second, it is deployed as a means of preserving the Nehruvian settlement from the onslaught of Hindutva. Third, secularism is considered essential to preserving civic peace in India, primarily in defusing tensions between the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority.

Secularism in India, then, essentially manages the relationship between a Muslim minority and the nation-state majority. (Sayyid 39,40)

The choice of religion is a problem-space for the minorities even with the Right to Religion enacted in the constitution because of the elite Hindu dominance of the Indian model secularism. Fayiza writes that the questions like how can we understand women who chose religion as important; why the majority Muslim women still opt Islam; why their choice is not considered as a choice are yet to be addressed by our public discourse (“Pothuvyavahaarungalile” 20). In the Indian context, the children follow the religion of parents accustomed to its rituals and identities. The people cling to their

religions believing theirs to be superior than others as well as for political reasons even when the cultural exchange between religions is active. The questions how do a particular religion chosen women groups and related lifestyle get excluded from the banner of women's choice and how well is it possible for our public discourses to acknowledge /accept hijabi Muslim women who are part of Muslim organisations and have Islamic lifestyle as a woman of voice and space should rise, adds she.

The Religious conversion in general and from a majority religion in particular is not welcomed in the Indian situation. From social out casting to brutal deaths the impacts are severe even though such conversions are lawful by Constitution. The conversion to Islam is considered as a negative and brainless act because of the attributed labels of the barbarous, suppressing and patriarchal of religions. Referring to the conversion of prominent Indian writer Kamal Das (Madhavikutty) into Islam, Hussain says that the public cannot accept the right of women to convert (*Musleemum*60). In most cases of women's conversions to Islam, even if they are highly educated or reputed, they will be described as 'brainwashed' by Muslims (men) thereby degrading their subject positions. The choice of Islam than other religious conversions is criticised in the Indian context.

Fayiza points out that the media is interested only on the attacks by Muslim community upon women that the tragedy of Muslim women killed by the invasion army in Iraq and Afghanistan are neither News nor part of marketing industry in the Kerala Literature market ("Pothuvyavahaarangelile" 20, 21). The situation in Kerala demands explanations from Muslims for any instance of mishap upon Muslim women even in a remote political geographical location. Shams writes that the philosophic teachings about women in Islam have got toppled when patriarchal constrictions and strange rituals

intrude in the religious field (“Vanitha Sanghadanaka” 41). The Islamophobia politics generalises the pattern of patriarchy and male hegemony and discards the contextual discourses.

Hussain problematises why the cultural contributions of Muslim women are not discussed in Kerala (“Nilavilulla” 15). Before the advent of modernity, the tribal models of community living had encouraged the creativities of men and women with increased spaces of actualisations. Even during the crises of independence struggles, the instinctive talents of the people were alert, political and visible as later discovered as the cultural history of Kerala. The oral song tradition, the non-vegetarian culinary experiments, art and fashion constitute the cultural identity of Muslim women beyond the religious concerns in the state. The creative critical social political endeavours and enterprises of women in general and the Muslim women in particular are limited to the scopes of feminism and not beyond by the male hegemonic public sphere.

The transnationalism and gulf migration have redefined the identity and visibility of the Muslim women in Kerala excessively. With the extensive economic social and cultural impacts over Kerala in general and Muslims in particular, the most important but least discussed of the changes is the circumstantial empowerment of women. By shouldering new roles of agency ranging from educational and health concerns of children to supervising house construction and driving, the Muslim women deconstruct the miserable image they had been identified with. The systematic and planned scheduling of family affairs being detached from the joint family system, education of children, shopping, visiting relations and attending functions make women policy and decision makers within the most important unit of society, family.

The women have been evolving into the subject positions overcoming many hurdles, syndromes of separation and gossips of 'spouseless' situations. Ironically, appearing in the so called attire of oppression, hijab, Muslim women are rising against the mainstream misconceptions. The sociological studies report that "In places like Kerala, the Gulf boom improved the socio-economic status of the women folk, and thereby the whole family system" (Kurup and Ismail 121). Travelling alone or with family to Gulf countries, the NRI women are not sitting idle inside the four walls in those Muslim countries. Coming into contact with different lifestyles in the Cosmo polis they have acquired strong impulses to make use of their time engaging in creative and business ventures.

Kiranmayi Bhushi says, "While exile, loss, dislocation and nostalgia were the tropes of identity among the earlier Diasporas; connections, simultaneity, flows, networks, hybridisations seem to be the new logic of transnational communities (131)". The religious habit of donations and charity as well as the enthusiasm for acquiring knowledge and education has prompted them to invest in the educational institutions in Kerala which also became a political act lately as an impact of the Sachar Committee Report. In the book *The Malabar Muslims: A Different Perspective* LRS, Lakshmi says, "The dedicated interest that the Mappilla community is taking in its educational progress is appreciable" (159). Realising the backward status of the community, the Muslim organisations, political parties and even individuals head on the task of uplifting the community from its stained image through education. Fayiza criticises that the increased attendance of Muslim girls in professional colleges is not credited to the Muslim organisations but the social injustices such as Mysore wedding is considered as a vice

related to the peculiarity of the 'religion' ("Pothuvyavahaarangalile" 20). The Muslim women critics, being caught in between the secular public and Muslim men, position themselves as particular and political equally criticising and appreciating the standpoints of the community.

Shams says that the Muslim student-youth organisations should come forefront to solve the problems within the community ("Vivahangal" 37). The contents of the magazines by the Muslim organisations fail to identify analyse and discourse the problems of Muslim women in the public as well as within the community. Hussain notes that the agenda of the earlier reformers was to reform the Muslim women for the community sake by all means (*Neunapakshathinum* 24). Reversing that situation, the Muslim women today are capable of proposing reforms to the community for humanity and human sake. Wadud writes, "Women who advocate the necessity for gender reform within an Islamic framework are even challenged by patriarchal and narrow conservative standards on what it means to be Muslim" (*Inside* 93). From community criticism to Islamic feminism, the Muslim women voice out their standpoints.

Fayiza questions the act of attributing the problems in the Muslim community on the shoulders of Islamic organisations ("Pothuvyavahaarangalile" 20). The progressive and secular Muslim individuals or organisations are even held responsible for the tradition and the related problems in the community. She adds that the virtuousness of a Muslim never gets attributed to the religion. Though the community recognises the sources of Islamophobia politics in the state, the absence of unity and solidarity of the diverse sects within the community weaken their resistance.

Shams blames the irresponsibility and indifference of the community for what women are experiencing within (“Vivahangal” 36). The mishaps of misogyny within the community tarnish the Muslim lives, making futile the continuing reforms carried out by the Muslim organisations in Kerala. As observed by Fayiza, as there are many stereotypes available of Muslim community, they (secular public) select only what they need and analyse (“Pothuvyavahaarangalile” 21). The selective communal tenets regarding the discourse on Muslim women are applied by the public sustaining the anti-religious sentiments in the state. Shahnaz Khan refers to Muslim woman as a subordinate colonial (307). Shams questions the political issue that though everywhere in the world women’s public entry discussions are active the important subjects of consideration for social scientists are only of Muslim women (“Vanitha Sanghadanakal” 41). There are political tactics behind the continuous attributing of misogyny and backwardness to a particular community without mentioning the minor but important achievements and advancements of it. Hussain wonders that Man-woman equality is still distasteful for many organisations that these ideals are said to be downloaded from west is strong within them (“Keraleeya” 102).

The active religious discourse in the state in the form of books, audios, videos, virtual classes, speeches, conventions and conferences advocate the concept of gender justice in Islam doctrinally. In her interview of the first women member of Waqf board, appointed after 2014 reforms Shams projects the personality of Shameema Islahiya who runs twenty-five learning classes with thousands of learners under her (“Waqf” 8). The recent changes in the pattern of Muslim organisations include women friendly offices,

conferences and programs which are yet to be implemented in the mainstream political parties, associations and NGOs.

Hussain pities the situation that most discussions about personal law make women invisible thus giving space to the religious leaders and interpreters (*Musleemum*54). On controversial issues, the Muslim men voicing out for women ironically when they are the accused, discards the agency of Muslim women in the public. The community heads letting women speak for themselves on behalf of religion can become a turning point for the religion as well as for the Muslim women in the state. Hussain writes that in strikes like dowry deaths and rape as women came in front, the uniform civil code could not get them go in unison (*Neunapakshathinum* Preface). The Muslim women should be categorised under women in general on biological terms than under religion or community.

The feminist associating of women against the patriarchy deep rooted in every aspects of society contributes to gender justice. The intrinsic caste class and religious feelings in the state continue to hindrance the possibilities of such associations. In the cases of assaults on women, their dressing style or 'street-walks' get criticised than the attitude of men towards women. Shams writes that the situation of a rape victim is like that of a life time sentenced in Kerala ("Vivahangal" 36). Instead of defaming the culprit, the girls and women are made to bear the humiliation of assaults which make their lives impossible in the society. Even in such critical cases, a massive protest by and for the women does not happen in India.

Shams problematises that the ideas, dreams, rights and power of elite women being the product of feudal system and having symbols of power and pride would never be that of a Dalit women (“Samooohanirmithiyil” 37). She is concerned of the miserable situation of Adivasi women whom the government has not recognised as humans, that for malnutrition of mothers and low birth weight, many Adivasi kids are dying which may soon eradicate a community from this world (“Samooohanirmithiyil” 38). Within the category women, the vulnerable cases of tribal and coastal women are not addressed in the mainstream feminist discourse. Shams adds that only the creamy portion of women are able to be part of all fields as celebrated. Generalising the empowerment of women by highlighting the achievements of a small group of women is a false assessment.

As problematised by Fayiza, the Muslim women experiences such that of the mother of Zakariya, the wife of Ma’dani, Sirajunnisa, the wives of those chartered with UAPA and the state terrorism victims of Bhima palli do not become stories in public discourses (“Pothuvyavahaarantalile” 21). Though the Muslim political and religious organisations associate with Dalit groups, the latter does not declare support for the community in critical issues. There should be a new practical politics from Muslim women along with criticising the liberal politics based on mere personal experience, says Fayiza. To which she exemplifies the Muslim women experience and activism in Indian campus as putting forth successful practical political models (“Pothuvyavahaarantalile” 21). The public is reluctant to acknowledge the intellectual activism of Muslim women but extensively quotes the Islamic feminist studies.

Fayiza criticises that the mainstream in the state is still in the 80’s Islamic feminism whereas the Muslim women groups and male Muslim intellectuals are far more

advanced in the discourse (Interview). The diverse subject positions and identity conflicts complicate the generalising of women as a homogeneous category. Shaikh marks, “Women’s multiple locations on different and intersecting axes of social power complicate the category of “woman” in significant ways” (“Feminism” 15). In order to restructure the patriarchy to spaces of gender justice, the bonding of women on terms of biological identity is a practical preference. Abu-Lughod writes, “Like other women, the kinds of suffering that Muslim women undergo are of many sorts and have various causes, only some of which might be traced to religious traditions and cultural formations” (221).

The problems of Muslim women are attributed to the males of the community than identifying with women in general. Fayiza questions the situation where the problems of Muslim women not raised as the problems of Muslim women distinctly (“Pothuvyavahaarangelile” 20). Beyond the similar biological concerns, the social political religious aspects of the category women complicate the situation when including the minorities like Muslim women. Kurup and Ismail substantiate, “The issues of Muslim women in Kerala all the time are discussed not on the basis of their human rights or privileges or economic development in the secular premise, but often on the bedrock of the so-called ‘shariah’, which in practise turns to be anti-liberal and rarely even anti-human”(191). The recent studies analysing the mobility of Muslim women relate their religious engaging in the form of Quran classes as formulating a bonding, conscious of their identity.

Such (Quran) classes arranged periodically are also attended by house wives, working women etc. who later become role models for others. This programme

was first initiated by the revivalist groups like the jamaati's and mujahids...now sunnis too...apart from getting an awareness of the religious life, this togetherness creates an identity and a limited exposure in social life...Periodical religious discourses associated with mosques and madrassahs specially meant for women, are a routine scene, now found extensively in Muslim quarters of Kerala. (Kurup and Ismail 138,140)

The social and religious spaces enabled by the Quran classes in association with regional mosques account to the pyramidal growth of Muslim women in the state post 1990. The participation in the ritual and spiritual actualisations of the religion accelerates their visibility within and outside the community. The Quran classes administered by the different sects within the community reduce the gap between the elite and middle class Muslim women, though the marginal and coastal groups are less benefitted. The increasing systems of knowledge and education, religious and non-religious, within the community enhance the spaces for women outside homes.

