

**CLAIMING RIGHTS THROUGH DEMOCRATIC PROTEST: CASE
STUDIES OF PROTEST MOVEMENTS AT THE KERALA
SECRETARIATE**

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DECLARATION

I, **JINCY S** do hereby declare that the Dissertation Titled **CLAIMING RIGHTS THROUGH DEMOCRATIC PROTEST: CASE STUDIES OF PROTEST MOVEMENTS AT THE KERALA SECRETARIATE** is based on the original work carried out by me and submitted to the Department of Sociology, Loyola College of Social Sciences (Autonomous), University of Kerala during the year 2024-2026 towards partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree Examination in Sociology. It has not been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship or other similar title of recognition before any University or anywhere else.

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled **CLAIMING RIGHTS THROUGH DEMOCRATIC PROTEST: CASE STUDIES OF PROTEST MOVEMENTS AT THE KERALA SECRETARIATE** is a record of genuine work done by **JINCY S** fourth semester Master of Sociology student of this college under my supervision and guidance and that it is hereby approved for submission.

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ABSTRACT

The right to protest is a fundamental element of democratic society, enabling citizens to articulate grievances, demand justice, and participate in public decision-making. In Kerala, the Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram has long functioned as a significant democratic space where individuals and groups present demands related to employment, wages, social justice, and public welfare. This study examines how democratic protests at the Kerala Secretariat operate as a means of asserting rights and influencing governmental responses. The study adopts a qualitative case study approach and focuses on three protest movements at the Kerala Secretariat: the ASHA Workers' Protest, the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) Employees' Protest, and the Women Civil Police Officer (WCPO) Rank Holders' Protest. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with selected participants, participant observation, and secondary sources, including books, journal articles, government reports, newspapers, and official documents. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that democratic protests continue to play a vital role in bringing public issues to the attention of the government and society. Protesters selected the Secretariat because of its symbolic and administrative significance, which offers greater visibility and direct access to state authorities. They employed various forms of peaceful collective action, including sit-ins, marches, slogans, public campaigns, and sustained demonstrations, to communicate their demands. While some movements secured partial responses through negotiations and policy interventions, others encountered delays, administrative inaction, and police intervention. The study also shows that the effectiveness of protests depends on factors such as public support, media attention, solidarity among protesters, and the government's willingness to engage in dialogue. The study concludes that democratic protest remains an important instrument through which citizens assert rights and seek accountability from the state. Although not all protests achieve their demands immediately, collective action contributes to the strengthening of democratic participation by creating opportunities for public dialogue and policy attention. The findings contribute to sociological understanding of social movements, democratic participation, and state-citizen relations in contemporary Kerala.

Keywords: Democratic Protest, Kerala Secretariat, Claiming Rights, Social Movements, Democratic Participation, State-Citizen Relations.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Protest has always been an important part of democratic life. It provides ordinary people with an opportunity to express their concerns, question public decisions, and demand justice when they believe their rights have been ignored. Throughout history, individuals and groups have organised collective actions to draw attention to social, political, economic, and cultural issues that affect their lives. Such actions demonstrate that citizens are not merely passive recipients of government policies but active participants in the democratic process.

From a sociological perspective, protest is a form of collective action that develops when people experience common problems and recognise shared interests. Instead of responding individually, they come together to voice their demands in public spaces. These collective efforts often emerge from issues such as inequality, unemployment, discrimination, poor working conditions, lack of social security, or denial of basic rights. Protest therefore reflects both dissatisfaction with existing conditions and the desire to bring about social change. The methods adopted by protesters vary according to the nature of the issue and the social and political context. Peaceful demonstrations, marches, sit-ins, hunger strikes, public meetings, signature campaigns, and symbolic acts are among the most common forms of democratic protest. While some movements are organised by political parties or trade unions, others are led by workers, students, women, farmers, environmental groups, or community organisations. Although their demands may differ, these movements share the common objective of seeking recognition, justice, and accountability from those in authority. In democratic societies, protest performs several important functions. It creates opportunities for citizens to participate beyond elections, encourages public discussion on matters of common concern, and enables governments to understand the needs and grievances of different sections of society. Protest movements also influence public opinion, attract media attention, and sometimes contribute to changes in laws, policies, and administrative practices. For this reason, many sociologists consider protest an essential component of democratic participation rather than merely an expression of conflict.

The Indian Constitution provides citizens with the freedom to express their opinions, assemble peacefully, and form associations under Article 19. These constitutional guarantees provide the

legal foundation for peaceful protest in India. At the same time, the exercise of this right often involves negotiation between citizens and the state, particularly when issues of public order, security, and administration arise. Understanding this relationship is important for analysing how democracy functions in everyday life.

