

Dissecting 'Modern' Syrian Christianity

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Sonja Thomas and Kochurani Abraham, in their separate works, present engaging and intersectional readings of Syrian Christianity. With five key chapters and a thought-provoking conclusion, Thomas complicates the ideas of minority, minority rights, communalism, caste, gender, and race in South Asia. Similarly, Abraham, in her five chapters and conclusion, opens up new possibilities of analysing gender within an upper-caste social milieu shaped by contradictions.

Before getting into the specific details of their respective works, let me emphasise the broad similarities: (i) the books are feminist "insider" interventions that cut open the smooth stories of Syrian Christian modernity. However, their "insider" status is not deep-rooted. Neither of them accurately fit the "dominant paradigm" of womanhood (as mentioned by Thomas in Chapter 6) in the community—Thomas a divorcee and Kochurani a feminist theologian. Thus, they operate in the borderlands of identity, a liminal space—one step in, the other step out; (ii) both describe the Syrian Christian woman as a "paradoxical subject"—representing the best of developmental indicators and yet conditioned by (what I prefer to call) oppressor consciousness—a term borrowed from Paulo Freire (2005: 58). This paradox is not perceived as something limited to Syrian Christians; rather they built a web of critical arguments, which implicate Kerala's journey from a backward past to a secular present; (iii) both of them dismantle Kerala's religious exceptionalism (as against a communal North India), albeit using different routes.

While Thomas explores the historical communalisation of private education and debates surrounding dowry, inheritance, and inter-faith/inter-caste marriages in Kerala (Chapters 4 and 5), Abraham centres the Syrian Christian family/household to address the questions of gendered

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Privileged Minorities: Syrian Christianity, Gender, and Minority Rights in Postcolonial India by Sonja Thomas, Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2018; pp 210, ₹995.

Persisting Patriarchy: Intersectionalities, Negotiations, Subversions by Kochurani Abraham, Switzerland AG: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019; pp 201, €84.99.

consciousness, religious indoctrination, domestic violence, inheritance, dowry, and sexuality (Chapters 4, 5, and 6); (iv) their scholarships present an eclectic, interdisciplinary mix of South Asian feminisms, critical race theory, postcolonial studies, critical pedagogy, and the sociology of caste along with religion. They stand alongside existing sociological interventions on Syrian Christianity by Susan Visvanathan (1993), Amali Philips (2003, 2004) and Prema Kurien (2002), among others. J Devika's multifaceted theorisation on Malayalee identity and gender are amplified in both the works. Additionally, we see Thomas engage with scholarship on race and communalism in South Asia. Abraham borrows from Freire, Antonio Gramsci, and Henri Lefebvre to make sense of consciousness, hegemony, and space; (v) Uma Chakravarti's (1993) conceptualisation of Brahminical patriarchy is a mainstay in both the books.

Thomas and Abraham, in varying measures, present the possibility of expanding the concept beyond Hinduism. In doing so, Thomas (and to a limited extent Abraham) questions the methodological Hinduism implicit in the study of caste-gender oppression. In fact, Thomas argues that a thorough description of Syrian Christianity can lead one to conclude that "caste is best elaborated in Christianity" (p 10). They affirm that caste can stand outside the trans-historic category of Hinduism and it can be equally Christian. Nevertheless, both agree that Syrian Christians forge bonds with upper-caste Hindus in their everyday

discourse. This display of fraternity, so to speak, operates along the lines of gendered respectability, racialised caste stereotypes, and elite class interests. Finally, both the authors pose concrete challenges to parish sociologists of Syrian Christianity by rejecting the mystique of Syrian Christian-ness. They unlock the Syrian Christian world for useful comparisons within India and outside. For instance, these books can serve as good starting points to compare Syrian Christians to the Bhumihars of Bihar or Baidyas of West Bengal—beyond the fixities of organised religion. I argue that Abraham presents an "inside-out" perspective, while Thomas an "outside-in" one—both equally valid and illuminating.