The spaces for women to demonstrate both their self-identification as female and their full humanity are not reserved for only those whom elite male scholars and laypersons have already manipulated in mind and body, but belong to all women who have endeavored to sustain their roles as women and Muslims despite silence, separation, violence and invisibility. (Wadud *Inside* 262)

Discourse of Hijab and Purdah

The basic necessities of life, food, cloth and shelter change styles from people to people, place to place and generation to generation. The climate, geography, occupation,

religion, economy, power, status, choice and convenience are the factors determining the clothing of the people of any region. The occasions of celebrations and ceremonies demand fashions depending on the financial situations. In ancient days, the kings, lords, slaves and warriors were distinctly identified by their dresses. The disciplinary concept of uniform for students in schools and colleges, doctors, nurses and attenders in hospitals and soldiers in war helps to identify them easily. The choice of dressing is overpowered by the politics of power, the trends of society and the preferences of community particularly for women.

The cloths of men while helps him in every sort of adventure in public, the male-designed dress varieties of women, serves mostly the purpose of voyeurism. Hussain protests that the concept of women's dress itself is an arrangement of her sexuality (*Neunapakshathinum*76). The implementing of the patriarchal notion 'women are meant for men', in the names of tradition, religion and values, conditions the dressing concepts of women and checks their mobility. Salva says that regarding slippers, bag, kerchief and watch there are differences for men and women set by the commercial industry that those of women are soft, cute, beautiful, slim, small and skin tight but those of men are rough, strong, powerful, big and loose, helping them to move easily ("Muslim" 64). The gender disparity in the cloths, fashion accessories and style is not discussed in detail by the social critics.

Kerala had witnessed the historic *Maarumaraykkal Samaram*(1813-59) where lower caste women claimed their right to wear upper body clothes to cover their breast which had been denied by the upper castes. Till the end of 20th century, Hindu Muslim and Christian women had their own styles of dressing up with *mundu*, *neryathu*,

kuppayam, *kachi*, *chatta* and *mundu* until saree and salwars started dominating. Elizabeth Bucar says that in places like Iran Muslim men easily accustomed to western dress, putting the burden of culture only upon Muslim women (Fayiza “Hijab” 39). While the men stylised themselves with pants and shirts in the state, the weight of tradition as well as religion, fell upon the women of all communities. Mahmood writes, “... continuity between Islamism and nationalism would appear to be all the more pronounced in regard to the question of gender, in so much as both ideologies seem to cast women as the repositories of tradition and culture, their bodies made the potent symbols of collective identity” (118). The pattern of the dressing of the Muslim women in particular is not adapted to the climatic situations of the state.

The commercial industries effectively propagate, implement, and establish these underlying notions of tradition, culture and religion in pomp and show to the extent of confining the objectives of the life to body-creams, dress, jewels, cell phones and automobiles. Osella and Osella write, “Within Indian-oriented styles, films are an important reference for both middle-class and popular fashions in clothing and hair” (128). By diverting the attention of youth to trivial material factors, other than business gains, they propound non-white complexion, unfit bodies and simple living as the other in the public. Recently, in order to promote the tradition, the government of Kerala has made it mandatory for men to wear *mundu* at least on one working day per week. Being a time consuming mode of dressing which restricts easy movements and mobility, saree as a dress code for lady teachers in schools has been made optional.

The presentation of saree as a traditional dress of beauty and grandeur has given way for the Persian model salwars, popularised by the north Indian media. The

convenience in the public makes it highly acceptable with girls and women. The visible changes in the dressing style of women which are developed out of need, necessity and convenience are markedly 'feminine'. Salva problematises that the garb of women would be very much bright and colourful whereas those of men never in bright colours, with the added advantage of pockets ("Muslim" 64). In India, the people of different religions, caste and tribes have their own distinct and non-distinct pattern of dressing. The hijab and the black purdah of the Muslim women identify, distinguish and polarise their minority status. Salva says that Islam has no specific, concrete form of cloths but dressing concept, which is a rule for both men and women. She adds that all types of dress can be worn Islamic and non-Islamic ("Mugham" 12).

The majority Muslims and their organisations maintain strictness in the dressing than the modesty of the women. Referring to the religious heads and preachers of the community, Kurup and Ismail note, "Modesty has been interpreted to mean that women should cover themselves from head to toe" (7). The dress code of the Muslim women is always considered as a symbol of suppression under religious patriarchy by the mainstream. This increases to the extent of Laura Bush justifying the antiterrorism war by US in Afghanistan to save Muslim women from the 'portable seclusion'. This aspect unites the non-religious secular and feminist movements over the world though the politics underneath is Islamophobia.

Shams says that in reality the black purdah is discriminated because it is understood as a symbol of political forwarding against the present social system and anarchy ("Purdah" 40). Regarding the dressing of the Muslim women, the Kerala public has discussed the black purdah more than the hijab. Salva points out that at present there

are no other tools except dressing to measure Muslim women's identity ("Muslim" 65). Within the community, black purdah and hijab attribute to the piety of the women. Even before the advent of black purdah, Muslim women were using modest and body covering dresses as part of their religiosity, that purdah in that sense cannot be considered as a recent phenomenon. The cultural introduction of black purdah/abaya, a form of women's dress in Arabian countries, into Kerala is the impact of the increased gulf migration of Keralites, Muslims in particular. The popularity of purdah with a good percent Muslim women post 1990 account to the convenience, color and lasting dress material of purdah than its religiosity. Hussain says that the religious organisations advocate purdah as a modest dress (*Neunapakshathinum*68). The formal way of dressing black in the countries of Europe still continue to exist in colonised countries like India formally or casually as evident in the use of black pants by men. The convenience of color acts in the black pants of men and the black purdah of Muslim women alike.

Kurup and Ismail write, "Being a thriving industry, the purdah manufacturers are highly vigilant and market conscious, and they frequently innovate the models to attract changing demands of the consumers" (161). The purdah as a safe mode of dressing in the public resists gaze and stares and have the advantage of pockets. Shams says that the black purdah of Muslim women is considered as symbol of extremism, brutality, injustice and patriarchy but the almost similar dressing of a nun is considered as a symbol of faith, devotion, kindness, tolerance, mobility and status ("Purdah" 39). The imposed dress code of nuns never comes up in the secular debates of Kerala. There is a uniform pattern of dressing for male and female priests in religions like Christianity and Hinduism which vary according to their status and position. The Muslim male religious preachers in

Kerala prefer white *mundu* and white shirt unlike those of the other states of India, though not instructed by religion.

Shams argues that the divide and rule policy tactics of the coloniser is still followed in the positioning of purdah as the other (“Purdah” 39). The commercial films present black-purdah-clad women as well as men in disguise in black purdah to instill humour. Khadeeja Mumtas says Indian secularism by practise should have accommodated the secular, giving freedom to Muslim woman to wear saree or purdah in accordance with their intellect (*Purushanariyatha*54). The discussions aggregate on purdah as if Muslim women do not have any other actualisations. Fayza says that the public discourse does not consider those who choose purdah as having freedom/choice (“Pothuvyavahaarangelile” 19). The women driving vehicles are marked as grades of empowerment but those Muslim women in colored purdah/hijab, riding vehicles are not considered empowered on account of their dress alone.

Kurup and Ismael mark, “Today it is a common sight in Kerala, whether it be in banks, hospitals, educational institutions, Muslim women though cloaked in purdah, are moving with steps of confidence and freedom” (124). On the other hand, it implies that neither purdah nor hijab restricts the mobility and actualisations of Muslim women. As observed by Salva, dress is not at all a problem for Muslim women but only for those who discuss the Muslim women (“Muslim” 65). The dressing pattern of Muslim women in the state adapts to the fashion industry than religiosity and the politics of identity.

While the class appropriation of veiling has shifted from the upper classes to the lower ones, the meaning and symbolism of a woman’s dress in the Islamic world

is still determined by regional attitudes, inherited legacies, and the negotiation of identity within the hegemonic structures of capitalism. Still, whether veiled or not, women's conditions are determined not by the clothes they wear, but by the degree to which they manage to forge an identity for themselves that is not manipulated by the (often male-constructed) discourses of modernity or religious authenticity. (Majid 70)

There are different varieties of hijab in Kerala ranging from a let loose shawl over the head to the tight-draped and pinned scarfs. Though the face-veil is not common, a piece of light cloth over the head is a pattern for Muslims of Malabar. Mumtas says that the spread of hijab is not a positive awakening of religious conscious, but to stand different from other communities (*Purushanariyatha* 130). The Muslim women in Kerala have differences of opinion regarding hijab. As an attributed symbol of piety, those in hijab look down upon the hijab-less women. The latter who do not wear hijab for various reasons, tend not to associate with those in hijab. Salva says that those not in the „dress code“ are not included to form a wider Muslim women platform whereas on the other side the mainstream neglects the spaces of the Muslim women in hijab (“Muslim” 65).

When the Muslim women in hijab associate with religious organisations, those not in hijab face the dilemma of joining either the religious or secular groups, being the only two options. The Egyptian American writer Leila Ahmed discusses in detail the attitudes of women in hijab towards hijab-less Muslim women where she problematises the pious status of hijab. She writes that those women who did not veil and the Muslim-majority nations whose women who did not veil are categorised as secular (43). The hijab of Muslim women is a debated area in the Islamic feminist discourse. In her review of

Elizabeth Bucar's book *Islamic Veil: the Beginner's Guide* Fayiza says that liberal feminism sees Muslim woman's dress in two ways-Muslim women have brain and potential but Muslim men are suppressing them by making them wear hijab or those Muslim women who choose hijab on their own are either fools or brainwashed lesser beings ("Hijab" 39). The secularists who lead this discussion consider the dress of Muslim women as product of patriarchy and irrationality, adds she. Globally, the discussions stereotype the victim image of Muslim women. Engaging in the identity discourse of hijab, Wadud explains,

Before Islam embraced me, I was already wearing long dresses and covering my hair...I adopted clothing that would cover my leg at all times in public and began various styles of head wrap before I entered Islam...So, I chose intentionally to cover my body as a means of reflecting my historical identity, personal dignity, and sexual integrity (*Inside* 220, 221).

The reasons to veil and not to veil are different for different regions over the world as far as such uniformity is not a religious obligation. Abu-Lughod argues, "One cannot reduce the diverse situations and attitudes of millions of Muslim women to a single item of clothing" (40). The majority Muslims consider reverent and practise hijab and purdah as the Quran-insisted dress code for women. Barlas writes, "I am disturbed that the issue of veiling is currently framed in most Muslim societies in a way that results in misrepresenting the Quran's form, purpose, and intent in formulating a specific dress code" (57). The discourse over hijab ranges in different political dimensions than over piety. Salva says that without discussing Muslim women's other life situations, social status, expressions, experience, interferences and en-spacing, narrowing their activisms

merely to dress should be deeply analysed (“Muslim” 64). Moreover, marking of hijab as the only identity of Muslim women create problems of identity for those Muslim women who are not in hijab. Wadud writes, “Like a sixth pillar, we cannot discuss Islam and gender without discussing hijab. While overloaded with multiple meanings, it is often the single marker used to determine community approval or disapproval” (*Inside* 219).

Referring to a survey of Girls of Malappuram and Calicut, the secular studies report that the Muslim women suffer from “mental abnormalities of veiling” (Kurup and Ismail 156). The documentary titled *In the Name of Secularism* (2014) directed by Fasila A.K. and Samra Abdul Razak portrays the aversion of secular public towards the hijab of Muslim women. The interviews of Muslim girls in the documentary express hijab as not just a mere religious identity, but also as a stronger political expression and a symbol of resistance, says the directors (Interview). The voicing of the choice of hijab by Muslim women, impacts stronger, when explained by women than men and establishes their agency.

