

# Stories From the Margin: Theorizing and Historicizing Testimonial Writings in Regional Indian Literature

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**Abstract**—Testimonio is a new genre that emerged in the 1960s in Latin America and came to be used by liberation and social movements of women, black, Adivasis, and other oppressed people. As the oppressed reasserted themselves publicly, their voices became more audible, and they began to vigorously develop their strategies for effective communication. When the oppressed find the existing genre is not appropriate to express their feelings, they start to introduce new forms of literature; it is because of the existing genre's inadequacy of representing the oppressed in early literary forms like novels, short stories, essays, picaresque novels, lyrics, sonnets, autobiographies, and secular theatres. This paper is an attempt to engage with the ongoing debate of the testimonio literature in post-colonial Writings. Taking some works written in Indian Regional Literature, we pose the question that the marginalized and indigenous people start to reflect on their lives through literature and a new type of genre called 'Testimonio Literature' is slowly emerging from the margin. To extend the scope of the question, we take a few autobiographical anecdotes and narratives on such marginalized lives. We argue that marginalized lives have never been represented as they deserve, and their identity is always hidden in the wider genre of literature.

**Index Terms**—testimonio literature, biography of a runaway slave, Indian writing in English, post-colonial literature, marginalized literature

## I. INTRODUCTION

Social struggle creates new forms of literature (Beverley, 1996, p. 23). Testimonio is a new genre that emerged in the 1960s in Latin America and came to be used by liberation and social movements of women, black, and other oppressed people (Dinegri, 1998, p. 230). These movements empowered people who had been silenced before, and who henceforth would begin to express their will to take control of their lives. As the oppressed reasserted themselves publicly, their voices became more audible, and they began to vigorously develop their strategies for effective communication.

When the oppressed find the existing genre is not appropriate to express their feelings, they start to introduce new forms of literature; it is because of the existing genre's inadequacy of representing the oppressed in early literary forms like novels, short stories, essays, picaresque novels, lyrics, sonnets, autobiographies, and secular theaters. But after years of colonialism, the colonized people developed new forms of literature to represent themselves in their words. Testimonio and testimonial novels are among these new forms which developed an urge to think beyond accepted genres and represent the feelings of exploited people. In this sense, the testimonio is part of the literature of the oppressed that gives voice to people whose voices are not captured by conservative literary genres.

At the same time, the literature of the oppressed should also be treated as their testimonio. Testimonio is polyphonic<sup>1</sup> in nature. It is powerful because it weighs to bear society's words. Testimonio is not fictional, but it is real, it depicts real stories and events as faced by a narrator, a style through which the oppressed speak to society (Anand, 2004). In this sense, the testimonio is a new post-fictional form of literature with significant cultural and political repercussions (Beverley, 1996, p. 13). This is in sharp contrast to the novel which is seen as having a special relationship with humanism and the rise of the European bourgeois class. Novels usually presented some ideal European characters at the beginning. Thus, the testimonio is a new form of narrative literature in which we can at the same time witness and be a

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<sup>1</sup> Polyphonic, here, the word means the sound of the community in which the narrator belongs to (Beverley, 1996). *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*. Duke University Press, p. 32.

part of the emerging culture of an international proletarian/ popular/ democratic subject in its period of ascendancy (Gugelberger, 1996, p. 39).

## II. OBJECTIVES / RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper studies the literature of the marginalized such as Dalits and Adivasis through their self-narratives, autobiographies, and testimonials. The researchers have examined and read Dalit testimonials to understand what and how the narrators visualize their role in society, their relationship with other movements, and their suggestions for the progress of their corresponding castes. Three autobiographies and one Adivasi novel have been taken for the study.

## III. METHODOLOGY

In this study, we adopt the comparative methodology. The work focuses on different literary texts such as autobiographies, history texts, and novels are compared to analyze the literature of different writers. We see the difference between the Dalit identity formation through literature in north India and Kerala to examine the relevance of the idea of the Dalit identity and their literature.

