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MODERNITY WITH DEMOCRACY? : GENDER AND GOVERNANCE IN THE PEOPLE'S PLANNING CAMPAIGN, KERALAM

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes advantage of the possibility of a critical perspective afforded by the feminist perspective in analyzing the interactions between political and civil societies in the shaping of specific developmental interventions by the state, to examine the People's Planning Campaign (PPC) in Keralam. Implemented in the mid-90s, this was hailed as an important experiment in mainstreaming gender concerns in development. The objectives of this paper go beyond reporting on the degree of success/ failure of the effort at mainstreaming gender concerns in the PPC, though it draws upon many such reports. It will raise a few questions essentially historical in nature: given the fact that political society in Keralam has never displayed any acute concern for gender justice, and that this was a marginal issue even within civil society here, under what conditions did it come to be acknowledged as a key element in a political experiment as momentous as the PPC? Gender justice has been addressed in people's planning (at least in some locations, to some extent) in some specific ways, excluding other ways– what determines this selection process?

In the first section of this paper I trace the emergence of civil and political societies in 20th century Keralam, with special attention to the ways in which they have been gendered, and simultaneously worked as gendering spaces. This account may help us to understand how gender justice came to be both 'in' and 'out', at one and the same time, in the momentous political experiment of the PPC. In the second section, several points of agreement between numerous reports on gender and governance in the PPC are taken up and discussed in the wider historical context. These reports generally point out, for instance, that that the active involvement of social movements like the KSSP in democratic decentralization has not effected a significant change in the general attitude of misogyny prevalent in political society. The conclusion considers the implications of some of two significant developments — the entry of women into local governance, and the wide reach attained by the women SHGs — for the future of gender politics in Kerala.

Keywords: Gender Justice, Framework of Democracy, Framework of Modernity, Civil Society, Political Society

Introduction

Over the past couple of decades, feminist observers of development and politics have been alert to the fact that gender justice is not automatically instated with greater inclusion of women in the economy and polity. The notion of gender politics that they have developed clearly embodies this caution. It hints at changing the structures that handicap the entry of women into politics and development. Nor does it take for granted that any socio-political domain is essentially more sensitive to gender justice than others. Gender politics, thus, involves articulating and realizing gender justice in the state and civil society *alike*; its gains are never construed as blessings naturally- unfolding but always as the result of persistent and intelligent struggle[1]. The agents of feminist critique have historically been located outside the state, in the realm of civil society, very often as organised groups speaking on behalf of 'women'. Yet they have often been quite marginal in that realm, finding themselves at loggerheads with major players. This marginality, then, provides a critical standpoint to analyse the interaction of political society and civil society in the shaping of political and developmental interventions by the state. This means that feminist critiques of state-driven efforts at engendering governance may not identify themselves as residing comfortably in an always- and already- oppositional 'civil society'; they would need to explode such homogeneity often attributed to this realm.

This becomes all the more vital in the case of the People's Planning Campaign[2] (henceforth, PPC), much announced as a significant effort at democratization and mainstreaming gender justice into local governance and development in Keralam launched in 1996. For, as will be elaborated later, it represented the culmination of a highly charged engagement between various social movements and the forces of political society in Keralam over a decade and a half. The objectives of this paper go beyond reporting on the degree of success/failure of the effort at mainstreaming gender concerns into the local developmental process and governance. By now, several such studies are available. In general, they have emphasized the absence of structural change capable of loosening the grip of patriarchy, and also pointed to the apparent lack of will on the part of political forces that endorsed gender justice as an important component of the PPC earlier. Here, keeping in mind the observations made by these reports, I will raise a few questions essentially historical in nature: given the fact that political society in Keralam has never displayed any acute concern for gender justice, and that this was a marginal issue even within civil society here, under what conditions did it come to be acknowledged as a key element in a political experiment as momentous as the PPC? Gender justice has been addressed in people's planning (at least in some locations, to some extent) in some specific ways, excluding other ways– what determines this selection process? These are questions that prompt a preliminary foray into the history of civil and political societies in 20th century Keralam, more specifically, to the history of the gendering promoted by these realms which have worked to disqualify women as full citizens or limit them to a citizenship actively mediated by a certain domestic-oriented Womanliness. It is hoped that this exercise will help to frame the observations of the reports mentioned above in a larger historical context. The historical lessons produced may also make evident the political utility of a feminist standpoint that marks its distance from both the state and civil society in generating critical insight on the process of gendering governance. Often,

a simple reporting of the process often trains its critical eye on the state alone, and misses that point that the PPC has been shaped by both social movements and political forces. Or it simply mixes up the two indiscriminately, thereby losing sight of the specific ways in which patriarchy has operated in these distinct realms.

I argue that for almost three decades in the late 20th century, politics in Keralam has been characterised by an overwhelming concern over issues of 'democracy', over issues of 'modernity'. By 'democracy', I mean the channelising of popular demands to the developmental state through the mediation of political society, which consists of mainly political parties and other mobilisations and institutions connected to them. By 'modernity', I mean the desire for a new ethical life characterised by respect for individual autonomy and informed by the ideals of the Enlightenment, including a secular culture. The 'public action' characteristic of the mid 20th century decades was the high tide of political society in Keralam; civil society in Keralam has always been in some sense subordinated to it, or has largely stayed within its terms. I find it useful to refer to the framework developed by Partha Chatterjee his analysis of Indian democracy precisely because it makes it possible to highlight the specificity of this situation. That is, I would like to argue that twentieth century Malayalee society has seen different models of the 'modern' — which have existed in tension with each other. One of these, which I call the 'framework of democracy', has been dominant, expanding right from the early twentieth century. This is one that has privileged the interests of the collectivity — the community or the society as a whole — over the individual person. I claim that the issue of women's freedom has been *posed and resolved* almost entirely within the terms of the former framework, indeed, to the neglect of the latter. In other words, the question of women's freedom has been posed and solved within the concern for 'collective welfare', the patriarchal moorings of which remain underplayed beneath the espousal of the public/private divide and the sexual complementarity it entails. This also means that

the very possibility of posing and resolving the question of women's freedom in terms of the concern for equality and autonomy of individuals — which would have certainly been more helpful in allowing better participation of at least elite women in the public as citizens — was effectively elided. Chatterjee's model is particularly helpful to bringing to light this tension. Of course, there remains the question whether gender justice is ensured within a full-fledged liberalism, and I would like to leave it open.

Chatterjee argues in favour of a distinction between 'civil society' and 'political society' in order to get a better grasp on the dynamics specific to Indian democracy. By 'civil society', he refers to those "characteristic forms of institutions of modern associational life originating in the Western societies which are based on equality, autonomy, freedom of entry and exit, contract, deliberative procedures of decision-making, recognised rights and duties of members, and other such principles." (Chatterjee 2002:172) What this implies is that the domain of such civil social institutions is still restricted to a fairly small section – a sort of "enlightened elite engaged in a pedagogic mission in relation to the rest of society ". It is more or less assumed that "the actual 'public' will not match up to the standards required by civil society, and that the function of civil social institutions in relation to the public will be one of pedagogy rather than of free association."(Chatterjee 2002:172, 174). In Keralam, the women's groups that sprang up in the late 1980s to form the nuclei of the women's movement in the state — and the contemporary women's movement itself — still conforms to these specifications, though in their pronouncements they aspire to be much more. 'Political society' in India, Chatterjee points out, lies between the civil social institutions and the state, and consists of elements that draw upon forms of modern political association. However, "the practices that activate the forms and methods of mobilization and participation in political society are not always consistent with the principles of association in civil society" (p.176). Mobilisations in political society

often make demands on the state, but violate civic regulations; welfare functions are demanded as matter of collective right. The agencies of the state deal with these people not as bodies of citizens but as populations deserving welfare, and the success these people may attain depend on "the pressure they are able to exert on those state and non-state agencies through their strategic manoeuvres in political society." (p.177) In the context of late 20th century Malayalee society, such distinctions are clearly much more blurred; indeed, it is interesting to note that while the more prominent movements in civil society like the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishat (KSSP) have remained largely within the terms of discourse set by 'democracy'. Those civil society formations marked by concern for what I term 'modernity' have been relatively marginal – this is especially true as far as the women's groups which sprang up in Keralam in the late 1980s are concerned. I argue that these have had important effects on the effort to mainstream gender justice in the PPC.