Upon the Burkini ban in France, Fayiza says that it can be seen as the continuation of March 2004-hijab ban and October 2010-*niqab* ban (“Burkiniyum”). She adds that the French liberal secular government is justifying their politics using secular feminism. The schools run by Christian and Hindu managements in Kerala are mostly averse to hijab in the uniform. Fayiza writes that there are more restrictions upon Muslim women’s hijab, *purdah* and *niqab* in the educational space but the public discourse is not analysing that as a restriction at all (“Pothuvyavahaarangalile” 20). The deep-rooted aversion to Muslims from the time of British in particular is one of the reasons for the ban. According to Shams, the hijab ban in schools in Kerala is a clear case of human

rights violation (“Manushyavakashadinathile”). The secularists who are not bothered of a Sikh turban or a nun’s scarf fail to accept the Muslim women in hijab as equal humans. Fayiza says that though the ban is a feminist issue regarding freedom and choice, it is narrowed down to a problem of Islam (“Pothuvyavahaarangelile” 20). In public debates, the secular Muslim men, the government and the mainstream Indian media support the ban, says she. The confusions within the community upon hijab complicate the crisis in the public particularly in the educational and employment sector with uniform dress codes. The people who support hijab by acknowledging the choice of Muslim women are considered orthodox in the social spheres.

The uniform wearing of veil has become a practise among a major section of the community only for the last two decades.... It acts as a Camouflage concealing the class differences and social distinctions that Islam never agrees to pronounce conceptually, particularly in the context of gulf boom... The rich and the poor, the low-born and high-born, find solace and solidarity, while they sit and enjoy together covered, in a single piece of garment. (Kurup and Ismail 155, 156)

Unlike the Muslim men who dress like the men of other communities except for white turbans or caps occasionally, with the advent of purdah, the Muslim women appear in the uniform dress code for the public. Hijab is considered as a religious issue inside the community (than political), says Fayiza (“Hijab” 41). The community tends to exclude those Muslim women not in hijab whereas the secular public never acknowledges the Muslim women in hijab. Recently, on the side of religion a style of considering dressing of Muslim woman as a reformative agenda in a reaction to secularism is developing, writes Fayiza (“Hijab” 40).

One of the major criticisms against Islam is that it imposes Arabian culture upon its followers though Islam in reality promotes the natural blend of cultures. Salva states that same dress- same food- same culture is not the objective of Islam (“*Barsa Thurakkenda*” 63). The hijab and purdah are vital in creating identity consciousness within the minority concerns of the Muslim community in Kerala. The hijab was introduced in the Islamic society to distinguish Muslim women from other women as well as to mark their sexual non availability. In the colonised countries, the dressing of Muslim woman has become part of the conflict between colonial powers and colonised men, reducing her to a ‘thing’ or a reason for men to fight, as the Muslim men consider hijab as a resistance to colonialism (Fayiza “Hijab” 39). To sum up, with or without hijab and purdah, the dress as a choice becomes the political statement of the Muslim women.

Representation in Literature and films

The cultural symbols and practises of the Muslims are read taught and considered as barbarous and uncivilised. From the very beginning of the Malayalam Literature, the attitude of elite class towards Dalits and minority Christians and Muslims continue to get represented in stories and novels reflecting the then society. Hussain refers to the deliberate political act of Vaikom Muhammed Basheer who had recognised the othering of the Muslims in the Malayalam literature and had countered that with good and marvelous human characterisation in his novels (*Musleemum* 14). With fourteen novels, thirteen short story collections and eleven other anecdotal write-ups, translated into different Indian and world languages, his usage of simple Malayalam, elements of humour and satire and the small size of novels have broken the conventional style and structure of the heavy paged elite sanskritised Malayalam novel tradition until then.

While representing the lived experience of Muslim community for the public, the genius in him has been equally criticising the problems inside the community. Sheeba E.K. writes about Basheer, “He mercilessly satirises the pervasive degeneration that infects Muslim social life. In his writings he had been attempting to create harmony in life through God consciousness” (“Muslim” 1). With the fictionists N.P. Mohammed, K.T.Mohammed, Punathil Kunhabdulla, B M Suhara, U.A. Khader, T.V. Kochu Bava, Shibabuddeen poithumkadavu, Akbar Kakkatil and Khadeeja Mumthas, the different aspects of Muslim life in Kerala have become part of the social culture.

Hussain problematises the situation that the novels written by Muslim women are presented as written by Muslim women while Sara Joseph or Chandramathi are not identified as Christian woman writer or Hindu woman writer (*Musleemum* 16). She explains the connotation behind it as that if writing is natural for other women, it is not so for Muslim woman. The majority women writers of the state are against adding the adjective ‘woman to ‘writer’ as it confines them to *écriture* feminine. The attributing of ‘Muslim to ‘women writers’ in particular, marks their identity and realm on one hand and limits their domain as well as the scope of their works on the other.

The female characters of the feminist writers, male or female, stand out bold and beautiful in the renowned Malayalam novels to the extent that even the novels are named after the heroines as in *Indulekha*, *Kundalatha*, *Sarada*, *Ummachu* and *Kocharethi*. Referring to the women characters of Basheer, Hussain broaches that they were portrayed bold which was quite unreal for the time that she attributes to the visionary creativity of him. She adds that he has broken the conventional concepts of masculinity and femininity

as well (*Musleemum*12). In the works of Basheer, the masculinity and femininity are highly relational.

The prominent fictionist B.M. Suhara distinguishes the cultural life of Kerala Muslims from the philosophic and ideological Islam and does not directly engage with the religious texts that she is not criticised by the community unlike Mumtas. Despite her presentation of the social issues within the Muslim community in her novels, the absence of sharp criticism against the religion reduces her readership in the public. Attempting a comparative study of *Barsa* by Khadeeja Mumtas and *Randam Yamangalude Katha* by Salma translated from Tamil, Hussain presents *Barsa* as picturing how Muslim women actualise her life and concepts of religion while *Randamyamangalude Katha* is based on Muslim life around (*Musleemum* 17,18).

Beyond being written by Muslim woman writer with the portrayal of Muslim life, the novel *Barsa* has confronted controversies, criticism as well as recognition and awards for directly engaging with the religious texts and practise. In an urge to update the customs and practises in the name of religion she problematises the different aspects of the religion from a typical secular perspective. She finds fault with polygamy, circumcision and Saudi Muslim lifestyle in *Barsa*.

Mumthasian frame perceives things in accordance with the ideological notions of Muslim woman propagated by proponents of liberal secularism which in turn, relegates the subtle articulations of the identities, identifications and positionalities of Muslim woman into the background. Mumthas follows the stereotyped notions of the Malayalee Muslim woman who are perceived to be

subservient to patriarchal ideology which is prevalent in Islam. She through her novels also envisages an ideal Malayalee womanhood who, in my observation, represents the value of the hegemonic savarna image of woman. (Muhammadali 6)

In the novels, the women wearing saree are related to beauty, grace and grandeur in which the author keeps up an elite Hindu attitude. The characters in the novel *Barsa* are seen discussing the grandeur of Saree, which in reality is a less-convenient mode of dressing than churidhar. On the other hand she considers the hijab of the Muslim women as reducing beauty (*Barsa* 81,112). Her material beauty concerns, looking down upon hijab, the scornful presentation of haj attires of men and women as well as her racist comments of African people become problematic as she is not giving respect to other cultures and reflects her narrow social concerns(*Barsa*93,65,182). In *Athuram*, the attitude towards the new religiosity among the different religious organisations as visible in Kerala as well as to the beard and hijab of Muslims becomes scornfully intense (173). Beyond the educational advancement of the community as portrayed in the novels with the characters of Muslim doctors, medical students and other staff in the medical college, Mumtas is seeing only the hijabs and beards for the community. Referring to *Barsa*, Hussain criticises that a recently converted is engaging with the history of religion than the holy Quran (*Musleemum* 26). The protagonist is depending more on the interpretations of Quran and Hadith which are interpreted in the favour of men, adds she. Mumtas praises the spirituality aspects of Islam with respect to Sufism and is bothered about the rituals and customs in the religion.

Salva writes that though *Barsa* raises relevant questions regarding the up to date presentation of Islam and the status of women, the answers are but not derived from Islam (“*Barsa* Thurakkenda” 64). The major criticism against the novel is its secular perspective of criticising religion. Hussain figures out that the basic problem with *Barsa* is that it is using an outside methodology to criticise the basic tenets of the texts (*Musleemum*30). The social analysis of a culture using the tools and methodologies of a different culture is another drawback of the novel. According to Hussain, though questions the patriarchal concepts of religion, Mumtas accepts the patriarchy inside the family or keeps silence about it or justifies in the name of love, especially when comparing the Arabian family structure which she despises as patriarchal (*Musleemum*29, 31). Mumtas presents the Indian hierarchical family system above the Arabian system where women have more voice and power. Though she says about women of Arabia as more powerful inside families than those in Kerala, she presents the former as hurt lions bursting out their suppressed frustrations (*Barsa* 82, 83). Criticising the negative attitude towards polygamy in the novel, Hussain writes that there Islam is not discarded but the limitation of blaming a culture from the value system of another culture is revealed (*Musleemum*29).

The questioning of gender distinctions and segregations in Muslim societies by Mumtas in *Barsa* come in the line of Islamic feminist writings as she problematises the basic tenets of religion through the convert Muslim woman protagonist. Discussing in detail the family life of Prophet Muhammed, she fictionalizes the biographies of his wives Ummusalma, Aisha as well as the wife of Abraham, Hagar in the novel (18,109). There are umpteen fictionalised genres on the life of Prophet Muhammad and his

companions even in Kerala. In the state which has celebrated K.P.Ramanunni's fusion-fiction of religious histories *Daivathinte Pusthakam* (2015), the criticism against Mumtas shows the community's attitude towards the women writers as well as towards the women not in hijab. Salva writes that Mumtas's positioning of Hagar's motherhood above the 'God' becomes the ultimate female representation that the 'god', the 'prophet' and the 'mother' in Barsa are much related to the Hindu ideologies and concepts ("*Barsa Thurakkenda*" 65). Responding to the arguments of religious conferences explaining full freedom for women inside religion, Mumtas's protagonist refers to that as a prisoner saying s/he has full freedom inside the jail (*Barsa*150). Hussain strongly argues against the narrator's belief that female minds are instinctively constricted (*Musleemum*30). As the present lifestyle of Kerala Muslims itself is the blend of Islam with the regional cultures and practises, Mumtas flags for the elite Hindu cultural association of Islam when she adorns *settu saree* and *naalukettu*. The Muslim women fictionists Saheera Thangal and Sheeba E.K. picture vivid experiences of Muslim life, conscious of the polyphonic cultural situations in the state.

The visual media entertainment in the form of movies present focused or generalised aspects of different cultures and societies, experimenting man-woman relations in particular. The politically profound scenes and stories intentionally or unintentionally impact the different fractions of the society. The form of satire mostly developed from the director's personal view is also influenced by the male-dominant social and cultural situation of Kerala. The continuous representation of any wrong or mistaken notion thus leads to the generalisation as well as the authentication of a concept or construct as happens in the representation of major minorities. Their vigilant minority

status detects humiliations easily. Michael Ray Fitzgerald says, “Media representations have long been a matter of crucial concern for minorities as well as those interested in creating a more responsible media”.

The anti-Muslim secular mainstream impacts in the prejudiced representation of the Muslim community in general and women in particular in films. The Malayalam movies present the culture, rituals and practises of the Muslim community as barbarous and portray the women as victims, oppressed under orthodoxy, backward, illiterate and weak. Despite the changes in the society the old fashioned dresses, vernacular Malayalam, non-vegetarian delicacies mark the home-bound Muslim women in the films. Hussain writes that Muslim women are often made to appear so young, innocent and as incapable to make a decision of their own that such portrayal in turn help in exaggerating the brutalities of the community (*Musleemum* 49). This intensifies the notion that Muslim men are not ‘gentlemen’ but rapists and behave very cruelly with women, and instigates in viewers sentiments towards Muslim women.

From the Malayalam films of ‘50s and ‘60s *Raarichan Enna Pouran, Kadam Becha Kottu, Umma, Kuttikippayam, Ayishaand Subaida*, there are films which portray Muslim life in Kerala. The media deliberately tries not to record the progress and development inside the community and instead present bleak aspects of early marriage, polygamy, and divorce as predominantly persisting only among Muslims. Even the first decade of twentieth first century did not truly portray the community and in ‘nation v/s terrorism’ films, always Muslim men are the ‘terrorists’ (Hussain *Musleemum* 49). The big Muslim families with more children are ridiculously pictured as setting against the rules of family planning. In the review of the film *Vilapangalkkappuram* directed by

T.V.Chandran, Hussain problematise the representation of particularly Muslim men as either foolish clowns or sexist men or aggressive terrorists. The protagonist who was brutally raped from Gujarat is seen all the more troubled by Muslims in Kerala thus making them a threat to modern cultured society of Kerala (*Musleemum*42, 49). There are films in Malayalam in the line of Bollywood films, presenting Muslims as terrorists. The national Muslim characterization as projected big and set opposite terrorist youth image in the movie *Daivanamathil* directed by Jayaraj, goes through the binary good Muslim/bad Muslim (*Musleemum*47). In the public, the Muslims are constantly demanded to prove their nationalism and patriotism. Even the praying images of Muslim women are repeatedly shown to indicate that their belief or piety is not able to help them from their problems, adds she.