## IV. SOURCES OF THE STUDY

Primary and secondary sources are used for the study. Primary sources such as autobiographies and texts written by the writers (1. Pokkudan, 2007, *Kandal Kadukalkkidayile Ente Jeevitham*, Kottayam: DC Books., 2. Madayi, 2008, *Nagna Jeevithangal (Naked Lives)*, Kottayam: DC Books., 3. Narayan, 2007, *Kocherathi*, Kottayam: DC Books.), and others form the basis of our study. In addition, Government documents such as the reports of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, National Crime Bureau Reports, various surveys, and census reports have also been used to explicate the socio-economic context of the study. Interviews with some subject experts and writers have also been done to get a better understanding of the subject. Secondary sources used in this analysis are books on the subject, newspaper cuttings, periodicals, and articles published in Malayalam periodicals. Analyses of various surveys and censuses were used in the study.

## V. DISCUSSION

### A. *The Testimonio as a Hybrid Genre*

Testimonio is a genre that came into existence in Latin America in the 1960s. It was used by movements of national liberation, and social movements of women, the Black, and others to express their collective voices and experiences (Arias, 2001, p. 766). The testimonio is a hybrid genre that incorporates several characteristics from other forms of accepted literature. *The Biography of a Runaway Slave* is the first of its kind in Latin America (Dinegri, 1998, p. 229). The definition of testimonio in the rules of the Casa de las Américas contest is as follows: "Testimonio must document some aspects of Latin American or Caribbean reality from a direct source. A direct source is understood as knowledge of the facts by the author or his or her compilation of narratives or evidence obtained from the individuals involved or qualified witness. In both cases reliable documentation, written or graphic, is indispensable. The form is at the author's discretion, but the literary quality is also indispensable" (Poduval, 2005).

Testimonio can be defined as a text which is told in the first person by a narrator who is also the central character or witness of the events s/he narrates. The unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience. Any testimonio, novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, novella-testimonial, non-fictional novel, or 'fractographic-literature' can be considered as a testimonio when it shows these characteristics. In India, Dalit, and woman's life- the narration is an integral part of this life-telling testimonio<sup>2</sup> as it helps them get themselves heard in society. This is significant because the testimonio is the voice of the oppressed and gives them authorized representation in an arena that has otherwise excluded them (Madayi, 2008). In this sense, the testimonio gives the oppressed a language of resistance and expands the boundaries of the accepted literary norms.

It must be borne in mind that the testimonio is an act of testifying or bearing witness to a particular event or the whole life of a person. The connotation is important because testimonio can be distinguished from simply recorded participant narrative as in the case of oral history. Here the narration of an author is supreme. In his/ her narration he/she will cover different problems faced by his/ her community like exploitation by others, poverty, hungry, the problem of repression, poverty, imprisonment, struggle for survival, and so on. So, the testimonio aims to communicate a particular society's affliction and hardship. Here the aesthetic or beauty of the work is avoided (Aston, 2002). The concern is to tell a story of their real-life which is mired with anguish and distress, and which represents an important experience of their community.

<sup>2</sup> Sharmila Rege has presented Marathi dalit women's self- narratives as testimonios. She suggests that dalit self-narratives 'violate the parameters set by bourgeois autobiography and create testimonios of caste-based oppression, anti- caste struggle and resistance. Rege (2006) *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Reading Dalit Women's Testimonies*, New Delhi: Zubaan.

The politics of representation is central to the importance of the testimonio since in the new genre oppressed constructed his own story, on his terms and with little mediation from the lettered (Nayar, 2006). In testimonio writing, two cultural groups are dealing with the genre one dominant cultural group is represented by university intelligentsia and other lettered classes, and the second group is the narrator who represents a section of the oppressed people (Dinegri, 1998, p. 231).

Thus, there is a distinct imbalance in the power structure of testimonio writing. The process of writing must come through two processes i.e., the narration of the story by an oppressed person or oppressed to a lettered person and the second step is editing of this narration by an editor. In the first stage, the informant and the narrator articulate their experience to the lettered person. In the second stage, the editor gets more space for a subjective interpretation. S/he can decide what the truth is and how it is to be represented. For instance, Nalini Jameela, a 'sex worker in Kerala rewrote her testimonio in its second edition. She is a less educated woman who told her story to a social activist, I. Gopinath. But when she realized that the text was written according to the editor's discretion she wrote:

He (the editor) could not professionally write it, because he wrote it in hurry to publish the book immediately.