In the first section of this paper I trace the emergence of civil and political societies in 20th century Keralam, with special attention to the ways in which they have been gendered, and simultaneously worked as gendering spaces. This account may help us to understand how gender justice came to be both 'in' and 'out', at one and the same time, in a momentous political experiment, which was nothing less than a key event in the history of political society in Keralam. In the second section, I turn to the numerous reports on gender and governance in the PPC by both academic and non-academic observers, to take up several points of agreement, and discuss them in a wider historical context. The conclusion looks for pointers to the future, and the possibility of 'modernity-with-democracy'.

Modernity, Gender, Civil Society: A Brief History

The early glimmerings of civic associations in Malayalee society were evident in the closing decades of the 20th century, when people – mostly of the newly educated classes, who were in contact with colonial

institutions, knowledge and practices – came together as 'reasonable individuals' for common purposes. From the outset this was gendered: modern educated men gathered together in 'Reading Clubs', 'Debating Societies' and so on; the women of this new elite formed 'Women's Associations'.[3] In their gatherings men discussed issues pertaining to the 'public' – to the economic, political, social and intellectual domains — while women discussed matters related to the home, human relations and sentiments.[4] The 20th century saw the rise of movements like the Shree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, the Nair Service Society, the Araya Sabha, the Nambutiri Yogakshema Sabha, which sought to transform pre-modern Jati-formations into modern communities.[5] It is difficult to term these movements as part of 'civil society' (as Chatterjee defines it, mentioned above) even though they clearly conformed to the norms of modern associational life[6] . In the early part of the 20th century, these were clearly part of political society, active in the community politics focused on representation in the state legislatures and on cornering resources from the state.[7]

It is possible to argue that these movements worked not so much within what I call (drawing upon Chatterjee) the framework of 'modernity', as the framework of 'democracy', and progressively so, as the 20th century unfolded. This may indeed be a controversial claim, as it is well known that these movements were the major vehicles of modernization– for instance, of the family. However, we have some important work on 20th century community reformisms in Keralam which argues forcefully that the changes in family forms and conjugal arrangements advocated by the various reformisms were much less committed to producing female autonomy, and finally produced a new patriarchy that limited female agency to the sphere of domestic concerns.[8] Women were assigned active supervisory roles within modern families and female education was treated as an instrument to produce efficient home makers and attractive wives. In other words, the 'woman question' was resolved not in favour of women's autonomy and equal participation

in community life and citizenship – in terms of the framework of 'modernity'. It was resolved in terms of 'social need', later to become an important element in the 'framework of democracy'.

But besides this, there seems to have been a *fear* of the modern – especially of those aspects of modernity that seemed to be conducive to individual autonomy, especially that of women. This becomes evident if we look at the debate over contraception in the Malayalee public sphere in the 1930s[9]. Here the fear of modernity appears as the other side of a desire for social order and well being. What we may see is a constant fear that some elements of modernity – here, contraception – may grant sexual autonomy to individuals, and that this may undermine 'the progress of society', by reducing sexual self-disciplining, which was regarded as a key element in productive, hardworking modern individuality. Even those who were advocates of artificial contraception (excepting very few) endorsed it as a measure useful for the promotion of 'public health', and not as one that gave individuals a measure of sexual autonomy.[10] As we will see, this fear of the modern as producing anarchy in some form recurs, albeit in altered form, much later in Malayalee society.

In the early 20th century, the expansion of civil social institutions in Malayalee society largely followed the gendered lines indicated above; *streesamajams* (women's associations) becoming more and more numerous.[11] However, by the late 1920s, a small but vocal group of women publicists had emerged, mostly women who had entered higher education and employment, who were demanding equal citizenship, representation of women in the legislatures and public bodies, job reservations for women and protesting against discriminatory restrictions on women in employment, discrimination against women in the law etc[12]. They aroused much anxiety precisely because they were agitating from within the terms of the modern, and their advocacy for women's autonomy as equal citizenship evoked much unease as it appeared 'divisive', i.e., upsetting the smooth division of the world into the

gendered domains of the public and domestic.[13] Indeed, many of them faced a great deal of slander and ridicule both in public and in other spaces.[14] It is worth noting that it was not the stepping of women into public space per se that evoked feelings of disconcertment. A modern-educated woman like B. Kalyani Amma, the wife of the well-known radical political journalist Swadeshabhimani K. Ramakrishna Pillai, who appeared to be the very paragon of wifely loyalty, self-discipline and fortitude, was almost universally admired. However, women who evoked the strategic unity of 'Women' in defense of the economic and political interests of such a group seemed 'divisive'.[15] Again, women active in the freedom movement in the 1930s often laboured the point that the advocacy of full civic freedoms for women was too narrow a struggle, and that women should 'expand their horizons' and work for general emancipation.[16] Further, in the 1930s, the political claims of 'Women' were sometimes pitted against the political claims of communities – and this often led to the identification of the espousal of women's interests with upper-caste, and later,-class interests.[17] This was an important way in which promotion of a gender politics aimed at securing the autonomy of women came to be forcefully depicted as fundamentally inimical to 'general interests' of the collectivity, be it 'Malayalee society', the community, or whatever. This was to echo all the more powerfully in the coming decades, especially in the Communist movement[18]. One of the most powerful ideological moves made by the early women publicists in favour of the full inclusion of women in the public was the argument that certain 'Womanly' capacities – capacities supposedly given to women by virtue of their 'natural' sexual endowment, like compassion, patience, forgiveness, gentleness and so on – were necessary for the conduct of modern public life and government.[19] However, this claim was never really effective in the field of politics, and political society of mid 20th century Keralam continued to implicitly or explicitly endorse the public/domestic divide, and the relegation of women's agency and their 'special capacities' to the domestic domain.[20] Indeed, when women participated

actively as a group in politics – for example, in the infamous anticommunist agitation of the late 1950s, the 'Liberation Struggle' — it was always in the name of the home and the hearth and (in that sense,) guardians of social order[21]. After the successful conclusion of the struggle, the women participants were heartily congratulated and gently shooed into safely apolitical 'social work'[22]. Even without such explicit direction, several of the women publicists who had been active in the 1930s and 1940s, had already taken to 'social work' and developmental activism in the later decades, both which appeared safely away from politics[23]. Thus, the espousal of full civic rights for women as equal citizens, the promotion of their specific interests (as in the demand for job reservation for women) was, by mid 20th century, clearly outside the concerns voiced by the class and community institutions that made up Malayalee political society. It is no wonder that these efforts withered, and have entirely disappeared from both official history and public memory.