The earlier films presented the college going Muslim girl as a rarest and uncommon scene overcoming the obstacles in front to complete her studies. Mentioning the Muslim woman character nicknamed as penguin for her appearance in purdah in the popular film *Classmates* directed by Lal Jose and released in 2006, Fayiza says that the film sets the plot that the Muslim woman's family always suppresses her but outside people can easily release her ("Malalayum" 37). They wrongly believe that removing purdah will make them modern and fail to realise that the purdah is not an Islamic dress code. The identity markers like scarf, hijab, veil or purdah serve the purpose of hiding, disguise or to create humour in films especially when the hero uses such feminine garments to hide from somebody or the heroine when she elopes or escapes with her lover, not only in the Malayalam movies but in other language films as well. The absence of representation of Muslims, Christians and Dalits in the popular evening soaps in the

prominent Malayalam channels, which exhibit the elite pomp and show, is not discussed in the Kerala public. The impacts of negative representation as well as absence of representation threaten the identity of the Muslim community in particular.

Hussain criticises that some films and media are still portraying Malappuram district in centuries old dressing and language. She argues that today's Malappuram and its women are not museum pieces as shown in such films (*Musleemum* 116, 117). Though the film *Anwar* released in 2010 directed by Amal Neerad negatively relate the Muslim community with terrorism, the heroine Aisha is presented as a scientist in hijab. The romantic-comedy *Thattathin Marayath* released in 2012 directed by Vineeth Srinivasan, projects the academic and extra-curricular talents of the college going heroine Aisha. Babu Narayanan's *To Noora with Love* released in 2014 is a woman-centric film projecting a scholarly young Muslim woman actively engaging in social service. The persona of Noora doing research in astrophysics is given importance over the plot of the film. Her character as participating in a Tele-quiz show, her powerful personality, decision-making ways, commanding style and knowledge in the religious texts is truthful regarding the present social political and cultural engagements of the Muslim women in Kerala.

Mosayile Kuthirameenukal released in 2014, directed by Ajith Pillai is the second Malayalam film about the island group Lakshadweep, *Dweep* (1977) being the first. Though being a neighbourhood Union Territory, it is not fairly mentioned in the films in Kerala possibly being a Muslim populated minority island. The subplot character, a marine biology student seen studying about a fish variety, is modeled on today's Muslim women with respect to education, dressing and subjectivity. The educational achievements of the Muslim women reflect in the films which deconstruct the negative images. The reversal in representation of the Muslim women in films and novels is influenced by the increasing

visibility and social play of them. Defending the religion in the Islamophobia politics
diverts the creative engaging of the community in the public.

CONCLUSION

The system of the religion Islam, considers the knowledge actualisations of women in the Muslim societies. The intellectual activism of the Muslim women can be marked as the peculiarity of any Muslim society, the graph of which corresponds to the development indicators of the place they are located. The minority-status of the community in the geographic location, the social, political and cultural situations of the religion and the politics of the attitudes towards it also influence the standpoints of the women. The parallel knowledge systems of every civilisations problematise the authoritarian nature of the patriarchal constructs in social discourses. The inaccurate and prejudiced methodologies of marking the history have impacted in the negative stereotyping of the Muslim community in Kerala. The tools of analyses and the strategies of comparison of the majority and minority communities should depend on their social political economic and cultural situations. The analyses of the oral, written, folk, mainstream, literary and political discourses restructure the agency, subjectivity and intellectual engagement of the women corresponding to the Muslim community in particular. The heterogeneous group of Muslim women should be categorised under women in gender issues and under religion and community in identity issues in academic and amateur researches.

The studies of gender justice advocate the importance of empirical and ethnographical analyses in cultural studies. The characteristic presence of social justice ensures the actualisations of every class, caste, gender and religion in the society. The

growth of interactions between the societies demands justice when stepping out of the exclusivities of tribal and sectarian cultural associations. The context-specific nature of justice regarding the minorities corresponds to the regional, social and governmental systems. The injustices towards the minority communities destabilise the growth of the society in general. The identity of Islam as the other to Secularism, Christianity, Hinduism and Atheism disadvantages the minority status of the community in Kerala. The impact of the polarisations ranges from the silence of the group to the considerable social, political and cultural protests in the society. The dominant secular majority in the country politically suppresses the increasing visibility of the alternate actualisation dynamics of the community post Independence. The political alertness to the social insecurities drives the standpoints of the Muslims. The situations task the Muslim women to counter the patriarchal situations within the community and address the Islamophobic secular society simultaneously.

The lifestyle of the Muslims of the first Muslim society in India, in Kerala, is different and far better than the Muslims of the other states. The quality health indicators, societal schemes and projects, celebrated literacy rate, political alertness, economic status, geographic and climatic factors favour the growth of the Malayali Muslim community. Unlike the Hanafi Muslims of North India, the Muslims of Kerala follow Shafi-Sunni school of Islam. The community living of the Muslims as well-informed and scholarly in religious texts, with noble dressing patterns, charity drives and lesser casteist concerns marks the identity of Malayali Muslims in general. The visible impacts of the mass gulf migration, the political aftermaths of communal tensions and the global Islamophobic pressures reinstate the organised resistance of the Muslims post 1990.

The historic resistance to the colonial invasions, the political positions in the administration, the expertise in trade and commerce, the literary endeavours in Arabic and Arabi Malayalam record the active social participation of the Muslims during the late Medieval and early Modern centuries in Kerala. As warrior sailors and traders, the Muslims occupied key positions in the branched kingdoms of the then Kerala region. The chronicle of heroes like Kunhali Marakkar is very popular as pictured in stories, songs and films in the state. The oldest book on Kerala, *Tuhfathul Mujahideen* (1583) written by Shaikh Zainuddin Maqdoom (1517-1583) in Arabic, depicts the armada of the Marakkars resisting the Portuguese, based on the Islamic concept of jihad, from 1498 to 1571. It also discusses the culture and customs of Hindus and Muslims of Kerala.

The Muslim men and women of the pre-independence period were cent percent literate in Arabi-Malayalam, the system of writing Malayalam using Arabic scriptures (Hikmathullah 121). The translations of the classical Sanskrit texts like *Ashtanga Hridaya*, *Amarakosa*, *Panchatantra*, legends of Hindu king *Vikramaditya* by MoyinKutty Vaidyar, medical texts by Abdurahman Musaliar and Persian novel like *Chahar Darvesh*(1883) had enriched Arabi-Malayalam as a language. The periodicals in Arabi-Malayalam as well as the throbbing social political themes of the *Mappilapaattu* had served the purpose of organising the unity and solidarity amongst the Muslims during the peak decades of the freedom struggle. The social political cultural and eventful lives of the Muslims during the period mirror completely in the folk Mappilasongs and Arabi-Malayalam documents authored by both the men and women. The orally and scripturally motile *Mappilapaattu* embellish the folk performances like *Oppana*, *Kolkali*, *Daf muttu*, and *Vattappattu* even today.

The possibility of the cultural engagement of the Muslim women in all the Muslim societies increases with the reference to the cultural studies on the recent history of Kerala. The works of Hussain, Geetha and Devika project the critical engagements of the Malayali women during the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century. The re-reading of the histories discovers the mobility of the women in the pre-Independence situations of the state which contrasts the attributed labels for women- 'home-bound, ignorant and illiterate'. The present social and political visibility of the Muslim women can be considered as the continuation from the past, revived after the turbulent decades of the Independence struggle. The creative and critical intellectual engagement of the Muslims shifted from Arabi-Malayalam to Malayalam, with the dominance of the latter by the turn of the twentieth century. The editors of periodicals of late nineteenth and early twentieth century were also the scholars, reformers and leaders of the community during the time. They played a crucial role in changing the medium of knowledge and learning of Muslims from Arabic and Arabi Malayalam to Malayalam. Adapting to the changes, the community has continued the religion-centred knowledge, literary, political and cultural engagements in Malayalam.

One of the most important events during the peak decades of the freedom struggle was the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. From an agrarian revolution with minor clashes, the rebellion furthered the political current with the Muslims strongly resisting the British policies and governance. Led by Ali Musliar and Variamkunnath Ahmmmed Haji, the rebellion turned out to be the first mass armed nationalist battle against the British in Kerala as ten thousands of men lost their lives, deported to Penal colonies of Andaman and Nicobar islands and a more number injured and went missing. Suppressed by the

British regiments, the rebellion was earlier recorded and taught by them as religious fanaticism or agrarian grievances in the books of history, lessening the significance of the event. The post-colonial re-readings of the history rediscover and celebrate the heroes, events and places of historic importance regarding the rebellion.

The present political alertness of the community owes to the re-readings of the Muslim history in Kerala which impacts in their political standpoints. Towards a centenary of the rebellion, the oral narratives as well as the rewritten works of history project the patriotism of the Muslims in particular. According to the oral historian Shamshad Hussain, based on their lived experiences there existed diverse perspectives and more regional heroes for the Muslims during the time (“Nilavilulla” 11). From the first to the last of the encounters with the British, Muslims had not fought as Muslims for the sake of the community but for the larger concern of the country. Yet, the partition intensifies the crisis of the Muslims as the only community in India which is constantly demanded to prove its patriotism. ‘Go to Pakistan’ is the most communal and political of abuses against Muslims in India. The Muslim community in Kerala keeps composed in the reactions and responses against the polarisation.

The Muslim women can be identified to either of the categories religion or women corresponding to the context. The gendered concerns of education, employment and creative actualisations of the Muslim women can be related to the dominant elite patriarchal social structures of Kerala. The identity concerns in the public and the religious agency with respect to the community should be related to the Kerala version of Islam. The alternate spaces of the community in knowledge and learning advantage the social political literary and religious actualisations of the Muslim women. The analysis of

social political cultural engagement of Muslim women reveals the reasons of invisibility as well as the silenced history of the Muslim women.

The life of the Muslim women of the twentieth century and before cannot be generalised as in darkness or as drastically suppressed by the Muslim men as there were female religious teachers who had taught Quran, Hadith, *tajweed*, Islamic history and basics of the Arabic language and grammar for generations in their respective locales. Towards the end of the twentieth century the legacy of Muslim women scholars was replaced by the growth and spread of the organised movements in the community by Sunni and Salafi sects with institutionalised classes and schools on religion. The considerable difference in the ratio of male and female religious orators accounts to the neo-patriarchal situations structured by the male dominant religious organisations.

The concept of gender justice as presented by the Quran is an active discourse today because of the religious engagement of the Muslim women. Appearing in modest clothes, attending prayers in mosques and performing *umra* and haj, the Muslim women engage with religion in the public sphere in Kerala. The increasing visibility of the Muslim women necessitates the updated readings of the religious texts and influences in correcting the attitude of the Muslim men as well as the secular public regarding the status of women in Islam. Ironically, while the community is reluctant to acknowledge the discourse of Islamic feminism, the secular majority celebrates the fictions and autobiographies of the Muslim women which criticise the patriarchy in the Muslim societies.

The Muslim political parties and religious organisations had protested against the academic lecture by the Islamic feminist scholar Margot Badran in 2006 in Calicut district squeamish to accept an American woman discussing religion (Hafiz Interview). Though criticised by all the Muslim organisations in the beginning, Islamic feminism establishes itself among the people through the translations of books by the female and male writers from different countries of the world. The men of Muslim societies, despite ideological differences, address and refer to their leaders as scholars for their degrees of religious education or oratory skills but they discard the scholarly academic engagements of the Islamic feminists over the world. The Muslim women writers of the state have not yet attempted the exegetical Islamic feminism. The books by Amina Wadud, Fatema Mernissi, Ayan Hirsi Ali, Shelina Zahra Jan Mohammed and Nujood Ali in English and their Malayalam translations have triggered the debates on Islamic feminism in the state. Even with a range of criticisms from oxymoron to blasphemy, the compelling influence of the Islamic feminism upon Muslims particularly women is now one of the most engaging academic discourses in the world. Hussain says that beyond the movements and organisations within the community, with Islamic feminism, for the first time women realise that they are also part of the religion (Hussain Interview).