Hence, I decided to rewrite the story again. A group of youth was ready to help me to draft the book using my style. Some ask me whether it is right to rewrite a published work. I do not know whether there is any law to prevent this. But I decided to be the first writer who rewrote her first testimonio (Jameela, 2011).

Jameela's case shows that though the testimonio is a fundamentally democratic and egalitarian narrative form (Anil Kumar, 2004) it too, follows the conventional method of subordinating the power of speech to the might of the written word. The transcriber decides what should be included and what should be excluded (Narayan, 2004). In the process, the text may become hagiographic<sup>3</sup> and romanticize the life of the oppressed.

Testimonio also has some epistemological problems such as the problem of representation. A testimonial narration involves both the political and ethical witnessing of an event (war, oppression, violence, etc.), its aesthetical or literary merits may be ignored. It may be better to see it as an instance of ideologically determined political assertion as in the case of the north Indian Dalit testimonio which is primarily used for asserting Dalit identity. Such an identity often glorifies the romanticizing Dalit background and feeling to represent collective pain (Beth, 2007, p. 550).

#### B. *Reading of the Marginalized Literature (Dalit and Adivasi) as Testimonio*

Through the brief description of the testimonio, we have tried to problematize how the marginalized, and the oppressed people are expressing their feelings. Keeping in mind these issues, three autobiographies and one autobiographical novel have been analyzed in this study. Novels, short stories, and other genres in Malayalam which portray Dalit life have been studied by many scholars. But an analysis of the literature on the oppressed has not attracted the attention it deserves. All testimonials, considered here were published after 1995 (Pampirikunnu, 2007, p. 95) and depict the lives of the authors and their communities.

#### C. *My Life Among Mangroves (Kandal Kadukalkkidayile Ente Jeevitham)*

The first testimonio is written by Kallen Pokkudan who told his story to Thaha Madayi who is a journalist and writer in Malayalam literature. He has published several interviews and testimonies of oppressed and marginalized people. This is a book based on a Dalit's experiences and worldview. Kallan Pokkudan is a Dalit who was working for the Communist party. Later he became a passive member of the party, because of his desperation for the younger generation of the party and his involvement in environmental activities. This book has two parts, in the first part he explains his experiences as a Dalit and in the rest, he narrates how and why he plants mangroves.

In his view, he expresses caste and caste discrimination are not permanent. He raises a firm stand against those who argue that caste is a permanent entity and should unite on caste identity. He got this notion because he moved along with the Communist party in his childhood. He formed a world view though he gave up his party in his later years. Pokkudan was born in 1937 to a Dalit family. He dropped his education when he was in second class. He became an active member of the communist party when he was 18. When the party split into two in 1964, he continued with CPI (M). He participated in and was in jail several times for his involvement in the farmer's struggle. Later he became a passive member of the party and gave full attention to planting and sustaining mangroves.

Lower caste people manage language not to entertain others, but they deal with language as a tool of expression. Their text is differentiated from the aesthetic sense of upper-caste people. To understand the language of the oppressed the reader needs to give up the stereotypical language of the mainstream which reflects only the lifestyles of the upper caste aestheticism.

Kallan Pokkudan's experience is not a uniform one. It mingled with some experiences as a part of the *pulaya* community and as a member of the communist party. His worldview and ideology reflect in his testimonio. Pokkudan challenges the accepted notions of the autobiographical style. According to our traditional concept of testimonio, an autobiographer should be a famous person who is active in the political or social, or religious arena. It should follow the aesthetic tradition of the *savarna* style romantically or emotionally and should not touch the realities of society. Here Pokkudan wrote against all these ideas. Each experience is the story of the society in which he lives. He became an example to encourage other oppressed people like old medical practitioners in the village, village artists, social activists,

<sup>3</sup> Hagiographic means a book about the life of a person that praises them too much. (Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary.)

chiefs of tribes, and women folk who suffer a lot from society, to draft their own stories. He said that this would enrich the literature. Pokkudan writes that if the marginalized people start it will change the whole accepted norms of the literature. The day-to-day life of ordinary people is more experienced than that of famous autobiography writers like political and religious leaders, journalists, etc. (Pokkudan, 2007, p. 26).