Contextualising Gender in Syrian Christianity

Now let me turn my attention to certain specific features and arguments of their respective works. Abraham, a long-time researcher, activist, and feminist theologian, explores the "opposing pulls" of patriarchy and development in her book. The gendered developmental paradox of Kerala is the author's starting point. She places this paradox within a global and national context. Abraham contrasts the high achievements of women in education and health against their exceptionally high rates of unemployment in Kerala. She examines the "cultural foundations" that define women's identity and regulate the pattern of their growth processes. Abraham foregrounds the caste consciousness of the Syrian Catholic community to build an intersectional analysis of gender contradictions in Kerala. Throughout the book, Abraham attempts to engage with the concepts of "power," "space," and "consciousness" in the domestic lives of Syrian Catholic women using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. It can be argued that Abraham's book is an interesting illustration of how

operational linkages between religious indoctrination, gendered consciousness, economic agency, and decision-making can be established and problematised (Chapters 4 and 5). The author is deeply committed to the transformative power of feminist research. She aims to dismantle the asymmetries of knowledge that conceptualise women as passive objects as opposed to knowing subjects. Women's ways of remembering are methodologically central to this project. With the help of Syrian Catholic women's narratives—one of the best pupils of Kerala's developmentalism—the author demystifies the Kerala story. Abraham outlines the everyday discontents, violence, apprehensions, and contradictions of Syrian Catholic women to argue that “negotiating patriarchy” becomes their “politics” of survival.

Gender Issue

In Chapter 2, Abraham spatially inscribes Syrian Christians in Kerala's context. It provides an overview of how gender is constructed through caste–class interactions in Syrian Christianity. Abraham attempts to understand the “Kerala model” and its paradoxes within such a gender construction. Chapter 3 recovers the term patriarchy from postmodern interrogations and explains it as a useful descriptor of interlocking oppression. The chapter also becomes the launching pad for the substantive portions of the book that probe the paradoxical position of Catholic Syrian Christian women, their consciousness “in relation to self and in relation to their community” (p 81) and their experience of power. In this book, Abraham quantifies the answers of 240 female respondents on an array of questions pertaining to economic agency, dowry, inheritance, body, and sexuality. She also conducts 52 in-depth interviews (of men and women) and eight focus group discussions with women across occupational groups (p 85). Chapters 4, 5, and 6 analyse this data.

Chapter 4 examines gendered perspectives of consciousness, power equations, spatial demarcations, body and sexuality, experience of violence, and the political economy of the household. It argues that the kinship ideology often presents women

with a “moral dilemma” between gender equality and family honour. Abraham observes that even after the Mary Roy judgment (*Mary Roy etc v State of Kerala and Ors*; 1986 AIR 1011), which granted women equal inheritance, most research participants did not want to fight for any property rights. Women actively associated land with family name and the male bloodline. This, according to Abraham, convinced them to “sacrifice” their rights over land. Though not expanded further, it should be noted that the family's name and associated symbols do provide women both symbolic and material benefits, if not in the form of land. Discussing the intricacies of dowry among Syrian Christians, the author brings out the critical link between dowry and the church. Dowry is a significant source of church—bigger the size of the dowry, richer is the church. Thomas also refers to the dowry discussions in Kerala's Legislative Assembly to point out how Syrian Christian members argued that dowry as an institution has ensured the economic prosperity and cohesion of the community (p 104). Abraham, with examples, emphasises the “interplay of silence, collaboration and resistance” to unravel the complex negotiation of Syrian Christian women with patriarchy (p 117). She links cultural notions associated with women's capacity to suffer and the “normalisation of violence” in everyday lives. She argues that education does have a bearing on gendered consciousness, yet education does not guarantee economic agency or decision-making within the households.

Politics of Survival and Subversion

Chapter 5 in *Persisting Patriarchy: Intersectionalities, Negotiations, Subversions* builds insightful connections between religion and gender. Abraham frames religion as constraining but at the same time fulfilling certain human functions for women. For example, religion becomes a valid reason to meet one's friends or travel long distances. However, religion has “succeeded” in sustaining gender ideology and idealisation of femininity, according to the author. Religion operates as an effective “meaning-making system” for housewives more than other women.

It has made female suffering and male supremacy (or supremacy of their own men) natural for the respondents. Abraham investigates the Syrian Christian marriage and its religious meanings to make better sense of how religion constructs gender. She concludes that religion is central to Syrian women and schools them to accept their fate and suffer in silence. She establishes the insidious relation between patriarchy, violence, and Christianity.