The flourishing market of religious literature in Kerala covers the works by the scholars, spiritual leaders and even commoners of all sects of the communities. The wide readership of the books reflects the enthusiastic spirituality concerns of the people. With nominal influence of atheism, the life of the people is timetabled by religious rituals, practises and fests. The women have been granted spaces within the worship and piety aspects of all religions though without the roles of agency. The religious books and

booklets for women are authored by men except for a few. The feminist discourse in the state plays a significant role in projecting the women's experience of the religions. The majority of Muslims, associate with AP or EK fractions of Sunni group, separated after E K Aboobacker Musliar and Kanthapuram A P Abubacker Musliar respectively, and insist anti-salafi practises far different from KNM and JIH. The open sermons by these groups, known as vayadhs, with their pinnacle in pre-90s, in rural pockets had included women for overnight public talks. Rivals to each other, these groups but in unison seclude women, confine them to non-public places and exclude from organisational activities. The attitude of the conservative groups attributes the anti-women label to the community in Kerala. The crises of the Muslim women between the conservative, Islamist and secular Muslim men within the community negatively affect their subjectivity and social engagement.

The impacts of Shariat controversy (1985), the demolition of Babri Masjid (1992) and the failure of Indian Union Muslim League as a common political platform of the community have eventually led to the formation of the political parties People's Democratic Party (1993), National Development Front (1993) and Indian National League (1994).

These movements formed after the demolition of Babri masjid derive their names from the so called secular and constitutional language compared to the previous movements whose names are derived from Islamic tenets and texts. Organisations shifted from a consciousness that is based on asserting their 'islamicness' towards a consciousness that is based on asserting 'muslimness' and 'citizenship', focusing on the idea of constitutional minority. (Jamal 3)

The community became politically oriented and reactionary to the machineries of the state with the murder of Sirajunnisa (1994) and Beema Palli Crossfire (2009). The differences in attitudes and opinions of the religious organisations of the community against the Uniform civil code post Shariat controversy had resulted in the launching of the newspaper *Madhyamam* from a Muslim trust in 1987. The healthy competition of Muslim organisations regarding books, periodicals and publishing houses drive determine and effectuate the active Muslim readership in Kerala.

Chandrika, Madhyamam, Siraj, Varthamanam, Thejas and *Suprabhatham* are the prominent daily newspapers run by Muslim trusts in Kerala. *Madhyamam, Chandrika, Thejas* and *Kudumbam* are the mainstream magazines from these publishing trusts. The discussion of religion, the Quran and related texts are meant through the periodicals owned by different sects within the community such as *Al-Muallim, Sunnath, Sunni Afkar, Sunni Voice, Al Manar, Athouheed, Snehasamvadam, Risala, Sathydhara, Shabab, Vichindhanam, Prabodhanam, Bodhanam* and *Thelicham*. The magazines for children include *Malarvadi* of *Madhyamam Trust* and *Kurunnukal* of *Samastha Kerala Jamiyyathul Ulama*.

The general impact of education and societal development has increased the readership of women as also advantaged by the increased number of Muslim publications. The family magazines from the above publishing houses address only women, particularly Muslim women. The pattern of equating women with and only within the family falls in the patriarchal line of conservative interests. The magazines *Aramam, Pudava, Poonkavanam, Santhushtakudumbam* and *Mahilachandrika* exclusively feature articles on and for women. The magazines play their part in the neo-patriarchal conditioning of women.

The patriarchic structures of the Muslim organisations modeled on the then political organisations of Kerala have to be developed and re-structured to include women. The Women's Wing of JIH formed in 1985 with an effective system and structure, organise women at unit, area, district and state levels. Their weekly meetings, Quran classes, cultural gatherings and charity missions orient Muslim women on Islamic principles as well as create public platform for women in general on social issues. Girls Islamic Organisation under Jamaate Islami Hind, formed in 1984, includes girls of 15-25 age groups. The summer camps, the Quran recitation competitions and quiz competitions diversify the activities of GIO which conducts annual conferences for girls in all the districts of Kerala. With the programmes and protests against hijab ban, assaults and other atrocities against women, GIO engage in the public active from state level to unit level. The Muslim Girls and Women's Movement, MGM formed in 1988, functions as the women's wing of KNM. The Quran classes, seminars and other programmes of MGM exclusively congregate Muslim women. Except in GIO, most of the programmes of Women's Wing of JIH and MGM are designed and often organised and managed by men.

The Muslim women play a vital role in the working of the organisations KNM and JIH but always men stand as the spokespersons of the religion. Often, the participation of women is highlighted as a response to the secular accusing that religion is anti-women. A good time of the organisations is spent to explain 'women in Islam' to defend their stands in the public. The orthodox Sunni groups hesitate to en-space women

within religion as well as in public. They discourage the women praying in the mosques giving excuse only to the women travellers. On the other hand, the voice of the Muslim women in social issues concerning them restructures the gender discourse within the community and increases their visibility in the public.

The two prominent independent organisations of Muslim women in Kerala are NISA and Kerala Muslim Mahila Andolan. Formed in 1997, NISA raises the problems of Muslim women within the community in the public. KMMA is formed in 2015 as the Kerala chapter of Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan which aids and interferes in political and legal issues concerning Muslim women. The public activism of the Muslim women does not confine to community based organisations or political parties. As leaders, members and participants, the Muslim women associate with all the prominent social political cultural movements in Kerala visibly by the twenty-first century. From writing poems to contesting in elections they contribute to the literary and cultural growth of Kerala in general.

The Quran-based classes emerge as the significant engagement of the Muslim women with religion recently. Established as part of the renaissance spirits and evolved out of late night public sermons, the classes are led by male preachers. The sessions condition the women on familial grounds highlighting the models of the wives of the Prophet and his companions, though the latter were neither family-conditioned nor kitchen-oriented. The women teachers, though rare, also follow the methodology of men on subjects concerning the women and family. The domesticity, obedience to husband, tolerance, kindness and caring children and elderly are falsely considered as the duties of

women. The absence of Muslim women scholars or orators in Kerala accounts to the organisations-centred male dominance in the Muslim community.

Criticising the patriarchal anti-women nature of the religious organisations, the works of the linguist and literary critic M.N.Karassery (1951-) are pivotal in keeping alert the 'Muslim woman question' since 1980s. Apart from being an academician, his argumentative style, research, and solutions to the problems of Muslim women position him with reformer status in the public. Though follows the method of substantiating his arguments with the verses from Quran and hadith in issues concerning women, the religious organisations of the state hesitate to accept him. Of his fifty one books, *Ummamaarkkuvendi Oru Sankadaharaji* (2008) and *Pidakkozhi Koovaruthu* (2014) directly subject the social, political and religious issues and concerns of the Muslim women. The essays in the book *Ummamaarkkuvendi Oru Sankadaharaji* deeply research on the existing misogynist practises of marriage, dressing, reservation, mosque entry, dowry, polygamy, talaq, Muslim Personal Law and Shariat controversy within the community. He severely criticises the attitudes of the male hegemonic religious organisations by detailing the legal tracks of the controversial cases regarding Muslim women. In the book, he argues against the orthodox Sunni fractions of the community for secluding girls and not letting them into education and employment; he criticises Jamaate Islami Hind for implementing neo-patriarchal ways of orienting women back to domesticity and cross-questions some Mujahid leaders for their illogical and even un-Islamic speeches of propagating polygamy.

Referring to the verses suggesting polygamy in the Quran, Karassery writes that it has considered the issue not from the perspective of a man but from that of a woman in

the backdrop of the Arabian tribal polygamous situations (*Ummamarkkuvendi* 73). The debates over polygamy and divorce in the Indian context advocates reforming the Muslim Personal Law. Karassery blames the self-acclaimed 'progressive' religious organisations for exploiting the Muslim women by prolonging the reforms in Muslim Personal Law and points to the repeal of unilateral talaq of men in the Muslim countries Iran and Pakistan in 1961 and 1967 respectively. *Pidakkozhi Koovaruthu* (2014) problematises the recent „cultural" practises of the Muslims in the name of the religion and discusses the recent political turns of the world regarding Islam such as terrorism and Islamophobia with their direct and indirect influences in Kerala as in the cases of Love jihad. According to Karassery, the most important problem Muslim women of Kerala face is dowry; and not the restriction on early marriage (*Pidakkozhi* 56). He adds that Arabikkalayanam, Mysore Kalyanam, polygamy, domestic violence, divorce and the concerns of the unmarried in the community are directly linked to the dowry system which would have been solved if the *mahals* or religious organisations take strong stands against the practice.

Karassery has been discussing gender justice based on the texts of religion even before the conservative and Islamist orientation of women by the different sects within the community. His social political cultural and religious criticisms have been impactful within the community in reframing the attitude towards the girls and women. The male hegemonic religious organisations never credit him the critical insider position nor acknowledge his concepts of gender justice. The strict authoritarian heads of the different sects of the community discard the 'outside' studies on religion and the Muslim

society. This attitude strengthens the fundamentalism of the Muslim men in the binary politics of secular/religion in the mainstream.

The book *Keralathile Muslim Sthreekalude Varthamankalam* (2013) by N P Hafiz Muhammad presents a cultural study of the Malabar Muslim women. Besides the persisting marriage-related problems, he marks the advancement and actualisations of the women in education, employment and public sphere as accelerated by the Gulf migration and other developments in the society. Supported by sociological studies, he argues that the impact of Gulf migration has been significant in changing the profile and personality of Muslim women as visible from their choice of purdah to their agency as family heads (19, 80). The book projects the positive portrayal of Muslim women by detailing their higher education achievements and changing trends in lifestyle with voice inside families and spaces outside. The conflict between familial concerns and higher education spirits of the Muslim girls when both merge at the conventional marriage age in the society is first problematised by Muhammad (57). The anxiety of parents in losing good matches if the girl exceeds the 'marriage-age' and the early marriage of the Muslim men pressurise the girls to the second part of life called marriage. He states that the familial responsibilities of daughters-in-law, pregnancy, delivery, and distance from educational institutions as well as the negative attitude of the teachers and office staff towards married girls stress them more.

The alert subjectivities of the Muslim women fictionists from B. M. Suhara to Sheeba E.K post 1990, impact in reimagining the Muslim women in the society. B.M.Suhara (1952-) subjects the upper class Muslim culture in general and living realities of the women in particular in her works. Her books *Iruttu*, *Nilavu* and *Mozhi* have

been translated into English and Kannada respectively, while she herself has translated into Malayalam *Kottaratheruv*, *Saininte Kalyanam* and *Amruthaputhri*. Often, Suhara is presented either as the sister of cartoonist B.M. Gafoor or as the wife of Critic M.M. Basheer and not as a writer or a Muslim woman writer. The privilege shields her works from the critical reviews and even neglects her potentials as well as agency. Saheera Thangal's debut novel *Rabiya* (2008) problematises the complex identities of Muslim women ranging from being repositories of the tradition and victims of misinterpretations to the reformers within the spaces of the community. The plot and plight of Muslim life in the novels are more discussed in the public than the agency and subjectivity of the Muslim women writers to project the victim image of the Muslim woman. The subject position of the Muslim women writers and their spectrum of themes themselves deconstruct the negative stereotypes of the Muslim women in the secular mainstream.

The novelist and short story writer Sheeba E.K (1975-) has been noted for her works *Y2K*, *Neelalohitham* (2013), *Rithumarmarangal*, *Duniya* (2014), *Kanalezhuthu* and *Manja Nadikalude Suryan* (2017). In the foreword of the short story collection *Neelalohitham*, Khadeeja Mumtas attributes the glimpses of Madhavikuttyin some stories of Sheeba. She has translated the books *Typhoon* of Qaisra Shahraz, *Saraswathi Park* by Anjali Joseph, *The Novice* by Trudi Canavan and *Beyond the Veil* by Fatima Mernissi into Malayalam. *Azhichukalayanavathe Aa Chilankakal* is her memoirs published in 2016. Like in *Duniya*, the sharply political and socially conscious fictionalising marks the strong femininity in her works.

The prominent contemporary writer K.P. Ramanunni (1955-) subjects Muslim life in his novels *Sufi Paranja Katha* (1993), *Jeevithathinte Pusthakam* (2007) and

Daivathinte Pusthakam (2015). Unlike Khadeeja Mumtas, Ramanunni is not criticised for fictionalising the lives of the Prophet Muhammed and Lord Krishna in his novel *Daivathinte Pusthakam*, which reflect the gendered nature of criticism in the society. The style, language and themes of the women writers are highly scrutinised by the male dominant literary and public spheres. The majority of the writers distances from writing about religions, but problematises the secular/religious binary in the works. The sensitivity of the Muslim community is targeted in the literature market of the state.