#### D. Bellu

The second testimonio is that of Bellu written by Venu Kallar. Bellu is the oldest person in the Koragar<sup>4</sup> community and is a story of men who used to eat the dead body of cattle and other animals. This community now resides only in the Kazaracode district of Kerala and in southern Karnataka. They have been considered an engendered community like the Orang in Andaman Nicobar (Kallar, 2009, pp. 10-11). In 1971, their number was 3460, but this has reduced to 1882 in 2008. Most of them died of TB in middle age and many of them are drug addicts and alcoholics. They believe that they are punished by their deities for not living properly and for not listening to their deities. If they go to the hospital, they believe, their deity *Kallurutti*, will get angry with them. To avoid her anger, they do not go to the hospital even if they are ill (Kallar, 2009, p. 11). The Koraga community was displaced into colonies from forests and because of this their social status has not improved. They depend upon mainstream society for their food and earnings. They even contested in local body elections on reserved seats. The government has spent crores on the development of this society. In this testimonio, he talks about Adivasis being exploited by *sudras*, *patters*,<sup>5</sup> and brahmin who inhumanly treat them. In short, *Bellu* is about the lifestyle of Adivasis in contemporary Kerala.

#### E. Kuppaswami, the Cobbler

Thirdly we have selected the story of Kuppaswami. He is a cobbler who belongs to the Chakliya caste. He hailed from Tamil Nadu and moved to Kerala. In his testimonio, he tells his life story. He sees caste discrimination in Tamil Nadu but in Kerala, he faces not much discrimination based on caste (Madayi, 2008, p. 16). His first strike was to protest the municipal chairman's decision to evacuate them from the town. He remembers comrade Krishnan who came into his life and though he does not know anything about the philosophy of the communist party he likes it.

#### F. Kocherathi

Lastly, we have chosen an Adivasi novel, *Kocherathi*, which has been written by Narayan. It shows the characteristics of a testimonial work rather than a novel. The author received the Kerala Sahitya Academy award for this work. After completing matriculation, he joined the postal department as a clerk. His sole aim is to change the stereotypical notions of Adivasi which are rooted in ordinary people's psyche (Narayan, 2007, p. 14). He does not say about the untouchability among Adivasi but talks about their exploitation by outsiders. He argues that education is the only way to progress. In *Kocherathi* Narayan portrays real events and his own experiences. For the same reason, we treat it as a testimonio rather than a novel. Through this process, we understand the varieties of voices of the oppressed people who must tell their life experiences to the entire world. They get access to the literature writing testimonies.

#### G. Entry of the Oppressed Into the Literary World

All the writers who are analyzed here welcome their entry into the literary world. They express their hope for this new entry, for instance, Bellu, the Adivasi narrator says, 'Everyone should know the truth, our children should know the truth, so nobody should suffer these bitter experiences again' (Kallar, 2009, p. 49). Similarly, Pokkudan says:

Unlike the usual autobiography writers, fishermen, farmers, and others have a unique experience that would be a valuable contribution to society if they write it. But none is ready to come forward because of social and cultural suppression. Their muddled, fishy smelled experience can surely be differentiated from the iron-pressed experiences of the autobiographers (Pokkudan, 2007, p. 26).

In the introduction of the novel, Narayan, author of *Kocherathi* says, 'the Adivasi-related stories have no relationship with the truth. Television channels and other media write non-factual things about Adivasi. My work is to show what an Adivasi is and what their life is (Narayan, 2007, p. 14). The new literary genre is welcomed by these oppressed groups. They express the concerns of their society through these writings. In this sense, they speak about the community to which they belong.

Pokkudan and Narayan start their narratives by criticizing the accepted genre of literature. Pokkudan does not know many letters in English and Malayalam, yet he started writing. He begins the testimonio in a jest but later his friends encouraged him to complete it. He asks in the beginning, 'does a Dalit have an autobiography? Has a Dalit been allowed a space in the literature of mainstream? He says that the oppressor's testimonio is worth more than other autobiographies of politicians, leaders, scientists, and high personalities because the oppressor's testimonio is about a particular society's day-to-day life. Like Pokkudan, Narayan at the beginning hesitated to write a novel. He stated that the circumstances compelled him to do so. The new genre gives oppressed people the possibility to express their inner sense to the entire world.

#### H. Hunger, Poverty, and Helplessness

<sup>4</sup> Koragar is a tribal community which is an endangering tribal community.