With the help of interview excerpts, Chapter 6 gives us details of varying modes of “negotiating patriarchy.” Abraham divides them into the following types of bargains—simulative, tactical, and agentic. She notes that simulative and tactical varieties negotiate without disturbing the apparent “comfort” and “security” of patriarchy. On the other hand, agentic bargains can be a double-edged sword, exposing women to new vulnerabilities. The author complicates her take on religion further by underlining how women sometimes “subvert established orders” through their faith and critique of “clericalized and ritualistic church” (p 189). She also provides nuanced accounts of sexual agency that challenge male hegemony within households. The chapter ends with a section on prominent Syrian Christian women (like Anna Chandy, Mary Thomas, Mary Roy, etc) who posed direct challenge to the community's patriarchal order. While it was interesting to read this section, it left me pondering whether non-Syrian Christians (for example, say K R Gouriamma who was married to a Syrian Christian Communist) could also serve as equally relevant examples of resistance or would they stand outside the pale of comparability?

In the final chapter, Abraham turns this “politics of survival” upside down and proposes a “politics of subversion.” In other words, she asserts that negotiation with power structures will not take women a long way. She underlines that patriarchal structures not only obstruct women but also distort their sense of self (p 203). She calls for “counter-narratives” and “counter spaces” that can denaturalise gender. She argues for the need to go beyond the “agentic ways of bargaining patriarchy” to bring about structural transformations (p 204). Abraham

foregrounds the role of religion in shaping the experience of patriarchy. This brings her to the conclusion that Syrian Catholic women are “prisoners of patriarchy” and not fully autonomous (p 204). Kochurani Abraham convincingly ties together the questions of sexuality, caste, religion, and gender to make sense of the Catholic Syrian Christian women.

She argues for a change in the social order and wants women to “problematise” the existing frameworks of emancipation. She argues that “gender equality” will change the “premises for social, economic, and political life and lead to the creation of a new world order” that places people at the heart of the development process. Thus, she does not prescribe any individual or communitarian solution to the problems of Syrian Christian women; rather she aims to connect their realities to larger structures (p 208). Lending language to one’s gendered experiences through “critical revisiting” (p 18)—a process actively pursued in the book—can encourage women to act against their oppressions, according to Abraham. She observes that when women express dissatisfaction with their gender roles they unsettle domestic orders. These subversions, she argues, invariably challenge the prevailing order. Highlighting the example of “Muslim Women’s Jamaat” in Tamil Nadu, Abraham observes that women with feminist sensibilities are now “reclaiming the Spirit” by rereading scriptures (p 213). Drawing inspiration from the Frierian idea of “conscientisation,” Abraham argues for a process of education that would help women grasp their realities more critically and thus encourage subversion.

Body-Fashioning and Caste–Race Complex

Thomas, an American scholar of women’s studies and South Asia, presents a fascinating reading of “Christianity,” “minority,” and “women” with an aim to disquiet the stubborn definitions and assumptions. She problematises the reification of religion that homogenises Indian Christianity and makes “privileged minorities” like Syrian Christians even more powerful. She argues that Syrian Christians “complicate the normative

images of Christian subalternity” (p 5). With historical examples, Thomas argues that the idea of “Christian culture” is shaped by caste. Further, she points out that the production of such cultures “engender and consolidate” the Brahminical power beyond Hinduism. In Chapter 1, Thomas provides a historical snapshot of Syrian Christianity within the sociocultural milieu of Kerala (much like Abraham). She begins with an account of how myths, legends, and representations of Brahminism shape Kerala’s past and present. She elaborates on the contentious origin myths of Syrian Christianity to highlight that she is not concerned with its historical accuracy; rather what interests her is the everyday reproduction and legitimation of the myth. To use Bourdieu’s (1996) term, Thomas approaches the St Thomas myth as a “realised category.” Like Abraham, Thomas also contextualises her inquiries into the “gender paradox” of Kerala’s developmentalism.

Chapter 2 is an engaging sociohistorical take on the transformation of Syrian Christian women’s clothing in Kerala. Thomas argues that the move from “communal” to “secular” clothing (*chatta/thuni* to sari and *churidar*) tells us a story of reworked power and resistance (p 51). She writes that the gendered clothing embodies notions of inclusion, exclusion, public surveillance, and morality. The chapter uses captivating photographs from Syrian Christian family collections and interview excerpts. While a direct linkage is drawn between the “whiteness” of Syrian Christian communal attire and that of the Brahmin or other upper castes, it would have been equally relevant to mark out the difference between them at the site of labour. It cannot be denied that a majority of Syrian Christians (including women) were directly or indirectly involved in peasantry—unlike Brahmins—in Kerala’s immediate past. Thus, the communal clothing had everyday dimensions of labour which did not have much to do with the upper-caste Hindu precepts. Thomas complicates the Breast Cloth Movement to underline how the fight against exclusion also reworked caste within Christianity, pushing upper- and