The Malayalam films portraying the Muslim life are rendered with Qawwali and Sufi performances recently as influenced by the elite North Indian Muslim culture. Some *Mappilapaattu* with marriage as theme being incorporated into the films establishes the sexist Muslim men character in the public. The excess projection of the food culture of the community in films creates negative impressions in the mainstream. It defines the community in the terms of food culture and corners the social advancements. The politics behind the negative representations projecting the differences intends to distance the minority Muslim community from the mainstream. The representation of the Muslim men as womanisers and terrorists in the popular Malayalam films post 1990 corresponds to the social and political polarisation of the community in the country. The representations problematise their identity and constantly demand the Muslims to prove their patriotism and secular leanings by removing the religious symbols. The secluding rigidity of the religious organisations in practising the faith in the state increases with the hike in the insecurities of the minority in the public. The defense position of the community against the attributed negative labels diverts them from their creative engaging in the society and retards the growth.

The problem politics of the untrue representation of Muslim women looms large in the hesitancy of the print media in reporting the frequent conferences, seminars and talks by and for the Muslim women in the public. The media sensationalise only the anti-religious sentiments of the Muslim women and the secular majority declare themselves as their emancipators from the Muslim men in such issues. The male authorities of the community hesitate to let the women speak in the marriage related controversies directly concerning them. The voice of the Muslim women in such instances in the public strengthens their agency and reduces the secular stress upon the community regarding the suppression of the women.

The clashes between the religious sects in Kerala range from Sunni-Salafi (wahabi) ideological variances to the administering of *mahals* and mosques. The '*mahal*' system among the Muslims equivalent to the Christian parish, plays a vital role in the occasions of marriage, divorce and death. All the *mahals* in the state are controlled by the different sects within the community and the women are excluded from the *mahal* administration. The *mahals* misemploy their authority in the cases of dowry, delayed marriages due to poor financial situations and mostly does not even hear the female side in the cases of divorce. While the Sunni groups debate on women's entry in mosques, the KNM and JIH groups have started to accommodate women in the ad hoc committees of *mahals* under their control.

The debates on the Sachar committee report recounting the miserable plight of Muslims in India in general has resulted in the politically oriented institutional intellectual activism of the voluntary, political and religious organisations among the community. In its effect, the Government of Kerala has paneled a committee known as

the Paloli Commission to study the situation of the Muslims of Kerala which reported the lack of educational institutions as the problems of Muslims corresponding to Kerala (Randathani 73). Steps were taken to access educational institutions and social welfare schemes for Muslims but the uneven distribution has impacted in considerable difference in the status of the Muslims of South and North Kerala. The Muslims of South Kerala are accessed to the institutes of higher education and government jobs more than those of Malabar. Recently, the Muslim political and religious organisations problematise the administrative discrimination ranging from the lack of infrastructure facilities to the number of government institutions in the Malabar region. The community today is alert to problematise the anti-Muslim segregation and communal polarisation-drives in the public.

In the pattern of the mainstream publications, the magazines by the Muslim trusts assign women writers only on issues concerning women. Despite the relevance of the Muslim women writing about the Muslim women, their domain should not be limited to feminism. The social and academic conferences of religious and secular organisations in the public, reserve women speakers and activists, though in a low per cent, on topics exclusively concerning women. The segregation further distances the women from the mainstream. Since the biological identity of women is insignificant in the social discourse of the public, the separate addressing of women as well as the familial topics of discussion should be changed to organise the people irrespective of gender.

The young scholars of the Muslim community consider the academic importance of Islamic feminism and initiate discussions while the veteran leaders are reluctant to accept the discourse. Stepping back from engaging in the new discourses on the Muslim

women problematise the position of the Muslim community controlled by the senior citizens. The silence or arrogance of them in the controversies over Malala, V.P. Rajeena and Hadiya are criticised by the seculars as well as the young generation of the community. The engagement of the Muslim women in the public necessitates rethinking the attitude of male authoritarian nature of the community and organisations.

The rights of the Muslim women get complicated with the flexibility of the rules of Shariat as well as of the Acts of the Constitution. The cases of *Md. Ahmed Khan v. Shah Bano Begum* 1985 SCR (3) 844, *Bai Tahira v. Ali Hussain Fissalli Chothia* 1979 AIR 362, *Fazlunbi v. K. Khader Vali* AIR 1980 SC 1730, *Rahmat Ullah v. State Of U.P* II (1994) DMC 64, *Danial Latifi v. Union of India* 2001 AIR 3958, *Shamim Ara v State Of U.P* MANU/SC/0850/2002 and *Shayera Bano v. Union of India* Writ Petition of 2016 have problematised the Muslim woman question in the mainstream. Abating the agency and the political presence of the Muslim women in the public, the court sessions in most such cases scrutinised the Muslim Personal Law thus falling for the majoritarian arguments for the Uniform Civil Code. Fasila A.K. writes,

At the same time, analysis of the political and social contexts of some of these pronouncements makes it unclear whose interests played a major role in the decision making process. Because there are two category of people who asked for the gender equality of Muslim woman other than the petitioners, feminist groups and Hindu Right wing. Hindu groups challenges the "privileges" given to religious minorities and calls for their immediate end through the promulgation of a uniform civil code and they have no real concern for gender justice. Secular feminists from a gender perspective, challenge the inequity of religious personal

laws. Although both of these groups have different ends their means and campaigns were the same. Moreover Hindu Right wing could make use of the gender equality campaign of the feminist to attain their agenda (7).

The absence of the Muslim-inclusivity in the public as an impact of global Islamophobia has activated the alternate spaces of the Muslims through audio, visual and virtual media. The alternate actualisations of the community in literature, films, telefilms, music and cultural meets express the counter culture of sustenance of the community. With the roots in the oral literary genres, the community develops the alternate discourse utilising the personal and collective finances among themselves. The survival strategy of the alternate dynamics further distances the Muslims from the mainstream but strengthens the social political and cultural integrity as the minority.

The government aided and unaided Muslim management educational institutions outnumber those by other communities in the state. The excellence and self sufficiency of the community in the field of education is considered as a parallel power basis by the secular public than as a necessary impact of the neglect towards the Muslims. The uneven distribution of the government institutions is the root cause for the imbalance in the ratio of the education institutions of Malabar and south Kerala. The religious and parallel education systems determine the positive growth of the community. The Muslim women are the immediate beneficiaries of the alternate systems, particularly education. Even the conservative sects who run the maximum number of institutions within the community started to accommodate the Muslim girls so as to present themselves better in the public as well as to 'protect' the younger generations from the secular dominations. The residential facilities, religious atmosphere, trust in the Muslim managements and less-

distant locations prompt the Muslim parents to encourage the education of the girls. The institutions provide employment opportunities to the Muslim women as teaching and non-teaching staff.

The access to the advanced technologies and cyber spaces enable the minority to engage in the public and politicise the alternate dynamics. The virtual spaces deconstruct the authoritarian nature of all the groups and organisations as the public problematise and develop the discourses. The online magazines, blogs, YouTube channels and social media- Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and twitter have become spaces of actualisation, entertainment, social criticism and political protests. Unlike the print culture, the online platforms are public-interactive and can direct to powerful consequences in sensational social and political issues. The trend of e-reading has influenced the digitalising of the religious and community-related literature. It becomes advantageous to the Muslims of Kerala living abroad particularly in gulf countries. The social media activism of the community ranges from knowledge systems to political communications. The standpoints of supporting, criticising or defending the community and religion turn out to become individual responsibilities in the troll-alert situations. The discourse on religion in cyberspace includes the Muslim women in subject positions as well as the subjects of controversies.

The active engagement of women in the social media platforms post 2012 is defined as the fourth wave of feminism. The voices of women problematise the everyday gendering process in the society. The emergence of social media as the new public sphere deconstructs the selective elite secular mainstream and includes the diverse groups. The women utilise the virtual spaces to barge in the otherwise unaccommodating public

sphere. The cyber spaces restructure the pattern of the social criticism and enable intellectual activism as envisaged by Patricia Hill Collins. The influential power of the social media campaigns is unchallenged since the Arab Spring of 2010. The social media-enabled activism has started accommodating the women in the public sphere. Though the lack of intellectual theories and random leadership are considered as limiting the power of social media protests, the hash tag campaigns help to project, problematise and redress the gender injustices in an accelerated pace. The political engagements of women in the cyber space are not free from neo-patriarchal censoring. Yet the women in general and the Muslim women in particular voice themselves making use of the access to public through social media. The critical engagement of the Muslim women in the social media activism increases their visibility in the public. The facebook posts of V.P. Rajeena, YouTube videos of Shamna Sherin and Vlogs of Rabeeha Abdurehim diversify the pattern of social criticism by the Muslim women.

The public entry of the Muslim women is empowered by the reservation though the percentage of women contesting in elections in local self-governing bodies and in Legislative Assemblies varies. The participation of women in political activities expedites recently with the implementation of the fifty per cent reservation for women, shaking the male hegemony of dominant political parties in candidate selection. Though the votes of the women play integral roles in alternating the government rule by right and left political parties in Kerala, the system of reservation has helped them engage in the social and political administrative affairs of the state. Referring to the increased voting percentage of women, Hasan and Menon write,

To put it differently, despite being poor, disadvantaged, discriminated against, and disempowered in any number of ways, they are able to articulate their preferences and express agency- given opportunity, they display a readiness to take up the challenge and to alter their material condition through political action (*Unequal*248).

The elite and secular structures of the organisations of and for women exclude the minority experiences of Muslim, Dalit, coastal and tribal women. Kerala Women's commission, under the Ministry for Social Welfare, actively indulges in the problems of women and emerges as a great support in raising their problems in public. At present, seventy six NGOs have registered under the Commission. Among the organisations for women, the Anweshi Women's Counselling Centre, founded in 1993, strongly problematise, protest and redress the gender injustices in the state. The feminist movements in the state are supported by the mainstream political parties.

The second decade of the twenty-first century witnessed the remarkable protest by the plantation workers demanding hike in price and permanent redresses to the work-place exploitations. Initiated by the 'Pombilai Orumai' in 2015, the strikes by women employees in the plantation belts, though not completely successful, in turn, thumped the state, the plantation-management as well as the male hegemonic trade unions. The formation of the all women trade union Asanghaditha Meghala Thozhilali Union is necessitated by the strike of the salespersons of textile stores who experience severe human rights violation such as denying permission to sit or even go to toilet during work hours, sexual harassments as well as financial exploitation. Beyond the feminist aspects

of the pattern of the strikes, they are grim reminders of the gender injustices in the society.

The cultural situation of Kerala should be particularly considered while analysing the gendered intricacies of the society. The cases of molests, assaults or even rapes in Kerala are not communal or casteist as in the other states of India. The strong media culture of the region problematises the anti-social elements effectively but the administrative solutions by the government lag behind. The development indicators of the state have not yet succeeded in depleting the range of injustices clutching the social cohesion of the society. The post flood expectations of massive changes in the discourse of the Kerala are seen declining with the passage of time.

The methodologies and tools of analyses regarding the study on the Muslim women should consider the social political economic and religious situations in Kerala, different from the other states of India. The problems of the Muslim women should be related to the gendering issues of the category women than to the identity of the community. The unpublished academic studies on gender studies in the meritorious universities of the state delay the development of the social discourses and intellectual activism. The recent sociological studies on the Muslims in the state tend to distance from negative stereotyping in the name of minority status and communal politics.

The reluctance to acknowledge the intellectual activism of the Muslim women in Kerala looms large in the public. Unmarking the advancements of the Muslim women and the community meets the politics of sustaining the religion/ secular binary, advantageous to the majority in the country. Unlike in general, the academic and literary

discourse on the Muslim women lags behind the visibility and engagement of them in the public. The developments in the society impact changes in the agency, subjectivity and standpoints of the Muslim women as social beings, but the secular society continue to present only the bleak aspects and continue the pattern of earlier discourses.

The Muslim woman writing about gender and religion is a strong political statement. The problematic location of the Muslim women between Islam and secularism, the Muslim men and texts and the conservative and progressive Muslim men increase the significance of the social criticism by the Muslim women. Inside the community, the women subjecting religion are either considered as feminists or are accused for blasphemy. The discourse of Islamic feminism in the state has its roots in the magazine tradition of the Muslim women pre-Independence periods. The present pattern of the Islamic feminism is influenced by the regional feminist discourses in general and post 1990 Islamic feminist texts in particular.