On the flip side, civil social associations of women were certainly not concerned with articulating the interests of women as equal citizens. *Streesamajams*, for instance, were more often than not tied to the interests of the modern family, helping their members to acquire modern social and familial skills and mores, or earn an income without wandering too far from the home ("cottage-industry"). The most popular forms of women's civic associations were those largely organised around their familial roles as mothers, wives and homemakers, and those geared to integrating women into active agents of 'social development' (which did not necessarily and frequently challenge the former, and indeed, largely built on it). The Community Development Programme of the 1950s, for instance, organised women in associations at the local level, and focused on the intersection points of development and familial 'improvement'.[24]

The decades following independence were the heyday of political society in Keralam, during which political parties successfully steered

popular demands for health, land, housing, education, higher wages and so on, towards the developmental state.[25] Women were active participants of these struggles, as not so much 'women', but as workers organized under trade unions. Here too, however, a critique of patriarchy remained unarticulated – the space for such critique was never cleared – and as Anna Lindberg has recently shown, women workers were consistently directed towards the home through a range of strategies, and literally 'shown their natural and rightful place' as wives and mothers by officials, employers and their own representatives. Thus while maternity benefits were fought for, the family wage remained in place. Thus one of the strongest effects of the unionization of working class women was what Lindberg calls 'housewifization' and certainly not their entry into a liberal public as full-fledged citizens. When these women came together in public associations, this often followed the above mentioned pattern of 'mobilization for the home and for social development'.[26]

In these decades – which also saw a cultural hegemony of leftism – a certain egalitarian Developmentalism grew into a powerful ideology shaping visions of the future of the Malayalee people. It was fervently hoped that state-directed economic growth would unify all sections of people, and political society was accepted as the major agent of such change[27]. Civil social institutions were conceived as crucial allies and 'junior partners' in this endeavor. The state-sponsored Family Planning Campaign in Keralam in the 1960s demonstrated the effectiveness of this arrangement. Civil social institutions and political parties and groups worked together to popularize birth control – but less as a tool of personal autonomy for persons but as a measure of economic gain for families and society as a whole. If Anna Chandy in 1935 had approved of artificial birth control as a measure that would improve women's control over their bodies, now such a possibility seemed almost absent. Birth control was being endorsed not within that frame, but within that of 'general

good' – within the frame of 'democracy', and by agents in both civil and political societies.[28]

After the 1970s, however, egalitarian Developmentalism, which had been the common rallying point for civil social and political social institutions, began to be questioned more frequently, and from different perspectives. In such critical evaluations, the ineffectivity of political society in delivering its promises, as well as the unrealistic and environmentally improvident developmental ambitions it fostered became the target of new critiques from the civil society[29]. This did not represent a rejection of the framework of democracy, but a radical revaluation. Popular movements, which grew in strength and influence in the 1980s, like the KSSP, operated within the framework of democracy, but they questioned powerfully the dominance of political society in setting its terms, articulating alternative visions and means in a range of issues, all of which had been crucial to political society's framework of 'democracy' (thus it is no surprise that a study on the KSSP preferred to refer to it as a 'development movement')[30]. When one considers the possibility of conveying a 'women's perspective' *within* such rejuvenated social movements outside political society, this aspect appears to have been a crucial debilitating factor. The late 1980s was also the period which saw the first flickerings of a women-centered politics in the Malayalee public arena[31]; small groups of new elite women, heavily influenced by Marxism and rationalism, began to discuss western feminism and the possibilities of generating social critique from a 'women's perspective' informed by feminism. Both the marginalization of women as active agents in politics and the instrumentalist and male chauvinistic use of women's grievances by Malayalee political society, which became appallingly visible here in the same decade, were important provocations for such efforts.[32] Within the KSSP, the articulation of a women's perspective was carried out in an understandably circumscribed manner – the focus of the strategy was to 'elevate' women to being active agents of change for 'general good' than to address the questions of gender injustice in any direct way[33].

This was not merely the limitation of a development-oriented movement like the KSSP. Activists who sought to integrate gender justice into the fish workers' movement of the 1980s, one of the first self-assertions by people marginalized from social development in Malayalee society, found it a rather steep climb.[34] In the 1990s, gender justice became far more widely discussed in the expanded mass media and due to reasons mostly unconnected to any upsurge of public concern about the deleterious effects of patriarchy. For instance, the erosion of faith in the homogenized image of the Malayalee People as the agent of egalitarian development (so dear to all elements constituting Malayalee political society), which became all the more apparent when groups of people marginalized in social development began to assert themselves, might have had a 'loosening' effect. The expansion of the media in the 1990s was momentous as far as the increase in the sites of enunciation of a 'women's perspective' was concerned. A 'woman's critique' of patriarchy became much discussed anew in the Malayalam literary field, which began in the 1980s itself, one of the few sites in which such a critique (that claimed to issue forth from a unified 'women's view') had held its own despite tremendous odds, through out the period from the mid-50s onwards[35]; in the sites of knowledge production, national trends that brought women's studies and gender to the fore had some effect.

In the public sphere, the struggles over issues that appear to affect women across class and caste and which seem to call for explicit, unambiguous confrontation of patriarchal institutions—like sexual harassment, dowry and domestic violence — have been long-drawn and bitterly dividing, even when the ethical correctness of the feminist position was often fully conceded[36]. In contrast, there seems to be all-round support for women's associational efforts which rest upon the goal of strengthening women's economic contributions to the family, hoping to thus empower them. Here again, civic mobilizations of women seem to be staying on the same terrain as they have been throughout the century; they are acceptable and actively encouraged when an overt link

is posited between such mobilization and domestic upward mobility. They are less accepted and regarded with more suspicion when they address themselves to the power structures within the family (appearing to destabilize it, in the very act), or claim for women the status of full-fledged citizens.

However, in the late 1980s- early 1990s, political society in Keralam was clearly facing a crisis that was precipitated by the conjunction of a number of elements. First, the remarkable levels of social development, the fruit of Malayalee political society's highly energetic interventions seemed to be under severe strain here, not to mention the sluggishness of economic growth. It was even being accused that the redistributive and competitive politics, which was indeed, the natural outcome of political society's framing of the question of social change in terms of 'democracy', was responsible for the latter[37]. The Nehruvian vision of development espoused by political society no longer seemed viable either; and the persistent critique of such visions from social movements in Keralam, quite audible since the early 1980s was not the least important factor that stripped away such conviction. The impact of globalization ('globalization' in a broader sense, as Malayalees had begun to slowly turn away from the Nation state and towards the international job market, for employment and livelihood since the 1970s) were also becoming apparent by the early 1990s, with very complex social repercussions. More and more educated Malayalees seemed to have lesser and lesser stake in reshaping socio-economic life in Keralam[38]; money flowing from abroad had a definite impact on lifestyle, promoting appallingly wasteful forms of consumption. These were essentially problems that the earlier sorts of 'democratic' mobilisations could not solve, and indeed, seemed to undermine such mobilisations themselves. The PPC was a response to this crisis, and it was shaped and supported by elements of the left that had been sympathetic to the social movements' critiques of state-centric visions of development[39]. It was in a strong sense, a serious effort to locate the 'people' as the major

historical agent of social transformation and economic growth, in a much broader sense than ever before.

This gives us some insight into how the concern with gender justice became an important element in the policy making of Keralam's experiment in decentralization, even though, as recounted earlier, the claims made by women to full citizenship had been regarded with deep suspicion not only by political society in general, but also by social movements. Along with financial devolution and administrative decentralization, a consensus on greater inclusion of women was apparently reached, and accepted in the policy formulation. Given its orientation towards broadening the inclusiveness of 'People' as the agent of historical and economic change, that democratic decentralization sought to reach out to marginalised social groups, to integrate them as full participants in planning and implementation, was no surprise. Also, the apparent consensus within political society (in which dominant sections had hitherto displayed little sympathy towards women's struggles for autonomy and citizenship, either as individuals or as a group) over the special and highly visible emphasis on welcoming women into governance and local development as participants was perhaps to be expected. One, here was a substantial group of people, who seemed to have already proven their mettle as agents of change within families – and also within local communities, as was evident in the Total Literacy Campaign — possessing necessary skills and time, and thus eminently employable in the effort to extend political society's framework of 'democracy'. Two, the fact that women were largely devoid of strong political affiliations, as also the fact that the category of 'Women' was itself largely not politicized, may have made them particularly attractive as agents of the new effort. [40] The induction of such a group may have seemed useful in warding off the pernicious effects of divisiveness within political society. Neither of these features had anything to do with working towards favourable conditions for evoking the women's question within the framework of modernity – for locating women as agents not within

the family/ local community, but within wider society as citizens with direct claims upon the state. But neither did they close off that possibility. There is of course also the argument that the pressure for gender sensitive planning from international bodies and funding agencies was also of crucial significance. While this may be true, I would still argue that internal compulsions are as important as external pressures. And without local political will, it can indeed have little to contribute towards creating genuinely liberal attitudes towards women's full participation in politics.