<sup>5</sup> A regional name of sub caste of upper caste Hindu.

What kinds of issues do they write about in these testimonies? Firstly, they write about their hunger, poverty, helplessness, and other miseries. Hunger and poverty are their key problems. Caste and all others are seen as secondary problems. In *Kandal Kadukalkkidayile Ente Jeevitham* Pokkudan writes of their hunger as:

Our food was very pathetic and insufficient. Our master would allow us a coconut for eight days, we would cut it into eight pieces and would eat it every day; *Pulayas* had no right to pluck the coconut from the tree near them. No *Pulaya* possessed coconut trees. Whenever our masters bestowed us permission, we would get coconut. The delicious food items, we have nowadays, like *biriyani*, and *ghee rise* were never tasted at that time. We used to catch fish. My mother would go fishing with other *pulaya* women, and they shared it in the evening (Pokkudan, 2007, pp. 28-30).

In Bellu, the chief of Adivasis marks their pathetic life as:

I ate dead cattle, leftovers, and food that were supplied for dead persons in funeral practices of higher castes. Higher castes, *pattars*, and Sudras practiced a ritual where they supplied food for the dead after three days after the death of their relatives. Rice, curry, soft coconuts, *malar*, *vellam*, and other items would be supplied for the corpse by the relatives. When they returned from the spot we would collect it, even though it was mixed with the tears of the bereaved and the ashes they put on the dead bodies. We collected this and supplied it to our children and women. We cannot suffer hunger. So, we eat dead cattle and leftovers. When cattle died, we were called "here dead cattle take it and go." They will never say how it died. And we will never ask. It may be bitten by a mad dog or poisoned, or it might have eaten poisoned grass and died, or it died because of diseases. But we suffer hungrily, so we care nothing. When we hear cattle are buried, we rush there and pull out it in the night and start to eat it (Kallar, 2009, p. 13).

In *Kuppuswami Enna Cheruppukuthi*, the narrator draws up the problems of hunger. Once they were banished from the town like cats when Nehru came there. They were offered food. When Kuppuswami and other beggars heard about the food, they got ready to go with them (Madayi, 2008, p. 18). This denotes the depth of the hungry and poverty.

The north Indian testimonio narrators give more importance to their caste identity than class issues (Dangle, 1992). Poverty is comparatively less focused in their works. For instance, while class-based issues certainly arise in their autobiographies, especially in which pain is commonly experienced as hunger, the narrative is driven forward and given meaning by issues of caste. The prominent autobiographical work, Om Prash Valmiki termed his testimonio as *Joothan*, (leftover scraps of food). The acceptance of the word, *leftover*, scraps of food, is interpreted in the context of his caste rather than class identity, i.e., as 'Dalits' rather than 'poor' (Narang, 2002). In these selected testimonies the narrators explain that they give importance to their hunger, poverty, and other factors.

Pokkudan and Bellu realize the real reason for the caste discrimination. They say that higher castes have no problem taking their money, but they hesitate to touch them. Bellu remembers that 'Brahmans never liked us. Even the wind which touches us is untouchable to them! But if we offer attributions to the temples and insert coins in the *bhandar*, they take the money, even though they never allow us to enter the temple (Kallar, 2009, p. 48). Here he understands the economic interest laying under the caste barriers.

### I. Lack of Education and Illiteracy

Lack of education, illiteracy, and historical backwardness is the prominent problems faced by them. All these authors strongly urge for an educated society. Getting an education is their prime motive. Some of the authors are either illiterate or less educated; they argue that education is the only way to go forward. Unlike north Indian autobiographers who secure their position in society by acquiring education and shifting from the village to the city, the (selected) oppressed writers in Kerala look towards their coming generation for bringing about progress. In *Kandal Kadukalkkidayile Ente Jeevitham*, Pokkudan describes his first school education and the changes it made to his life:

While I was a tenant of my master, the British government ordered compulsory education for all students. The government created a post whose job is to bring children to school. At my place, this person was C.H Choyi. I remember the picture of the person who carries children on both his shoulders. In school, the first lesson was to practice students how to brush their teeth, and later it became a routine of our life at home (Pokkudan, 2007, p. 32.).

.....After going to school, our dress habits started to change. Though our life was a suppressed one, we felt that we started to get human feelings (Pokkudan, 2007, p. 33).