The agency, subjectivity and critical engagement of the critics Mumtas, Hussain, Salva, Shams and Fayiza represent the intellectual activism of the Muslim women in the state post 1990. They problematise the issues of the Muslim women relating to the category women by engaging in the gender discourse of the state. They address the identity concerns, marriage-centredness and social exclusion of the Muslim women in the patriarchal situations within the community. They realise the problem position of Muslim women between the secular public and the male authoritarian community in Kerala more crucial than the intricacies of early marriage, polygamy and *talaq* regarding other Muslim societies in the country.

The intellectual activism of the Muslim women in the state increases the possibility of Islamic feminism as an active discourse. The style, language and pattern of the writers addressing the secular mainstream and religious community simultaneously in the gender discourse in the context of Kerala contribute to the diverse nature of the Islamic feminist studies. The political significance of the Muslim women writing about the religion and the Muslim society is a recent research area. Developing a positive approach towards the discourse beyond the prejudices of the secular criticisms against the religion as well as the male hegemonic interpretations within the community is the task before the critics.

The confusions of the new identity politics of the Muslim women include whether to associate with the elite secular feminist currents in the state or else to make use of the available platforms to organise the activism of the women. The hijab as the symbol of piety, cultural habit, uniform dress code, political resistance and marker of identity complicates the crises of the Muslim women. The recent social media activism of the women in general and the Muslim women in particular, energise the gender discourse in the state in the virtual spaces. The possibilities of the post-feminist studies have to be evolved out of the discourse of the Muslim women to resolve the crises and towards the post secular situations.

Works Cited

Abdul Razak, Samra and Fasila A K. Interview with Varsha Basheer. *Café dissensus*. 17

Jul 2015.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*. Harvard UP, 2013.

Adujar, Ndeye. "Feminist Readings of the Quran: Social, Political, and Religious

Implications". *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians*,

Edited by Ednan Aslan et al., Peter Lang, 2013, pp. 59-80.

Ahmed, Leila. *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence from the Middle East to*

America. Yale UP, 2011.

A.K., Fasila. *Minority Identity and Gender Justice: Contextualising Judicial Concerns on*

Muslim Women. 2017. Unpublished Dissertation, Indian Law Institute, New Delhi.

--- and Najda A. "Sandehangale Thurannezhuthumbol". *Campus Alive*, Issue 6 Nov

2011, pp. 61+

Ali, Kecia. *Sexual Ethics and Islam*. Oneworld Publications, 2006.

Alwani, Zainab. "Muslim women as Religious Scholars: A Historical Survey". *Muslima*

Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians, Edited by Ednan Aslan et

al., Peter Lang, 2013, pp. 45-58.

Anwar. Directed by Amal Neerad, Red Carpet Movies, 15 Oct.2010.

Ashraf, Hiba. "Social and Moral Implications of Authoritarian Interpretations of Texts".

Islamic Academic Conference Proceedings, Edited by Ubaid Rehman M. A. SIO

Kerala, 2012, pp. 91-98.

Ashraf, K., editor. *Penrathrikal*. Olive Publications, 2013.

Ashrof, V.A. Mohamad. *Islam and Gender Justice: Questions at the Interface*. Kalpaz

Publications, 2005.

Aslan, Ednan. "Early Community Politics and the Marginalisation of Women in Islamic

Intellectual History". *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women*

Theologians, Edited by Ednan Aslan et al., Peter Lang, 2013, pp. 35-44.

---, et al, editors. *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians*.

Peter Lang, 2013.

Badran, Margot. *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. Oneworld

Publications, 2009.

Barlas, Asma. "*Believing Women*" in *Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of*

the Qur'an. University of Texas P, 2002.

Basheer, Vaikom Muhammad. *Samboorna Krithikal*, Vol. 1. DC Books, 1992.

Bhushi, Kiranmayi. "Understanding Transnational Identity through Consumption: Issues

and Methodology". *Indian Diaspora: Trends and Issues*. Edited by Ajaya Kumar Sahoo and K. Laxmi Narayan, Serials Publications, 2008.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 1990.

Cohen D and Crabtree B. "Qualitative Research Guidelines Project." July 2006.

www.qualres.org/HomeNarr-3823.html.

Collins, Patricia Hill. *On Intellectual Activism*. Temple UP, 2013.

Cooke, Miriam. *Women Claim Islam*. Routledge, 2001.

Das K., Neethu. "Constructed Femininity: Male Gaze in Women's Magazines".

Problematics of Gender Discourse, Edited by Eeshan Ali and soumy Mohan Ghosh, Aauthors Press, 2015pp. 250-7.

Devika, J. *En-gendering Individuals: The Language of Re-forming in Twentieth Century*

Keralam. Orient Longman, 2007.

---. *Her-self: Early Writings on Gender by Malayalee Women 1895-1938*. Stree, 2005.

---. *Pouriyude Nottangal*. Olive Publications, 2013.

---. *Womanwriting= manreading?*. Penguin Books, 2013.

--- and Binitha V. Thampi. *New Lamps for Old?*. Zubaan, 2012.

--- and Avanti Mukherjee. "Re-forming women in Malayalee Modernity: A Historical

Overview". *The Enigma of the Kerala Woman: A Failed Promise of Literacy*, edited by Swapna Mukhopadhyay, Social Science Press, 2007, pp. 101-130.

E.K., Sheeba. *Duniya*. D C Books, 2012.

---. "Katha Vayich Samooham Manasantharappedilla". Interview with Rashmi G and Anil Kumar K.S., *Deshabhimani Weekly*, 19 Oct 2014, pp. 60-7.

---. "Muslim Writing in Kerala". Malayalam Marathi Translation Workshop, Mumbai 25 Oct 2015.

---. *Neelalohitham*. DC Books, 2013.

Fayiza, Ummul. "Adhikaravum Sangharshangalum". *Pachakkuthira*, Jan. 2017, pp. 19- 26.

---. "Burkiniyum Muslim Sthreekalum". *Madhyamam Daily*, 25 Aug. 2016, p6.

---. "Hijab Adichamarthalinum Vimochanathinumappuram". *Prabodhanam Weekly*, 23 Aug. 2013, pp. 38-41.

---. "Idathu Mathethara Rashtreeyavum Muslim Sthreekalum". *Malala, 'Prati' vaayanakal*, Edited by Mufeeda K. T. and Fasila A. K., Pratheeksha Books, 2014, pp. 56-9.

---. "Malalayum Sthreepaksha Rashtreeyathinte Pratisandhikalum". *Malala 'Prati' vaayanakal*, Edited by Mufeeda K.T. and Fasila A.K., Pratheeksha Books, 2014, pp. 35-8.

---. Personal Interview. 8 Mar 2017

---. "Pothuvyavaharungalile Muslim Sthree". *Prabodhanam Weekly*, 24 Feb. 2017, pp. 17-21.

---. "Sometimes a Hijab is just a Hijab; Sometimes it is Not". *Campus Alive*, Vol. 1, No. 7, Aug2013, pp. 45-6

---. "Vaayanakalile Sangharshangal". *Pachakkuthira Monthly*, Vol. 12, No. 7, Jan. 2016, pp. 47-53.

Fitzgerald, Michael Ray. "Evolutionary Stages of Minorities in the Mass Media": An Application of Clark's Model to American Indian Television Representations". *Howard Journal of Communications*, 21:4, 367-384, DOI: 10.1080/10646175.2010.519651

Geetha. *Ezhuthammamar*. State Institute of Languages, Kerala, 2014.

Gerstein, Samantha. *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*. Capstone Project. Spring 2012.

Gheaus, Anca. "Gender Justice". *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2011.

Gilmore, Jennifer. *(Re)Emerging Subjectivities: A Postmodern Feminist Perspective on Subjectivity, Agency and Change*. 2003. University of Queensland, PhD Dissertation.

Gupta, Juhi. *The Future of Indian Muslim women: Fatwa vs. Feminism*. Readworthy, 2012.

Hasan, Zoya, and Ritu Menon. *Educating Muslim Girls: A Comparison of Five Indian Cities*. Women Unlimited, 2005.

---. *Unequal Citizens: A Study of Muslim Women in India*. Oxford UP, 2004.

Hassan, Rifa. "Women and Men's "Fall": A Qur'anic Theological Perspective". *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians*, Edited by Ednan Aslan et al., Peter Lang, 2013, pp. 101-114.

Hidayatullah, Aysha A. *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*. Oxford UP, 2014.

Hikmathulla, V. "Sahityam-Deshacharithram: Moyinkutty Vaidyare Munnirathi Punaralochikkumbol". *Kerala Muslim History Conference Proceedings*, Edited by Jameel Ahamed. Kerala Muslim Heritage Foundation, 2015, pp. 119-138.

Hussain, Shamshad. "Keraleeya Navothanavum Muslim Sthreekalum". *Mappila Vasantham; Charithravum Varthamanavum*, edited by Haskerali E.C., Piano Publications, 2012, pp.95-103.

---. *Musleemum Streeyum Allaathaval*. Redcherry Books, 2015.

---. *Neunapakshathinum Lingapadavikkumidayil [Between Minority and Gender Status]*. KeralaBhasha Institute, 2009.

---. "Nilavilulla Charithramezhuthinu Vaikarikanubhavangale Ulkollanavilla". Interview

with Haseena et al. *Campus Alive*, issue 6, Nov. 2011, pp.10-15.

---. Personal Interview. 27 Jul 2015.

Indira, K.R. *Sthraina Kamasoothram*. D C Books, 2012.

Islahiya, Shameema. "Waqf Boardile Aadya Sthree Shambdam Samsarikkunnu".

Interview with Fousiya Shams. *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 32, No. 3, Jun. 2015, pp.

8-11.

Jamal K.M., Thahir. "Immanence of Muslim Democratic Politics in Kerala: Towards a

Communitarian Becoming of Democracy". SIO Kerala, 2016, Vidyarthi Bhavan.

Lecture.

Jayasree, G.S. "Thus Spake Malayali Muslim Women". *The Hindu: Friday Review* 26

Feb 2016, p4.

Jayawardena, Kumari. *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. Zed Books, 1986.

Jesme. *Amen: Oru Kanyasthreeyude Atmakadha*. DC Books, 2009.

Kadakkal, Ashraf A, editor. *Sacharinte Kerala Parisaram*. Other Books, 2007.

Kanakalatha, P. K. *K.Sarswathiyamma: Ottakku Vazhinadannaval*. DC Books, 2013.

Karassery, M. N. *Pidakkozhi Koovaruthu*. Mathrubhumi Books, 2014.

---. *Ummamarkkuvendi Oru Sankataharaji*. D C Books, 2008.

Khan, Shahnaz. "Muslim Women: Negotiation in the Third Space". *Gender, Politics, and*

Islam, Edited by Therese Saliba, et al., University of Chicago P, 2002, pp. 305-336.

Kunhammad, K.K. "Fractured Reflections: Feminist Theory and Women's Experience in

Kerala". *Littcrit*, Vol.39, no. 2, 2013, pp. 69-75.

Kunjamu, A.P. "Gender Justice and Islam", NISA. 29 Nov 2015, Sports Council Hall,

Calicut. Keynote Speech.

---. "Muslim Sthree Islamine Vayikkunnu Jeevithathayum". *Barsa*, DC Books, 2007, pp.

11-16.

Kurup, K.K.N. and E. Ismail. *Muslim Women in Kerala: Tradition vs. Modernity*. Shipra

Publications, 2014.

Kynsilehto, Anitta. "Islamic Feminism: Current Perspectives. Introductory Notes".

Islamic Feminism: Current Perspectives, edited by Anitta Kynsilehto, U of Tampere, 2008, pp. 9-14.

Lakshmi, L. R. S. *The Malabar Muslims: A Different Perspective*. Foundation Books,

2012.

Lamprey, Jerusha Tanner. "From Sexual difference to Religious Difference: Towards a

Muslima Theology of Religious Pluralism". *Muslima Theology: The Voices of Muslim Women Theologians*, Edited by Ednan Aslan et al., Peter Lang, 2013, pp. 231-246.

Lewis, Pauline. "Zainab al-Ghazali: Pioneer of Islamist Feminism".

www.michiganjournalhistory.files.wordpress.com//2014/02/lewis_pauline.pdf

Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety*. Princeton UP, 2005.