Democratic decentralization certainly envisaged women's presence as participants and not merely as passive beneficiaries. In the later years, there was concerted effort to define 'participation' more sharply, so as to avoid not only the reduction of women to mere beneficiaries but also to open up some space for the articulation of women's strategic interests. But at the outset at least, the ambiguity of 'participation' was probably useful – it could either be simply the extension of the active familial agency already conceded to women into the realm of the local community, or the active articulation of women's strategic interests along with their practical needs. This was probably crucial in garnering *general* assent for incorporating women in an unprecedented way in the PPC.

With this history in mind, I believe it is possible for us to understand better many of the observations that have been common to the various reports on gender, local development and governance in the process of democratic decentralization in Keralam. In the next section I draw upon some of these.

Gender in the PPC: Questions and Concern

(a)   Almost all the reports on gender in the decentralization process agree that the substantial reservation for women was definitely a major step towards inducting women as participants in local governance. [41] However, they also point out that little cognizance

was taken of the fact that their near-total inexperience in politics calls for special measures to help them learn the ropes of political activity. The recent report by SAKHI (2004), based on field work in 2000, points out that the rotation of wards reserved for women every five years is detrimental to building the political capacities of women; it also points out that political parties and movements have very limited interest in ensuring the actualisation of the mandatory Women's Component Plan, and in developing women's skills in the political domain[42]. Women's reservation does not automatically ensure a politicization of women as a group. Several reports therefore have recommended continuous capacity building and sensitization programmes for elected women representatives[43]. It may appear curious that these reports very forcefully point out that political parties, which were keen to induct women into the political process, seemed most reluctant to provide the conditions under which these women could develop the skills and capacities for full-fledged political careers. Women representatives who refused assigned roles have often been made to suffer, many of these reports indicate[44]. As an author points out, "Women members who stick their necks out continue to be in danger of being heckled and in occasional cases, of being subject to slander" [45].

 What is very clear in all these accounts, then, is the disjuncture between the professed willingness of political society to induct women into the process of governance, and its actual reluctance to do so – and indeed, its eagerness to maintain the restrictions upon women entering the public as politicians. It may be noticed here that after the pre-independence legislatures in which women nominees represented the 'interests of women', it is in the democratic decentralization of the 1990s that we do have a similar measure in governance, an effort to make women's 'specific interests' audible in political decision-making bodies[46]. What is

really striking –going by the documentation in these reports – is that it is precisely those strategies that were deployed in the 1930s to silence and shove out those women articulating specifically 'Women's interests' in politics, like sexual slander, heckling, public ridicule, indecent sloganeering, postering etc., that are being used now to silence their present-day counterparts[47]. In other words, political society stubbornly clings to the idea that shaped civil and political societies in early 20th century Keralam: that the domestic forms the appropriate space for women, and that women who venture out seeking public forms of power must be effectively treated as 'not-women'—as not worthy of the privacy and respectability enjoyed by the truly gendered Woman, she who emits the Womanly signs of modest dress, discreet speech and above all, political docility. From the reports, it is evident that most of the strategies that seek to disorient recalcitrant women members aim to some extent or the other, at stripping off their dignity [48]. Of course, such experience has steeled many a woman representative and spurred her on to acquire the necessary skills[49], but no wonder that a large section of women representatives interviewed by observers admitted their reluctance to contest again[50]. No wonder, again, that some reports by feminist observers stress the urgent need to politicize the category of 'Women' as a group with well-defined interests in society; others recommend remedying the lack through gender training[51].

Nor is it surprising that the active involvement of social movements like the KSSP in democratic decentralization has not effected a significant change in the general attitude of misogyny prevalent in political society; despite the fact that it did try to raise the issues faced by women representatives, for instance, through its women's street theatre group[52]. However, even in the brief period of animated debate over gender justice within the KSSP in the late 1980s, the distrust of women's autonomy as

citizens – as different from the simple assigning of an active public role to them, one essentially derived from active, supervisory domesticity – as socially divisive, was never fully overcome.

(b)   The reports are also in agreement that those projects that were aimed at satisfying women's practical needs were generally endorsed, while those which addressed their strategic interests were either ignored or opposed (with, of course, important pockets of exception). Thus Sarada Muralidharan points out that while schemes for training girls in self-defense techniques was generally ridiculed, others which simply distributed sewing machines to women were readily approved[53]. The dominant tendency, it seems, has been to keep apart the two – i.e., to separate out practical gender needs from strategic gender interests, as if the two were so watertight that they could be addressed only through different projects. When they appeared mixed, a great deal of 'moral opposition' seems to have been provoked. Thus, as the SAKHI report indicates, the suggestion for a multipurpose centre for women to be used as a training centre, a daycare centre for aged women, a restroom for fisherwomen etc. did not meet moral condemnation, though it came to be finally shelved in favour of other projects that generally fell under the familiar rubric of "cottage industry",[54] something that has been accepted as suitably 'Womanly' in Keralam since the thirties[55]. Also, projects that seemed to address women's livelihood without threatening the existent structures of gender dominance too explicitly, were not the target of 'moral' opposition, though many of them died down, often due to the lack of managerial and entrepreneurial skills. SAKHI mentions two such projects in its reports[56]. However, from the documentation of the reports, it seems that the moral opposition seemed particularly virulent when schemes that linked practical needs with strategic interests (when the effort was to fulfill women's practical gender needs through means that

essentially challenged entrenched forms of gender power) were proposed. (The guidelines for designing projects for women and the models of such projects distributed in all Panchayats in the second year, 1998-99, contained both the above types – those who explicitly challenged patriarchal norms and those which mounted a more muted challenge). For instance, Vanita Mukherjee and T.N. Seema mention how a scheme for training girls as auto-rickshaw drivers (not only a male preserve, but also a very visible masculine public role in Keralam) that aimed at generating greater income for women was crippled through public derision of the women who underwent the training and finally, had no takers, as it went against accepted gender codes and seemed to hold the possibility of upsetting established norms of sexual morality [57]. The SAKHI report mentions another telling instance, in which a proposal for generating employment for women through starting a unit to manufacture cheap and hygienic sanitary napkins was booed out as 'indecent' [58].