In Bellu the chief talks about education, while he says:

Our men die due to disease. We never bring them to the hospital. We are afraid of them (caste Hindus), they may kill us. If we go there, the doctor will send us back to the forest and they will tell us 'You do serve your medicine.' Doctors are from their castes, *pattars*, *pulithora*, and *nairs*. They cannot touch us so how can they treat us? Our caste has no doctors, now and then. We do not have education for it. That time we were the tenants of *sudra*, the landed class *sudra* did not touch us, and we could not touch them, but we touched their cattle (Kallar, 2009, p. 52).

In *Kocherathi*, Narayan portrays a society that welcomes a teacher who comes to educate their children. After starting my studies, the routines changed. He describes Adivasis children's reaction to education as 'the students change their lifestyle, start to utter prayer morning and dusk, to cut their nail, hair, to take bath regularly' (Narayan, 2007, p.

120). In Kuppaswami he remembers comrade Krishnan as an ideal person. Kuppaswami describes that the 'Communist party saved my life; comrade Krishnan educated my sons' (Madayi, 2008, p. 16).

In short, all these above-mentioned writers look at education as their means of progress and prosperity.

### *J. Untouchability and Caste Discrimination*

For the north Indian and Tamil Nadu Dalit authors, writing testimonio is a way of hardening individual connection with the larger imagined Dalit community (Pokkudan, 2007, p. 34) and at the same time contributing to the political assertion by presenting 'facts' of one's life to contest casteism (Madayi, 2008, p. 22). In their autobiographies in north India, they constitute a socio-cultural record of the Dalit community. They give a detailed description of events in the political history of the Dalit movement. The writers in North India consider the dalithood, not a temporary one or a historically created one, but it is a permanent entity.

But the writings of the oppressed in Kerala say that untouchability, caste discrimination, and exploitation from higher castes are some main social evils they write about. Instead of glorifying or theorizing about casteism, they consider caste as a social evil and should be wiped out from there. All realize the economic interest of the upper castes. In the foreword of *Kandal Kadukalkidayile Ente Jeevitham*, the editor, Thaha Madayi asserts that:

Pokkudan keeps a hateful past in his mind as an unhealed wound, but when he writes about this, he never becomes talkative or becomes an agent of casteism as some Dalit activists do. Pokkudan argues that the progressive change in society is overturned by some caste organizations (Pokkudan, 2007, p. 111).

Pokkudan sees that the hateful past should be forgotten. Here he does not like to project the caste identity as a permanent entity. This is the main difference between Pokkudan and North Indian autography writers. He remembers:

Pulaya were considered untouchables, so the higher caste people kept their distance from us. They used to spit on our faces. Insulting and harassing were their common practices. For instance, our headmaster would take bath while he was returning home from school to purify himself from untouchability. Was this the mentality of an educated headmaster, the widespread practice was so insufferable to us (Pokkudan, 2007, p. 34).

He says untouchability is less practiced by higher castes now. He hates to remember his past when they were treated as slaves and untouchables. In *Bellu*, the narrator remembers that his community is considered untouchable. His land is in on the boundary of Kerala and Karnataka; the reformation movements have come there rarely. So, the same practice is going on nowadays. He recollects:

Barbars (hairdressers) are not cutting our hair. They keep their distance from us saying we are dirty and unclean. So, we cut hair using our working sickles. All castes such as *tiyya*, *pulaya*, *mugar*, and others practice untouchability. Muslims do not practice it. We do not like to be born into this caste, but we wish we were born into the higher caste. 'Nobody will give us rise soup in plate, but in a coconut shell, or areca nut leaf plate. We need to make a dig in there and put it in the dig' (Kallar, 2009, p. 48).

Kuppaswami also faces untouchability in Tamil Nadu. So, he left there and came to Kerala. He says, 'In Tamil Nadu, I was considered as an untouchable, but when I came to Kerala, I became free from untouchability' (Madayi, 2008, p. 17). In *Kocherathi*, the author does not mention the problem of untouchability, because untouchability is not a customary practice in tribal communities in Kerala.