lower-caste Christians further away from each other. She traces the shift from communal *chatta* to secular sari in the mid-20th century, coinciding with Indian independence, through in-depth interviews. Drawing from Nivedita Menon, Thomas argues that the “sari” created the “unmarked citizen” who pleased the majoritarian secularism (p 55). The sari-clad upper-caste woman is placed against working-class women in Kerala’s public life. This opposition informs the notions of worth and trails of surveillance.

In Chapter 3, Thomas dives deep into the racial nature of oppression in Kerala and South Asia. She uses race “not as an identifiable social category” but as an assemblage that unpacks interlocking structures of class, caste, religion, and gender. She does not attempt any definition of race; in fact, she argues that any attempt to define race moves our attention from the “effects of racialised oppression on bodies” in South Asia. In other words, Thomas approaches race as a verb and not a noun. In Chapter 3, she works her way through the racial designations of “Aryan” and “Dravidian” with the Syrian Christian example. Syrian Christians (and others) use these racial designations in their discourse as a combined proxy for specific “phenotypical differences, religion, and caste” (p 67). Its intersectional avatar, so to speak, Thomas argues is “yet another element of Brahminical patriarchal power.” Colour-codes in Kerala’s society also follow a scheme. For example, Syrian Christians may claim that they are as fair as Brahmins and not Arabs. The “fairness” is crucial only when it stands for a pre-existing value. Colour becomes a convenient form of political incorrectness which hides more than it reveals.

Mobilising as a ‘Minority’

In Chapter 4, the author challenges “nationally” fixed notions of the minority to argue how the ambiguity of the term has led to the ascendancy of dominant minorities under the ambit of minority rights (p 91). To explain her point, she presents a feminist analysis of the *Vimochana Samaram*, which brought down the first democratically elected Communist Government of India. Thomas notes

that Christian women participated in large numbers in the movement. Their gender roles (as mothers) and expectations shaped the contours of the mobilisation and even made it popular. Using the concept of the “embourgeoisified womanhood,” Thomas tries to understand how certain women play a crucial role in building consent for patriarchy (p 92).

She conceptualises the communal history of education in Kerala from the Syrian Christian prism and demonstrates how religious authority and social elites can dictate the class interest of the community as a whole. The immediate context of the Vimochana Samaram was the Kerala Education Bill, which proposed moderate mechanisms to standardise and regulate the education in Kerala. However, Syrian Christians, who controlled (and still control) the majority of private educational institutions, mobilised their economic and political might against the legislation in the name of “minority rights.” Thomas analyses this mobilisation to argue how minority rights can be used as a weapon to “mask upper-caste and masculine power inherent in dominant minority culture” (p 99). Similar mobilisations tried to obstruct the passage of Dowry Prohibition Act in Kerala. Thomas observes that the rhetoric of Syrian Christian exceptionalism as a minority is consolidated in terms of unique, culturally-shaped gender relations. Thus, dowry (like non-interference in Christian educational institutions) was conceptualised as essential to Syrian Christianity. The hypervisibility of the Syrian Christians ensured the invisibility of other Christians and minorities.

Chapter 5 reiterates the key arguments of the previous chapter and also moves beyond it. Presenting a critical analysis of what has come to be known as the second Vimochana Samaram—the textbook controversy of 2008 (over a moral education lesson titled “A Life without Religion”)—Thomas examines how a unifying definition of morality and order brings different castes and religions against the best of secular intentions. She takes us through the tussle between communal and secular narratives in Indian textbooks, especially the history textbooks, to provide a context

to the controversy. Syrian Christian historiography is a collection of convenient forms of errors that cushion the identity claims. Thomas points out that the second Vimochana Samaram politicised old social histories, to outdo secular narratives. She highlighted that the heart of the controversy was not the non-religious message of the lesson; rather the sharp opposition to mixed marriage. Syrian Christian morality is deeply informed by endogamous marriages; any public or private move against this morality attracts the ire of the church and its faithful. Syrian Christians, especially the Syro-Malabar church, increasingly views its own women as a “dangerous class” capable of dislodging its relevance with “mixed marriages.”