This appears crucial when we consider that feminists have been quick to point out that no hard and fast dividing line can be drawn between women's practical needs and strategic interests, and indeed, that it is crucial for women's political interests that the two should not be perceived to be existing in dichotomous relation. As Kabeer and Subrahmanian point out, "…….meeting daily practical needs in ways that transform the conditions in which women make choices is a crucial element of the process by which women are empowered to take on more deeply entrenched aspects of their subordination."[59] Feminist observers of democratic decentralization have implicitly asked for precisely that linkage in the formulation of projects for women[60]. It is clear that a realistic understanding of the implications of adopting a gender-in-development perspective – that, here, it would have to integrate measures to bring about structural changes to promote equality

in gender relations, into the very grain of the processes of local development and governance – was lacking. Such a perspective, as observed earlier, was not forthcoming from the major civil social movements deeply involved in democratic decentralization in any serious sense. It would possibly come only from feminist groups, which were marginal in Malayalee civil society, even in the 1990s[61]. And feminist groups in Keralam were battling with the state and political parties (over cases of sexual harassment, limitations in mobility etc. in which political society was directly implicated), precisely when the GID vision was being prescribed and reasserted in the policy of democratic decentralization![62] The formation of the Women's Commission, again, intended as a step towards institutionalizing gender justice in the state, was toothless in effect: once, again, simultaneous presence and absence. And predictably, the risk of the divisiveness of political society getting reflected within the Women's Commission soon appeared real, so also the deep resentment of powerful sections of political society against it.[63]

(c)   Many reports have observed the rapid spread of SHGs of women as part of the decentralization process and reflect on the potentials of such mobilizations. Almost all agree about the unprecedented degree of assent this form of organizing women has gained all over the State, they also agree more or less that "Women who have participated in vibrant self-help or neighbourhood groups have developed strong sense of self worth and faith in their ability to interact with power structures. Increase in their contribution to the household income has led to an increased relevance within the family."[64] Some have been far more optimistic than others, seeing in them the institutions that could potentially deal with both the practical gender needs and strategic gender interests of women[65]. Yet, a later observer has voiced serious doubts about the ability of the *Kudumbashree*, the State poverty eradication

programme (which has had a history distinct from that of both feminist activism in Keralam, and democratic decentralization more attentive to gender), which has been welcomed all over Keralam as the space to widen the participation of women in local governance, to ensure the active presence of women as participants—who inform or critique the processes of governance and development. She observes that the presence of the women thus inducted "… not been able to materially alter the texture of the project. The decision making in the local government has certainly not incorporated the opinions of these groups. In the absence of statutory or other compulsions, provisions not perceived to be in the immediate interest of the panchayats are merely ignored…... Thus the role they have been formally assigned for participation in the developmental processes has tended to manifest as a conduit for implementation rather than as one that informs or critiques the developmental process."[66]. She also points out how this reduces empowerment to a means for an end set by the governmental state – poverty alleviation. This perceptive observation about such empowerment is worth quoting: "It has focused on woman as a unit of the family and sought to improve the family situation through her increased capacity for income generation, and through increased access to knowledge, especially about government institutions that concern her. It has co-opted her formally into community structures on the expectation that she will play her 'part'." [67]

Looking back to the history of women's agency in Kerala, we may see that there is really no novelty in what is being offered as agency for women. In the early decades of the 20th century, ideal Womanly subjectivity was defined as centered upon a reformed domestic realm, performing active supervisory functions[68]. The present move is really the offering of such a possibility to the

women of the poorest classes (*Kudumbashree* mobilizes BPL women), with appropriate changes (such as the foregrounding of income-generation), and further, extending it to the local community. While it can create a great deal of self-confidence among women – for it does attribute to women a certain 'natural' capacity to be the guardians and disciplinarians of the home and the local community — by infusing in them a sense of genuine participation, there is absolutely no guarantee that this will translate into a full scale concern for gender justice, for women's rights as equal citizens, with equal access to both public and domestic domains. Indeed, such a move actually serves to further entrench established gender norms that have been so central to the assertion of the new Malayalee elite of the 20th century through community reform and modern education. It is possible that this may further extend a modern patriarchy in Keralam, which to some extent, would be 'female-driven'.[69]

(d) The measures and the concrete action taken at various levels in the process of decentralization to address strategic gender interests have also been documented and assessed by the reports, especially the measures adopted to ensure women's participation at all levels, and to prevent the conflation of women's interests with familial interests, or interests of a more general sort, and also the training programmes for gender sensitization. Later, Watchdog Committees' or Jagrata Samitis, were to be initiated along with the SHGs, to deal with "social issues" which included "Violence against women, dowry, alcoholism..", were probably meant to be complementary to the SHGs[70]. Here again women's practical needs and strategic interests seem to be dealt with in two different institutions. And more importantly, the move towards 'dissolving' gender struggles, towards seeing them as part of 'general social conflict' by blurring their distinctiveness and thereby, the upholding of community-based non-confrontationist solutions has

been conspicuous in many instances. In the case of struggles over women's practical needs this is readily achieved, but such a thrust is evident even in struggles over strategic interests.

This is not to deny that there have been some instances in which problems like alcoholism were tackled by the SHGs themselves[71]. The Jagrata Samitis were envisaged as lower-level units of the State Women's Commission [72] However, 'community-resolutions' continue to remain popular. One report found that a large majority of the women representatives were mostly reluctant to take up "inside issues" of families, and when they did, it was largely through the NHGs and, in one instance, the Gramasabha[73]. A truly telling instance is an anecdote related by Mukherjee and Seema about a play focusing on the difficulties of women representatives presented at the State-level gender training programme in the second year[74]. Titled 'Subhadra Madhavan and Panchayati Raj', it was a street play produced by KSSP's women's theatre group, which had a woman persuaded by her husband to joining politics as the chief protagonist, and the play throws light on the problems she has to confront as a representative. At the State-level camp, a small team wrote a sequel to it, depicting how she single-handedly fights corrupt commercial interests, the apathetic bureaucracy and her suspicious husband. When the play was presented, apparently, there was considerable adverse reaction. The model of the lone fighter seemed too unrealistic; instead, the participants wanted Subhadra Madhavan's story to be a non-confrontationist one, in which she gradually manages to wear down the gossip, elicit help from all around her, and convince her husband. They wanted to see it "depicted as a struggle in partnership with other persons and forces seeking to transform society."[75] What is striking about this whole account is that it is as though only two alternatives are available to women struggling against patriarchal restrictions: either be a lone fighter,

hitting back single-handedly, or solve one's problems with the help of the community. While the first of these is clearly unrealistic, the second is equally problematic from the feminist view in that it avoids the articulation of a gender politics. The third possibility of *women* mobilizing as a political group for action against patriarchal restrictions does not seem to even occur! I would claim that such polarization of alternatives is commonly upheld in the Malayalee public sphere, as in the media's handling of some of the highly controversial incidents around charges of sexual harassment that held public attention in the late 1990s[76]. No greater testimony to the marginality of the feminist perspective to democratic decentralization need be produced. Given the overall thrust on SHGs (the name given to the poverty alleviation programme focused on women – *Kudumbashree* – which has clearly familial implications, is apt indeed) which locate women's income generation right within the family, one may claim that entrusting conflict resolution to the community (conceived most often as a group of families) has generally found greater favour over encouraging the politicization of women's issues and recognizing women as a group (albeit with a great deal of internal differences) with distinct political interests, in establishing fairness in gender relations.

(e) The reports have also emphasized the extent to which gender training is being looked upon as a means of creating gender awareness and skills required for tackling such issues, by both the architects as well as the women newly inducted into the decentralization process. Whether this can actually work as a substitute for the political awareness generated in and through the feminist movement is a key question here, especially in the light of the fact that feminist groups have been drafted in as gender trainers[77]. It is undeniable today that feminist mobilizations have effectively worked to some extent in the Indian context, to

dismantle the pubic/domestic divide, by bringing the latter into legitimate public discourse. Here from what has been discussed above, what seems to have encountered the greatest opposition, despite many rounds of training and sensitization efforts, is precisely this aspect of stripping away the ostensibly apolitical appearance of the domestic and private. The bulk of attention has been given to discussing the impediments women aspirants for a career in politics have to face, and to learning the skills necessary for formulating women's projects. The assumption that women's smooth entry into public life will somehow set in motion a process by which they will develop their own perspective and demands seems to be pervasive in much of the gender sensitization efforts themselves. However, the historical experience of women in 20th century Malayalee society does not bear out this hope. That women's education and empowerment have not performed such a function is clear, as recent work has emphazised.[78] Given this context, gender training may well be expected to help women learn the ropes of governance and to boost their self-confidence; but there is no assurance that the private/public divide will be breached in any fundamental way.