Here the author recalls untouchability but does not glorify it nor consider it a permanent entity (Pokkudan, 2007, p. 111). Brahmins and *nairs* are common in all cases, but in *Bellu*, it is sudra who practice untouchability to the Koraga community. Even they never call them to their wedding. Bellu considers these higher castes as Hindus. His words, 'the Hindus like *pattars*, *sudras* and *nairs* will never allow us to come to their weddings' (Kallar, 2009, p. 51). He asserts that he is being exploited by other 'polluted' caste which is widely known as polluted caste in India. But here the same caste exploits Koraga and practices untouchability. Bellu writes about inter and intra-caste discrimination in his society. At a certain point, he becomes proud to impose untouchability on his fellow community. He says:

We have several divisions among us. *Chappu koraga*, *kaattu koraga*, *kattige koraga*. *Chappu koraga* wears only leaves on their waist. *Kandige korage* hailed from Kandige. Their assigned labor is different, they are unclean. Though their assigned work is bamboo collection and weaving, they are considered a lower caste than us. We never add them to our community (Kallar, 2009, p. 52).

These words show the importance of an alternative way to lead them to improve their living conditions. Caste should not be a solution to unite them. As we see in this analysis, the complex caste system will ruin them once again if they raise a slogan to uphold their caste identity and the 'higher castes' among lower castes will get all benefits of this caste unity.

What solution did these writers put forward to overcome caste discrimination? Bellu wishes to be a member of a higher caste rather than a lower caste. He says,

'We don't like to be born in this caste, but we wish we were born in the higher caste' (Kallar, 2009, p. 52).

When he realizes it is not possible, he seeks education to overcome the discrimination, due to untouchability. When upper caste doctors are not ready to treat them, Bellu says that they need doctors in their community. He notes that 'Our caste has no doctors, now and then. We do not have the education for it' (Kallar, 2009, p. 14). Pokkudan sees economic interest in caste discrimination and if the gap between the two is removed, the suffering may be stopped (Pokkudan, 2007, p. 46).

### K. Protest Caste Discrimination

Bellu and Pokkudan remember resistance against caste discrimination. Pokkudan participated in a strike for temple entry but also asks whether the untouchability will be eradicated if they get entrance into temples. He does not believe in the temple, but he participated in a protest after independence when he understood that it was a matter of all humanity. The strike was defeated. But it gave them courage and free thought. He explains it as:

This was my doubt since my childhood, even if the doors of temples open before the pulaya will it stop untouchability? I do not visit the temple. After independence, Harijan Welfare (an organization formed in Kerala to protest uneven practice against the then harijans) led a march to the nearest temple, I participated in it, and three teachers, all belonged to pulaya were in front of the rally. Next year we refused the seed which was used to supply outside of the temple courtyard, and we demanded to enter the temple. The upper castes denied us to enter, but the pulaya dared to go forward. Caste Hindus attacked pulaya, injured several, lost their teeth, and some escaped dressing as women. Pulaya leaders lodged a charge; police wrote in their F.I.R that pulaya trespassed the temple so the problem occurred. If pulaya were not coming inside the temple nothing would happen. They went without any arrest' (Pokkudan, 2007, p. 52).

Bellu's agitation was not a direct one, but along with a Swami, who occasionally used to visit him. Bellu mentions a Swami. He does not know what his name is. But from his dress, he calls him a Swami. Once he was having tea in a coconut shell instead of a glass. Police came and arrested the tea shopper. He explains this incident:

A Swami regularly visited us; he discouraged them to have tea in a coconut shell. Once we were having tea police suddenly appeared and arrested the tea shopkeeper, Madivala. Then they stopped giving tea in the shell. But later they killed the Swami (Kallar, 2009, p. 49).

The younger generation starts to complain about those who call *koraga* to eat the carcass of animals. It tells us that the younger generation of *koraga* becomes aware of the inhuman practice of others. Bellu is, in fact, angry with his younger generation who are not ready to eat the dead cattle. It shows the gap between older and younger generations. The third narrator, Kuppuswami, escaped from Tamil Nadu, the place where untouchability is practiced, and reached Kerala, a safer place where untouchability does not practice. So, the pilgrimage from a place, in a sense, can be seen as his protest<sup>6</sup>. All these writers urge people to escape the caste barrier. So, they look at a society where caste is not an important one. Pokkudan remembers they get the right to name their children after many years of struggles (Pokkudan, 2007, p. 44).

