

Remembrance as Contest: A Study on the Ex-Slave Religious Communities in Kerala

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Abstract : Caste slavery was an exploitative human transactional system that prevailed in Kerala, the south-western state of India, till the late nineteenth century. In this particular system, more than ten untouchable/Dalit caste groups had been enslaved and transacted. Mainstream historiographies have subsumed caste slavery under caste servitude covering up the transactional aspect of the practice. However, there are communities in Kerala like Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (The Divine Church of Visible Salvation) and Deva Jana Samajam (The Society of God's People), who claim to be the descendants of the caste slaves. Being spiritual organizations, they engage with the historical reality of slavery through Dalit theology. Their theology is articulated through their oral narratives, including songs, stories, myths, and other cultural productions. This study seeks to understand how the descendants of slave castes in Kerala attempt alternative historiography through Dalit theology articulated in their cultural productions collected over fieldwork.

Keywords : caste slavery, Dalit theology, Dravidians, Deva Jana Samajam, Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha

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