Conclusion: Pointers for the Future

I have been implicitly drawing upon the framework developed by Anne Marie Goetz (2003) to analyze women's political effectiveness in governance. She suggests that the success of the gender equity interest in policy-making and policy implementation depends upon the interaction of three major factors: the strength of the gender equity lobby in civil society, the credibility of feminist politicians and the capability of the state to enforce gender commitments[79]. In all these counts, decentralization in Keralam has a rather bleak record. As discussed before, the gender equity lobby has been weak in both civil and political societies, and the responses of civil and political actors towards feminists have

ranged from outright hostility to vague suspicion —sympathy has been rare. In Malayalee politics, women participants are few, and tend to follow party directives. The capacity of the state to enforce commitments to gender equity has also not been encouraging.

There is no doubt that the induction of women into local governance and the remarkable spread attained by the SHGs of women formed as part of the *Kudumbashree* programme are two events of immense significance to the future of gender politics in Keralam. The question, however, is regarding the directions they may take, and the forces liable to influence these developments. The question is whether they will be able to work together to produce the sort of effects the new social movements produce, those which transcend "the institutional boundaries of old politics"[80]. Ultimately this has important implications for the autonomy of civil society in Keralam. It will make possible for civil society to focus on issues hitherto obscured by its remaining within the terms set by political society. And importantly, it will help to shift the major focus of public action from extracting gains from the state to changing the nature of politics itself. Civil and political societies would engage in a far more equal exchange than has hitherto been possible, making redundant the notion of a chosen historical political subject, be it the working class or a more amorphous 'People'[81].

It seems inevitable here that feminist initiative has to claim much greater space in the Malayalee public sphere for this to happen. There is no doubt this is a daunting task: playing on the title of Robin Jeffrey's well-known book (2003), one may express almost in formulaic terms one widely shared conception of the roots of Kerala Model ("Politics+ Women = Social Development/Well Being"). The conjunction of a particular sort of politics and a particular sort of female subjectivity is seen to have produced the well being Keralam is so famous for. It is easy to see the magnitude of the critical task that the feminists are taking on here, when they say that this particular female subjectivity, and the

domestic arrangements supporting it, has been oppressive, and that it has denied women parity of participation in public life – and that 'Politics' has been reinforcing it. It, is then, clear that the simple extension of 'Politics' into what was hitherto a technocrat-bureaucrat privilege zone cannot answer the feminist critique. Especially when 'Women' remained defined (within dominant sections of political society and civil society, as well, with the possible exception of a minor group which may have wielded some influence at the level of policy formulation) as essentially outside 'Politics'. In the 1990s, feminists in Keralam have taken some strides towards a more vocal gender politics, and this meant entering into direct confrontation with mainstream political parties and hegemonic political discourses that monopolize the definitions of 'progressive', and challenging them to pay more attention to gender oppression[82] This, however, has taken place almost in complete isolation from the process of democratic decentralization. Critics have pointed out that some of the most vexing ills of decentralization derive from the fact that the effort had been to actualize participatory democracy within a framework ill-suited to it, that of the Five-year Planning [83]. For the project of realizing gender justice as envisaged in the PPC, it could be said that it was skewed because what should have been ideally the attempt to address political demands ensuing from a feminist identity politics was delivered within a framework of governmental intervention. Thus the PPC sought to recognize 'Women' as a group and ensure it a fair share in the distribution of resources; but neither such recognition, nor the concern for such redistribution was forthcoming in wider political and civil societies in Keralam. Thus we had (isolated, but to some degree influential elements in) the state trying to create the conditions through policy, while the elements of the 'People', acknowledged as the major agents of the process of decentralization, themselves had either extremely instrumentalist ideas of gender justice, or were outright hostile. Peter Evans says that if deliberative democracy is to succeed, three conditions have to be necessarily met: firstly, it has to be socially self-sustaining in that ordinary

citizens must remain willing to invest their time and energy in it; secondly, the institutions created by deliberative democracy must be capable of overcoming the 'political economy' problem, i.e., the opposition of powerholders in existing decision-making structures; thirdly, they must not be inefficient or biased against investment such that real growth is affected. He thinks that in the PPC, the 'political economy' problem has been surmounted[84]. One cannot resist adding that this conclusion is impossible if 'powerholders' were defined in gender terms.

The mobilization of BPL women in the SHGs under the *Kudumbashree* programme brings up in bold relief one of the major divides that has been characteristic of women's politics in Keralam in the 1990s. In this decade we have seen women of the marginalized groups, or at the peripheries of mainstream society mobilize (the *Kudumbashree* mobilization is one form this is taking, albeit, very much state-sponsored), in contrast to the relative passivity of women of the new elite, who have had better access to education, health care and employment. The diverse mobilizations of dalit women, tribal women, women of the fisher folk, sexworkers, and people of same-sex orientation form an emergent network that carries many of the distinctive features of the new social movements, such as internal democracy, horizontal organization and identity politics, to a much greater extent than civil social institutions like, say the KSSP, which are far more subservient to political society at the ideological level. However, these have before them an overwhelming task, given the immense organizational strength of political society in Keralam, which has decades of dominance behind it. Perhaps equally important would be a rethinking on the Left. Zygmunt Bauman's suggestion that one of the ways in which the Left could effectively meet the current crisis that it faces is by turning itself into "the counter-culture of modernity" also, rather than trying to remain merely "the counter-culture of capitalism", as it has hitherto done is of utmost relevance to the Left in present-day Keralam[85]. The PPC has often been represented as the counter-culture of globalized capitalism; it has hardly aspired to

be the "counterculture of modernity" (as it has been historically realized in Keralam, of course). It is also important to note that the identity politics espoused by the above mentioned network is certainly not of a sort that displaces issues of economic inequality to install reified and intolerant identities. On the contrary, they represent a politics of representation attentive to both maldistribution and misrecognition[86].

I would regard the above-mentioned mobilization of women in SHGs to be part of this general phenomenon, or at least taking force from it. However, whether the SHGs formed will serve to question gender power is still ambiguous, though it clearly holds interesting possibilities. An observer remarks about the SHGs that "The forum for thrift and credit could be developed into a hunting ground for ideas and debate"[87]. Reports on the experiment have stressed its importance in helping many women gain citizenship skills like public speaking and in dealing with the state machinery. However, they also point out the claims often made by NHG members regarding the expansion of their general awareness are often considerably exaggerated; more crucially, they observe that at present, these institutions do not in any sense challenge patriarchal values. Moreover, the SHGs do not seem to challenge the belief in the home being women's 'natural' location[88]. Indeed, they seem to achieve a limited extension in that domestic agency conceded to women by Malayalee social reformism is widened to the level of the community. It may be argued that the extension of such agency to the poorer, working class, marginally located groups of women who were not recognized as coming under the sign of Woman, and hence excluded from the middle-class privilege and relative security this offers, is really the sum and substance of the current phase of 'empowerment' through the SHGs. It may even be conceded that this is 'empowerment', relatively considered. It is mentioned as such by many of the women who participate in SHGs. However, the limitations of such agency are already evident in Malayalee society; far from challenging entrenched gender norms, it invisiblises them, making token changes. This is not to dismiss the aspirations of

those who have entered the SHGs. Yet I find it important to assert that the outcome of such initiatives at least until now is not likely to be gender equity, unless we dilute the notion considerably.