### L. Government and Administrative System

What is their approach to the government system that is meant to lead them to progress? They strongly criticize the bureaucracy and police intervention. In each case, they remember the police harassment. According to them, police behave badly with them. Police are like a part of the ruling class. In *Kocherathi*, most of the story gives an account of administrative exploitation and harassment. For example, Narayan portrays a story of harassment as:

Once, Pareeth, a local trader cheats Kochumunda, when he goes to complain to the police about his son, the police treat him as a culprit. A police officer addresses them as

'Who are you? In which case you were brought here?'

Police start to treat them. Nobody understands them.

'Dear Sir, don't beat my child?'

'No, I will tear his legs, where did you get pocketful money? You, fraud dogs! S.I. will come here soon; you must say the truth when you get four kicks at your throat with his boated legs. Sit there.' Hearing this they run from the police station (Narayan, 2007, p. 89).

Pokkudan explains police harassment along with his temple-entry agitation. Police here behave partially. When violence erupted in the rally, police lodged F.I.R as, 'as pulaya trespassed the temple so the problem occurred. If pulaya were not coming inside the temple nothing would happen. They went without arresting anybody' (Pokkudan, 2007, p. 52).

In Kuppuswami, he starts his story by remembering police harassment. He says Police harass me whenever they see me. Even at night, they harass me' (Madayi, 2008, p. 17).

Government interventions, according to them, are not working properly. Bellu says that the forest office is far from the forest. So, they cannot avail of its service. If they go there to apply for any assistance, most of the time the employees are absent. This means they must go repeatedly. So, they drop their idea to come to get the government's assistance (Kallar, 2009, p. 51). They identify the government systems' dysfunction as one of the reasons for lagging in progress.

### M. Conversion and Its Politics

Conversion to Christianity and Islam is another narrated theme in these testimonios. Though all write about the benefit of conversion, their approach to the conversion is different. Pokkudan has an ambivalent stand on conversion. He asks:

<sup>6</sup> He escaped from Tamil Nadu to Kerala, the real motive was the inhuman practice of untouchability done by the native. In this sense his travel from Tamil Nadu to Kerala was a silent protest untouchability.

When *Chirakkal Pulaya Mission* was formed in our place Christianity began to spread among Pulaya. They enjoyed the fresh breath and sweets of freedom that they were denied for centuries. I did not convert because man's problem was not so simple that it will never end if the yoke of one religion is replaced by other. I do not like to catch my fish at other expenses. I teach this lesson to my children (Pokkudan, 2007, p. 46).

Here he explains the reason for and the benefit of conversion. They go from a more exploited religion to another less exploited one. But he writes that difference between 'haves' and 'have nots' continue. So, the concern should be to eradicate the difference between the two (Pokkudan, 2007, p. 47). Bellu only knows, 'Conversion brings us education, good food, clothes....' (Kallar, 2009, p. 50). In *Kocherathi*, the opinion against conversion is said a bit strongly. According to Asan, the teacher appointed to teach them:

God is one for everyone. Krishnan, Muhammed, Christu- different names he has. Men made religion and caste, this is only a belief that those who do virtues go to heaven and rest in hell, heaven is not a reserved place for Christians, we should do good deeds and help others, which is all enough' (Narayan, 2007, p. 124).

## VI. CONCLUSION

The testimonies are not a substitute for history, but a work occupying a separate distinct from the latter in terms of its foregrounding of hitherto silenced voices and of establishing a collective identity and consciousness. Testimonial literature plays out a unique generic role not by substantiating factual truth claims, as does the court testimonio (Arias, 2001, p. 766) for example, but about the insists it yields into how events are experienced by a collective and how the reception of events in truth turn mobilizes future possibilities. In many testimonies, the narrator is illiterate or not a professional writer. Narrators speak their life stories to a translator who is most cases a researcher or a university intelligentsia. S/he collects it on tape or in a notebook. The interpreter edits the oral account and publishes it. Because of this, the testimonio has been subjected to scrutiny on issues of authenticity and truth. The relationship between the testifier and the transcriber and the role of memory, orality, and writing have also been of concern to many scholars. At a different level question has been raised about the cooption of the 'subaltern' into the mainstream (Dinegri, 1998, p. 234).

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