Post-secular Feminism

Thomas in her conclusion presents a critique of secular feminist frameworks that fail to comprehend the possibilities of piety for women’s emancipation. She underlines how Charismatic Christianity becomes an outlet for Syrian Catholic women—often unavailable in the dogma of the mainstream church. She borrows from Saba Mehmood’s work to make a case for such spaces, hitherto relegated to the margins of feminist analysis. Nevertheless, the author is mindful of the caste distinctions and gender discourse that colour new religiosity. So, what exactly do women achieve in this affective realm? This question, perhaps, cannot be answered satisfactorily as it involves the tacit assumptions and socialisation of individuals. Thomas is deeply aware of the “impossibilities” of solidarity even in the realm of faith yet remains immensely hopeful.

Reading the conclusion, I wondered whether these attempts to understand the “religious” would be possible without methodological secularism; Is it not a modern secular polity that makes such an academic response possible? Would those attending charismatic movements tolerate the atheism and irreligiosity of individuals in their own kin networks? What about those who are simply forced to attend these spaces, against their will? One does find examples of women (and other genders) being coerced to attend

charismatic movements to straighten up their non-normativity. In such instances, how do we evaluate liberation? Moreover, new religiosity combines social conservatism with neo-liberal individualism in various concoctions. It also becomes a major source of disinformation (which is true for old or new forms of religiosity), exploitation, and a site of middle-class consumption.

Cuts, Pieces, and Tools

Reading Thomas and Abraham, one realises how the church can behave like a feudal lord and a capitalist, enlisting the support of its women members for maintaining status quo or cementing economic dominance—all in the name of religious morality and gendered rituals. However, it is difficult to think of Syrian Christian women only as gullible objects acted upon by their men and church, a point highlighted by both the authors. One realises that Syrian Christian women do not problematise the hierarchies within families, households, and communities “as necessarily against them” (emphasis mine). This is not to say that women are not vocal about how gender shapes their domesticity, a point we gathered from Abraham’s detailed exploration of domestic violence in Syrian Christian households, and its historical role in shaping the community itself. Yet, the contradictions evident to the authors do not exist as “contradictions” in women’s articulations.

Secular modernity is mostly characterised in Thomas as a consequence of upper-caste rearrangement of their lives, which then extends to the rest of the society. While this may be partially true, it ought to be emphasised that upper-caste rearrangement and reform were not shaped by internal factors alone. The constant, creative assertions and movements

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by labouring castes/classes paved the way for many public (and private) compromises on the part of the ruling elite. What we understand as secular modernity is, then, not simply a product of upper-caste actors, rather it is the highly asymmetrical yet historic tension between classes that shaped secular modernity and its many symbols and consequences. Consider the relentless fights of lower castes, especially Dalits, to ensure public morality, civic sense, freedom, redistribution, and recognition using legal or extralegal instruments. These fights have forced the oppressor castes to behave and sometimes usher in public amends. This is not to deny the incomplete and gendered nature of such tensions or amends. Nor is it my intention to downplay the more insidious forms of discrimination, which are clearly evidenced in the colour discourses in modern Kerala as shown by Thomas (Chapter 3). Rather, my aim is to underline lower castes as historical actors who shaped public spaces of interaction.

As Rekha Raj (2016) observes, "human" can be recovered as a product of Dalit struggles in Kerala. The urgent need to change and become a "new human" can be conceptualised as Dalit reminder. Thus, when a Syrian Christian woman explains sari as secular and as an attire that does not distinguish, we need to recognise the historical forces which socialised this change in her, even when we fully appreciate how the sari is used to reconstitute class and caste divides (p 55).

The question of inheritance and dowry in Syrian Christianity were analysed in detail by the authors. They have convincingly highlighted how Syrian Christian women's fight for equal inheritance has brought out the gender disparities, which shape the caste and its claims as a religious minority. However, in Abraham's book the question of land often gets managed as a lack of gender equity within families and households. Several scholars have linked Syrian Christian landownership with Dalit-Adivasi land alienation and dispossession (see, Pramod 2020; Kunhaman 1985, 2011 for example). When we move beyond bloodlines and marital alliances, inherited resources can be conceptualised as appropriations of working-class labour. Such a shift would broaden

our understanding of household, family, caste, and its daily machinations. The question of inheritance and its redistribution would then include ex-slaves, agricultural labourers, and other workers whose labour shaped Syrian Christian surplus. Such an expansion is extremely pertinent to any discussion on the Syrian Christian elite. We can then ask—who exactly should own land? Would a horizontal concentration of inheritance between men and women within the logic of blood counteract oppression?