Whether the SHGs can be developed into vibrant civil social institutions that raise the issue of gender justice within the framework of modernity, depends upon whether the above mentioned network is able to transform itself into a vigorous 'counter-public', capable of breaking the apparent dichotomy between 'democracy' and 'modernity' in the framing of the Women question in contemporary Malayalee society, with such force that issues of 'modernity' can no more be subsumed under issues of 'democracy', as before. And indeed, by asserting that 'democracy' is unthinkable without 'modernity'. Indeed, that would require us to go beyond both 'democracy' and 'modernity', beyond both the exclusive espousal of either 'collective welfare', or 'individual autonomy'.

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Notes

1   See, Molyneux, 1985; 2002.

2   The PPC was launched in August 1996 by the Left Democratic Front in Keralam, and it was hailed as a unique effort to draw in people as participants in planning for development and implementation of projects. Local bodies were to be substantially promoted as institutions of governance, and considerable financial devolution, which made available to these bodies some 35-40% of the resources of the Ninth Plan, was effected. Efforts were also made to institutionalize local-level planning and implementation by setting up the Administrative Reforms Committee. The PPC was to unfold in six stages, the first of which (Sept- Oct 1997) was the convening of the local village assemblies, the Grama Sabhas, with maximum popular participation,(special attention was to be paid to ensure participation of women) in which people were to voice their needs and demands through group discussions aided by trained facilitators. An estimated two million people took part in the assemblies, of which some 26.22% were women. In the second phase (Oct- Dec 1997), assessments of local resources were made through participatory studies, presented as the Panchayat Development Report at Development Seminars to be attended by delegates from the Grama Sabhas. The report was to have a mandatory chapter on women and development. The third phase (Nov. 1997- Mar. 1998) was the election of 'Task forces' for various sectors, consisting of elected representatives, experts and activists, who were to formulate projects. Gender impact statements were made mandatory for all projects and a separate task force was set up for women's development projects. The fourth phase(Mar.- Jun. 1998) involved plan finalization at the local level in meetings of elected representatives, and the plan document was to have a separate chapter on women's development projects, with 10% of the resources set apart of the Women's Component Plan. The fifth phase (Apr.- Jul. 1998) consisted of the integration of local plans at the block and district levels, and the final phase (May-Oct.1998) was the formulation of a State Plan from the District Plans, in which the local-level plans were to be evaluated by the District Planning Committees. In this phase the Voluntary Technical Corps was raised, consisting of retired government officials with various technical skills to help the local bodies to assess the feasibility of the plans. For a detailed account, see Isaac and Franke 2000.

3   The 'Trevandrum Debating Society', the 'Puthenchandai Reading Association' and the 'Chalai Reading Club' and other such groups began to take shape in Thiruvananthapuram and other centers closest to colonial power in the late 19th century, not to mention such forum in colleges etc. See Devika 2002.

4   It is worth mentioning that in the early 20th century novel *Indulekha* (1889), widely acknowledged as one of the earliest and most lucid statements of the gender divide identified as 'truly modern' in Keralam, the two all male discussions are around the eminently 'public' topics of religion and politics, while the modern-educated heroine forcefully intervenes just once, in a topic centered around the domestic, regarding conjugality, morality and marital fidelity.

5   See Gopalakrishnan 1973.

6   This comes close to what Frietag 1996 argues about the shaping of communal identities in late 19th century British India.

7   See Ouwererk 1994 ; Menon 1994.

8   Velayudhan, 1999; 1999a; Kodoth 2002, 2002; 2002a; Arunima 2003; Awaya 1996 ; Devika (forthcoming) (a).

9   See Devika 2002a.

10   For instance, the contrast between the position taken on the issue by intellectuals like Sahodaran K. Ayappan and first-generation feminists like Anna Chandy. See Devika 2002a.

11   The *Malayala Manorama* (henceforth, *M.M*) reported the activities of a *streesamajam* at Thiruvananthapuram   (*M.M*, 13 October,1907); at Palakkad (*M.M*, 23 July,1910); at Attingal (*M.M*,18 September,1909); at Guruvayoor (*M.M*,19 December,1908); at Tiruvalla (*M.M, * 16 June,1909). The *Sharada* reported the activities of a *streesamajam* at Kozhikode in 1905 *(Sharada* Vol.2 (7),1905-6,p.137).); a *streesamajam* was operating at Talasherry in the 1910s which home delivered books to women. M. Kunhappa , 'Preface' to Amma 1977, p.iii. A fuller account is given in Devika (forthcoming) (a).

12   See Devika 2002; also, (forthcoming) (b).

13   See Devika 2002.

14   Women who tried to enter contestative politics, or even were active in nominated positions in the pre-independence legislatures of Travancore

and Kochi has to face tremendous odds. Anna Chandy, contesting in the 1931 elections in Travancore has to face a powerful smear campaign and abusive propaganda, even in the form of abuses written all over the walls in the road of Thiruvananthapuram. See Editorial, *Nazrani Deepika,* 16 Jun. 1931. Some of the preliminary fieldwork I have been doing about these women, who were impressively vocal in legislatures made me alive to the extent of the sexual slander perpetrated against these women ; in popular memory, they were 'society ladies' who enjoyed favour among bureaucrats and the Dewans, by virtue of the sexual services they rendered. But even those women who spoke in deviant voices that espoused the interests of 'women', were ridiculed and treated with distrust. Thus Kochattil Kalyanukutty Amma's advocacy of artificial birth-control came to be mercilessly ridiculed in the press in the 1930s. See, Devika 2002a.

15 See the way in which the well-known Malayalee humorist of the 1930s, 'Sanjayan' (pseudonym of M.R.Nair) contrasts Taravath Ammalu Amma, a senior female author well-known for her advocacy of a moral, domestic, non-confrontationist existence for women, and the 'speechifying' women of the 1930s, whom he found obnoxious. Sanjayan 1970 (1936).

16 See the article by a prominent freedom fighter from Malabar, E. Narayanikutty Amma titled 'Streekalum Khadarum', *Malayala Masika* 1(1) M.E 1105 Medam (April-May 1929-30):15-20.

17 In Keralam, the political claim that demands made on behalf of gender identities must remain secondary to the claims of community movements dates back to the 1920s. See, for instance the stance taken by the well-known progressive Ezhava reformer Sahodaran K. Ayyappan, in the debate around the Child Marriage Restrain Act of 1940 that affected the Tamil Brahmins most, in *Cochin Legislative Council Proceedings* Vol. IV, 1940, 1439.

18 See Velayudhan 1999; also see a very perceptive article written in the 1950s by Kumari Saraswati, 'Vanita Sanghatana', *Kaumudi Weekly* Vol.6 (10), May 9, 1955, 13-15.

19 Devika 2002.

20 See the statements of the KPCC President of Tiru-Kochi, Kumbalatu Sanku Pillai, in the *Nazrani Deepika*, 29 Oct. 1951; Nov. 19, 1951. He

was justifying the poor representation of women in the Congress candidates' list, claiming that the home was Woman's rightful place, and that Malayalee women who enjoyed high status within the family did not have to venture out.

21 See, Editorial, 'Streekalude Samoohyadautyam'(Women's Social Mission) *, Nazrani Deepika*, September 20,August 2, 1959.

22 ibid.

23 Examples are many: Parvati Ayyapan; Konniyoor Meenakshi Amma; Ambady Kartyayani Amma; Akkamma Cheriyan; Mukkappuzha Kartyayani Amma etc. Gandhi was often cited as an inspiration for this calling.

24 For an account of the Community Development Programme of the 1950s in Keralam, see Nanu 1960.

25 Jeffrey 2003, 150-211.

26 See Lindberg 2001.

27 Devika 2003.

28 Devika 2002a.

29 The struggle against the large-scale hydroelectric project proposed at Silent Valley in the early 1980s brought about a sharp polarization between two visions of development, when civil social opponents of the Nehruvian vision of economic development (which included many shades of opinion) won a major victory against political society.