Majid, Anouar. "The Politics of Feminism in Islam". *Gender, Politics, and Islam*, Edited By Therese Saliba, et al. University of Chicago P, 2002, pp. 53-93.

Maqdoom, Sheikh Zainudheen. *Tuhfathul Mujahideen*. Translated by C. Hamza, Al-Huda Books, 1995.

Memunda, Rafeeq, editor. *Penpravasam*. Olive Publications, 2014.

Menon, M. Indu. *Status of Muslim Women in India: A Case Study of Kerala*. Uppal Publishing House, 1981.

Mernissi, Fatema. *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. Paperback Publications, 1992.

Mir-Hosseini, Ziba. "Beyond 'Islam' vs. 'Feminism'". *IDS Bulletin*, Vol. 42, No. 1, Jan 2011.

Mohammed, U. *Educational empowerment of Kerala Muslims: A Socio-Historical*

Perspective. Other Books, 2007.

Mosayile Kuthirameenukal. Directed by Ajith Pillai. Frames Inevitable, 24 Jan. 2014.

Muhammad, N.P.Hafiz. *Keralathile Muslim Sthreekalute Varthamanakalam*. Olive Publications, 2013.

---. Personal Interview. 1 Jul 2015.

Mukhopadhyay, Swapna. "Understanding the Enigma of women's Status in Kerala: Does High Literacy Necessarily Translate into High Status?". *The Enigma of Kerala Woman: A Failed Promise of Literacy*, Social Science Press, 2007, pp. 3-31.

---, et al. "Mental Health, Gender Ideology and Women's Status in Kerala". *The Enigma of Kerala Woman: A Failed Promise of Literacy*, edited by SwapnaMukhopadhyay, Social Science Press, 2007, pp. 71-101.

Mumtas, Khadeeja. *Athuram*. DC Books, 2011.

---. *Balyathil Ninum Erangivanna Oraal*. Piano Publicaions, 2011.

---. *Barsa*. DC Books, 2007.

---. *Purushanariyatha Sthree Mughangal*. Mathrubhumi Books, 2012.

---. *Sargam Samooham*. Sahithya Pravarthaka Co-operative SocietyLtd.,2014.

---. "Sthreevirudha Niyamam Kuzhichumoodanam", *Pachakkuthira* Jul. 2014, pp. 20-23.

---. Interview with Myna Umaiban. *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, Jan 30- Feb 5 2011, pp. 22-28.

Mutman, Mahmut. *The Politics of Writing Islam: Voicing Difference*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

Osella, Filippo and Caroline Osella. *Social Mobility in Kerala*. Pluto Press, 2000.

P.K., Muhammadali. *Imagining the Malayalee Muslim Woman: A Post-Secular Reading of Khadija Mumtas" Athuram and Barsa*. 2013. Unpublished MPhil Dissertation, TheEnglish and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad.

Pullipparamb, Haneef. *Barzayile Barza*. Geethanjali Printers, 2013.

Rafiq, Shahina K, editor. *Penchillakal*. Redcherry Books, 2015.

Raj, Dileep, editor. *Ranimar, Padminimar: Malayalishreekalute Kaivitta Sancharangal*. DCBooks, 2016.

Rajan, S. Irudaya and Sreerupa. "Gender Disparity in Kerala: A Critical Reinterpretation". *The Enigma of Kerala Woman: A Failed Promise of Literacy*, edited by Swapna Mukhopadhyay, Social Science Press, 2007, pp. 32-70.

Ramseena, C.A. "Politics and Misogyny: Women Representation in Indian Union Muslim League in Kerala". 25th World Congress of Political Science, Brisbane July 21-25, 2018. Abstract.

Randathani, Hussain. *Malabarile Musleengalum Idathupakshavum*. Chintha Publishers, 2013.

Sachar, Rajinder. "Women's Reservation Bill – A Social Necessity, National Obligation". *PUCL Bulletin*, 2003.

Salem, Sara. "Feminist Critique and Islamic Feminism: The Question of Intersectionality". *The Postcolonialist*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Nov. 2013.

Saliba, Therese, et al. *Gender, Politics, and Islam*. University of Chicago P, 2002.

---. "Introduction: Gender, Politics, and Islam". *Gender Politics and, Islam*, University Of Chicago P, 2002, pp. 1-14.

Salva, K.P. "Adayaalappeduthendathum Adayaalappedendathum". *Prabodhanam Weekly*, 23 Apr. 2011, pp. 36-41.

---. "Barsa Thurakkenda Vereyumu Mughangal". *Madhyamam Weekly*, 29 Sep. 2008, pp. 62-65.

---. "Bhajanamirikkal". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 30, No. 4, Jul. 2013, pp. 64-5.

---. "Feminisathinte Arthathalangal". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 30, No. 5, Aug. 2013, pp. 64-5.

---. "Ithra Romantic-aano Prasavam". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 29, No. 3, Jun. 2012, pp. 64-5.

---. "Jeevithamezhuthu". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 30, No. 12, Mar. 2014, pp. 64-5.

---. "Kalyanam Mudakkikal". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 29, No. 2, Apr. 2012, pp. 64-5.

---. "Kudumbam Maattikkurikkenda Bodhyangal". *Kerala Development Forum*

Conference Proceedings, 2011, pp.49-55.

---. "Mailanchi". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 30, No. 3, Jun. 2013, pp. 64-5.

---. "Mugham Marakkaatha Samvadangal". *Aramam Monthly*, Jan. 2015, pp. 7-14.

Debate.

---. "Muslim Penninte Veshavum Rashtreeyavum". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 30, No. 9,

Dec.2012, pp. 64-5.

---. "Muslim Sthreeyude Varthamanam". *Prabodhanam Weekly*, Vol. 64, No. 18, Oct.

2007.

---. "Mysore Kalyanam". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 29, No. 12, Mar. 2013, pp. 64-5.

---. "Purdaye Pedi(pp)ikkunnathenthinu?". *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, Nov. 22-28, 2009, pp.

48-9.

---. "Pennidangalude Prasakthi". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 29, No. 7, Oct. 2012, pp. 64-5.

---. "Pennungalillatha Nombuthurakal". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 29. No. 4, Jul. 2012, pp.

64-5.

---. Personal Interview. 30 Jan 2012.

---. "Pranayam Prashnamavunnath". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 30, No. 7, Oct. 2013, pp. 64-

5.

---. "Pre-marital Counseling". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Apr. 2013, pp. 64-5.

---. "Randu Doshakalkkidayile Samayam". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 30, No. 11, Feb. 2014,

pp.64-5.

---. "Shah Bano Thurannitta Vazhikal". *Campus Alive*, Issue 6, Nov. 2011, pp. 64-7.

---. "Sughaprasavam". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 30, No. 10, Jan. 2014, pp. 64-5.

---. "Veettujolium Kooliyum". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 29, No. 11, Feb. 2013, pp. 64-5.

Sayyid, S. *Recalling the Caliphate: Decolonisation and World Order*. Hurst Publishers,

2014.

Shaikh, Sa'diyya. "Feminism, Epistemology and Experience: Critically (En)gendering

the Study of Islam". *Journal for Islamic Studies* 33, 2013, pp. 14-47.

---. *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn „Arabi, Gender and Sexuality*. U of North

Carolina P, 2012.

Shams, Fousiya. "Aarkkaanu Purdaye Pedi". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 25, No. 9, Dec.

2008, pp.

14-6.

- . "Adhikarathinu Purathe Pennu". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 33, No. 2, May. 2016, pp. 59-61.
- . "Karuthavane Poruppichalum Pennine Poruppikkilla". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 25, No. 3, Jun. 2008, pp. 7-9.
- . "Malayali House Enna...". *Chandrika Weekly*, Vol. 57, No. 39, Jul. 2013, pp. 32-5.
- . "Manushyavakashadinathile Chila Apakva Chinthakal". *Chanrika Daily*, 10 Dec. 2013.
- . "Muslim Personal Lawyum Muslim Sthreeyude Aakulathakalum". *Prabodhanam Weekly*, Vol. 73, No. 14, Sep. 2016, pp. 42-4.
- . "Muslim Vanitha Masikakal". *Kerala Muslim History Conference Proceedings*, Edited by Jameel Ahamed. Kerala Muslim Heritage Foundation, 2015, pp. 515-24.
- . "Navanirmithikk Penporattam", *Janapaksham Bimonthly*, Vol. 1, No. 1, May-Jun 2016, pp. 51-5.
- . "Paadyapadhathi Parishkaranam". *Chandrika Weekly*, Vol. 54, No. 27, Mar 2008, pp. 10-12.
- . "Pandithanmar Chankootam Kaattumo?". *Madhyamam daily*, 26 Oct 2005, pp. 4.

- . "Purdah Kandu Njettunnavar". *Prabodhanam Weekly*, Vol. 66, No. 32, Jan 2010, pp. 34-40.
- . "Penninidamillatha Parliament". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 31, No. 1, Apr. 2014, pp. 26-8.
- . "Prathikara Rashtreeyathinte Kanakkazchakal". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 25, No. 3, May. 2008, pp. 37-40.
- . "Samoohya Nirmithiyil Sthreeyude Pank". *Deshabhimani Weekly*, Vol. 47, No. 44, Mar. 2016, pp. 35-41.
- . "Samshayikkappedunna Vidyabhyasam". *Kudumbamadhyamam*, 1 Aug. 2008, pp. 3.
- . "33 % Vanitha Samvaranam". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 22, No. 7, Oct. 2005, pp. 17-9.
- . "Vanitha Samvaranam". *Kudumbamadhyamam*, 20 Jun. 2008, pp. 3.
- . "Vanitha Samvaranam Engumethathepoya Vanithadina Sammanam". *Madhyamam Daily*, 8 Mar. 2014, pp. 4.
- . "Vanitha Sangadanakal Kathukodukkenda Karyangal". *Prabodhanam Weekly*, Vol. 72, No. 39, Mar. 2016, pp. 40-4.
- . "Veetil Ninn Thudangam". *Kudumbamadhyamam*, 30 Jan. 2009, pp. 3.
- . "Vivahangal Aaropanathinum Aaghoshathinumidayil". *Aramam Monthly*, Vol. 30,

No. 7, Oct 2013, pp. 34-9.

Sharadakkutty, S. *Vicharam Vimarsam Vishwasam*. Mathrubhumi Books, 2015.

Stowessar, Barbara Freyer. *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*. Oxford UP, 1994.

Sudheesh, T. "Number of Child Marriages in Kerala on the Rise". *Deccan Chronicle*, 20 Jan. 2018.

Suhara, B.M. *Aarodu Chollendu Naam?*. Lead Books, 2013.

---. *Nizhal*. Chintha Publishers, 2012.

---. *Oru Venalinte Anthiam*. H & C Publishing House, 2009.

---. *Rachanayile Chila Prashnangal*. Green Books, 2007.

---. *Suharayude Kathakal*. Chintha Publishers, 2014.

Sumangala, K.V., editor. *Penyathra*. Kairali Books, 2013.

Thampi, Rosy. *Sthraina Aathmeeyatha*. Green Books, 2009.

Thangal, Saheera. *Rabiya*. Cosmo Books, 2008.

Thattathin Marayath. Directed by Vineeth Sreenivasan, Lumiere Film company, 6 Jul. 2012.

The Holy Bible. General Editor, Thomas Nelson, Catholic Bible Press, 1991.

The Holy Qur'an. Trans. by A. Yusuf Ali, Amanat Corp, 1983.

To Noora with Love. Directed by Babu Narayanan, Don Bos International, 1 May 2014.

Tuksal, Hidayet Sefkatli. "Misogynistic Reports in the Hadith Literature". *Muslima*

Theology: The Voice of Muslim Women Theologians, Edited by Ednan Aslan et al., Peter Lang, 2013, pp. 133-154.

Tyrer, David. *The Politics of Islamophobia*. Pluto Press, 2013.

Umaiban, Maina. "Manovyathayude Kathakal", *Balyathilninnnu Erangivanna Oraal*.

Piano Publications, 2011, pp. 8-10.

Wadud, Amina. *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*. Oneworld

Publications, 2006.

---. *Qur'an and Woman*. Oxford UP, 1999.

Wallace, Charity. "Radio Address by Mrs. Laura W. Bush, Crawford, TX, November 17,

2001". *George W. Bush Institute: Content and Resources*, 1 Feb. 2013.

Wells, Spencer. *Journey of Man: A Genetic Odyssey*. Princeton UP, 2002.