This brings me to the next point—Syrian Christian men and women, especially the rich and affluent, share a strategic consensus on identity, distinction, and the need to ensure the concentration of wealth within families. The problem of gender as articulated by Syrian Christian women, especially in Abraham, implicitly brings out this consensus. A convenient form of middle-class individualism, usually expressed in terms of individual possessions, career, and economic independence, is upheld as the ultimate solution to internal gender oppression. In one such instance, Rosamma, a middle-class participant in Abraham's research and a survivor of domestic violence, narrates that she left her abusive husband's house with her children, maid, and a gas burner (p 112). The participant lists the "maid" as one of her possessions in this story of "survival through resistance." The contradiction of class stares at us in Rosamma's account; however, it is not probed further in Abraham's analysis. The author often reduces gendered oppression to a single axis—husband and wife. We do not get a sense of other relations within the household—blood or non-blood. For instance, would not Rosamma's interactions with the maid qualify as a site of gender analysis? Do affluent Syrian Christian women think of other women as "equally women" and right-bearing individuals? For example, Thomas observes how Syrian Christian women show no sympathy towards Latin Catholic women married into Syrian homes (p 138). Does this mean that the problems of gender operate within the boundaries of caste with no entrance or exit? Similarly, do Syrian Christian women think of men—other than their own kind—

as "men" or as castes/races/stereotypes? Or a combination of both?

Both Abraham and Thomas tell us that neither gender nor caste is available in any pure form in the society. Slogans of equality, independence, freedom, and rights are clearly compromised by class-caste interests. The story gets further complicated when we take note of internal hierarchies within Syrian Christian churches.

Both Thomas and Abraham do not make any mention of the lower-castes present within Syrian Christian denominations. Though small in numbers, it is critical to mark out their objective and subjective difference. Also, the class divisions within Syrian Christians complicate the plot further. What do the poor, working-class Syrian Christians gain from their association with the rich? What role does the church play in diffusing their differences? Thomas skilfully addresses this class contradiction in her analysis on the Vimochana Samaram (Chapter 4). She underlines how lower-class and lower-caste Christians disproportionately faced the anger of the state compared to middle-class and landed Syrian Christians (pp 110–11). On the other hand, Abraham is often seen combining the experiences of working-class and elite Syrian Christian women. The daily wage workers and college lecturers are classed together to argue that they enjoy greater spatial mobility than housewives (p 101). We find scanty discussion on the precarious work conditions of the daily wager (or that of her husband who also happens to be a daily-wager) and how it determines her spatial mobility (for example, Jancy from pp 178–80). Neither does Abraham factor in that these women, owing to their contradictory class locations, occupy competing interests. Thus, their "agensic bargains" can be oppositional to each other (p 177). The *thandedi* entrepreneur (p 180) will expand her economic freedoms by reducing the cost of labour which will inevitably prove counterintuitive to the freedoms of the poor daily wage earner, irrespective of her caste (including spatial freedoms).

Conclusions

The cutting open of Syrian Christianity is not a new academic or political endeavour. It can be traced back to Dalit Christian



mobilisations of the early 20th century Kerala. The writings of Pampadi John Joseph and Poykayil Yohannan (Sreekumara Gurudevan) can be conceptualised as foundational to such critique (Chentharassery 2015; Mohan 2006). Yesudas's (2010) *Baliyadukalude Vamsavalli* (Genealogy of the Scapegoats) gives us a thick, rigorous account of Syrian Christian machination in the context of the Separate Administration Movement of the church of South India. Ninan Koshy's (2014) study on "Caste in Kerala's Churches" was a direct consequence of this movement in the mid-1960s. Also, O P Raveendran's (2019) book on the communal and private control of public education in Kerala against the backdrop of the struggle for reservation in aided educational institutions highlights the economic hegemony of Syrian Christianity. I hope the authors will engage more comprehensively with anti-caste critique and writers in their future writings.

Having said that, both Abraham and Thomas convincingly describe Syrian

Christians as "caste-inscribed religious communities"—to borrow a phrase from the former (p 210). It was absorbing to see how "Syrian Christianity" provided a methodological fillip to discuss caste beyond Hinduism but also in relation to it.

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