30 Zacharia and Sooryamurthy 1994.

31 See Erwer 2003.

32 See Interview by Gita Hiranyan with prominent Malayalam author and feminist Sara Joseph, *Bhashaposhini* Annual Number, 2000, p.102.

33 Erwer 2003, 197-202. As a participant in such efforts, I do remember the extent to which they were driven by an instrumentalist concern to increase the number of women members in the KSSP, which was abysmally low. It was hoped that raising women's issues might attract more women to the movement.

34 Nayak and Dietrich 2002.

35 Arunima 2003

36   Devika and Kodoth 2001.

37   Tornquist and Tharakan 2000.

38   ibid.

39   And indeed, this has brought much credit to the Left in Keralam, and this has been used as evidence by the detractors of the claim that the solutions of the ills unleashed by the rolling back of the state with liberalization and the forces of globalization lie in the civil society. See for instance, Harris 2001. This is, however, not the place to assess the debate.

40   Shirin Rai (1999) points out that such a motivation could underlie the political parties' recent attention to women's representation in Indian politics. She says: "With the break up of the old system of one-party domination, there has also arisen the need for mobilization of new constituencies. Women have been identified by most parties as one of the important and neglected constituencies that need to be brought into the political mainstream. Patrick Heller (2000) credits the CPM with recognizing decentralization as a way of approaching interests and issues that appeal to post-class struggle constituencies. However his claim that the explicit recognition given to gender equity was non-instrumental appears facile, given the fact that the CPM, or at least its lower-level functionaries, have been at least equally hostile to gender justice, as anyone else. Nor does the KSSP have anything beyond a programme that seeks to extend the familial agency, already conceded to women in earlt 20th century social reformism, to the local community.

41   All reports more or less agree that there was effort by the top architects of the PPC to bring in a gender perspective in the guidelines, documents and training for the panchayats council members, and a more energetic effort made in the second round of planning, after it was observed in the evaluation of the first round of planning that low participation of women in the PPC was one of the three major weaknesses (Isaac 1998).

42   Vijayan and Sandhya 2004, 77.

43   For instance, Vijayan and Sandhya 2004, 76-77; Mukherjee and Seema 2000, 42-44; Radha and Roy Chowdhury 2002, 33-35.

44   Vijayan and Sandhya 2004, ; Mukherjee and Seema 2000, 30; Radha and Roy Chowdhury 2002, 28-31 ; Muralidharan 2003, 6 ; Sukumar

and Thomas 2003, 9-10 ; Chathukulam and John 2000. Reports also observe that the active women are tied very firmly to political parties— see, for instance, Jain 1998.

45   Muralidharan 2003, 6.

46   The difference of course is vital: the women in pre-independence legislative bodies were largely state-nominees, upper-caste new elite women, while the present day women representatives are democratically elected, and from diverse social groups.

47   Op cit. n. 14.

48   Op cit., n. 43.

49   For instance, see Mukherjee and Seema 2000, 31-34.

50   Radha and Roy Chowdhury 2002, 28.

51   Op cit. , n.42.

52   For instance, see the street play 'Subhadra Madhavanum Panchayati Rajum' (Subhadra Madhavan and the Panchayati Raj).

53   Muralidharan 2003, 3.

54   Vijayan and Sandhya 2004, 39

55   Devika 2002.

56   Vijayan and Sandhya 2004, 39-42.

57   Mukherjee and Seema 2000, 22 ; Vijayan and Sandhaya 2004, 39.

58   Vijayan and Sandhaya 2004, 47.

59   Naila Kabeer and R. Subrahmanian, 'Institutions, Relations and Outcomes: Framework and Tools for Gender-Aware Planning, IDS Discussion Paper No. 357, Institute for Development Studies, Brighton, 1996, p.24.

60   All the reports echo this concern.

61   Noteworthy exceptions have also occurred, for instance, in Ernakulam district were the groups that are part of the Kerala Streevedi, the feminist network in Keralam has been involved in setting up a women's multipurpose centre. Discussed in Erwer 2003, 160.

62   Devika and Kodoth 2001.

63   Erwer 2003, 169-174.

64   Muralidharan 2003, 5-6.

65   Mukherjee and Seema 2000, 34-35.

66   Muralidharan 2003, 5.

67   Muralidharan 2003, 6. Also see, Anand 2002 whose has studied the
      Community Development Scheme SHGs and NHGs in Malappuram
      district, and concludes that while some betterment of self-confidence
      are evident, concrete results are yet to come.

68   Devika, forthcoming (a).

69   This fear seemed rather confirmed at a Women's Day discussion on 'equal
      wages for equal work', aired by Doordarshan which I attended in Mar.
      2004. Among the participants were enthusiastic members of
      Kudumbashree SHGs, in whose speech and demeanour a fresh self-
      confidence was abundantly evident. However, in the discussion, it was
      cleared that the family-orientedness of the *Kudumabshree* was really
      being projected as its major merit, and one of the participants went to
      the extent of arguing that equal wages for women workers was really
      not an important issue; those women ought to quit work and join together
      in *Kudumbashree*, be with women, rather than continue in (socially/
      morally) unacceptable gender roles that required competing with men!
      What loomed frightening in this enthusiastic flourish was of course a
      renewed gendered segregation at work, one that may well be expected
      to reproduce all the existing inequalities.

70   Mukherjee and Seema 2000, 35.The handbook for women
      representatives, titled *Women's Empowerment and Women-Friendly
      Panchayats* , (Thampi, 2001), conceptualised the Jagrata Samitis as the
      lower-level unit of the State's Women's Commission (p.35).

71   Mukherjee and Seema 2000, 32; Radha and Roy Chowdhury 2002, 26.

72   Thampi, 2001, 34-36.

73   Radha and Roy Chowdhury 2002, 25-26.

74   Mukherjee and Seema 2000, 39-40.

75   ibid., 40.

76   Devika and Kodoth 2001.

77   Feminist reflections on the state agree more or less that the state is a site of power that one can bargain with, that need not be rejected fully, and may be conceived as one of the actors in a complex political field. See, Ray 1999; Phillips 1998; Randall 1998.

78   Eapen and Kodoth 2002.

79   Goetz, 2003. See also, Goetz and Jenkins, 1999.

80   Offe 1985.

81   Boggs 1986; Laclau and Mouffe 1985.

82   The Streevedi is now an all - Kerala network of 50 organizations , from medium-sized organizations to small groups. Personal Communication with Mercy Alexander, General Convenor, Streevedi. Its ideological influence however is undeniable, and sceptics have changed their tunes. Compare, for instance, the language used by the CPM politician Susheela Gopalan, in a speech made at an early conference organized by feminists in 1990 (report, *The Hindu*, Dec. 12, 1990), and another speech in 1998 (report, *Kerala Kaumudi*, Sept. 29, 1998). A similar shift is perceptible in the KSSP's language on women's issues. See KSSP Souvenir of the 39th Annual Conference focused on gender discrimination, *Vivechanattinte Bhinnamukhanagal* (The Many Faces of Discrimination) (2002). Aleyamma Vijayan, a prominent feminist, wrote an article on the 'Politics of the Body and Sexuality', a topic strictly no-no in the KSSP around a decade back.

83   Chathukulam and John 2002.

84   Evans 2003

85   Bauman 1995.

86   For an elaboration of this aspect, see Fraser 2000.

87   Muralidharan 2003, 4.

88   See, for instance, an early study on the CDS Programme in Keralam, Oommen, 1999, which was a survey of 1279 women members of the NHGs organized under the CDS scheme.

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