Kerala has a long tradition of democratic mobilisation and public participation. The state's history of social reform movements, labour struggles, student activism, and campaigns for social justice has contributed to a vibrant culture of collective action. Within this context, the Kerala Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram occupies a unique position. As the administrative headquarters of the state government, it has become one of the most important public spaces where citizens and organisations present their demands before the government. Protests held at the Secretariat seek not only to communicate grievances but also to obtain policy responses and administrative action.

The present study, titled **"Claiming Rights through Democratic Protest: Case Studies of Protest Movements at the Kerala Secretariat,"** examines how democratic protest functions as a means through which citizens claim their rights. Using selected case studies, the research explores the issues that give rise to protest, the strategies adopted by protesters, the responses of the government, and the outcomes of these movements. By analysing these experiences from a sociological perspective, the study contributes to a better understanding of democratic participation, collective action, and the relationship between the state and citizens in contemporary Kerala.

1.1.1 Nature of Protest

Protest is a form of collective action through which individuals or groups express dissatisfaction with existing social, political, economic, or cultural conditions. It emerges when people believe that their concerns have not been adequately addressed through regular institutional channels. Rather than remaining silent, citizens organise themselves to voice their demands publicly and seek action from those in positions of authority. In this sense, protest represents an important democratic practice that allows people to participate actively in public life.

Protests develop from shared experiences of injustice and inequality. When individuals recognise that others face similar problems, they often build a collective identity and act

together to demand change. This process transforms personal grievances into collective action. Protest therefore reflects not only dissatisfaction but also the belief that united action can influence society and encourage institutional response.

Protests occur for a wide range of reasons. Demands for fair wages, employment opportunities, social security, gender equality, environmental protection, access to public resources, and the protection of human rights have all led to collective mobilisation. Although the issues vary across societies and historical periods, the underlying objective remains the same: to secure justice, recognition, and equal treatment.

The character of a protest is shaped by several factors, including the nature of the issue, the organisations involved, public support, media attention, and the response of the state. Some protests are carefully planned and organised by trade unions, political parties, or civil society organisations, while others arise spontaneously in response to unexpected events. Protest movements may remain peaceful throughout their course or become confrontational when dialogue fails or tensions increase. However, in democratic societies, peaceful protest is generally recognised as the most legitimate and effective means of expressing public opinion.

Protest is closely connected with the broader concept of social movements. While an individual protest may highlight a particular issue, repeated and organised collective actions often develop into larger social movements seeking long-term structural change. Such movements contribute to public awareness, influence policy discussions, strengthen democratic participation, and encourage governments to respond to the concerns of citizens.

In recent years, technological developments have changed the way protests are organised and communicated. Digital platforms and social media have enabled organisers to mobilise supporters quickly, share information, coordinate activities, and attract wider public attention. At the same time, these technologies have created new challenges, including the spread of misinformation, online surveillance, and digital restrictions. Despite these changes, the fundamental purpose of protest remains unchanged: to provide citizens with a democratic means of claiming rights and demanding accountability.

Understanding the nature of protest is essential for sociological research because it explains how collective action develops, how citizens negotiate with the state, and how democratic societies respond to public demands. Examining protests from this perspective helps us

understand the relationship between social movements, political institutions, and the ongoing struggle for equality, justice, and democratic participation.

1.1.2 Forms of Protest

Protest can take different forms depending on the nature of the issue, the objectives of the participants, and the social and political environment in which it occurs. People adopt various methods to communicate their demands, attract public attention, and influence decision-makers. The choice of a particular form of protest is often determined by the seriousness of the issue, the resources available to the protesters, and the response expected from the authorities. While some forms involve large public gatherings, others rely on symbolic actions or peaceful acts of resistance.

One of the most common forms of protest is the public demonstration or rally, where people gather at a specific place to express their opinions through speeches, slogans, banners, and placards. Such gatherings help bring public attention to important issues and create a platform for collective expression.

A march is another widely used form of protest. Participants move together from one location to another, often towards government offices or other public institutions, to highlight their demands. Marches demonstrate unity among participants and increase the visibility of the movement.

A sit-in is a peaceful method in which protesters occupy a public space and remain there until their concerns receive attention. Sit-ins are commonly organised in front of government offices, educational institutions, or workplaces to emphasise the urgency of an issue without resorting to violence.

Hunger strikes are symbolic forms of protest in which individuals voluntarily abstain from food for a specific period to draw attention to their demands. This method has a long history in India and has often been used to express moral commitment and persuade authorities through non-violent means.

Another important form is the strike, where employees or workers temporarily stop their work to demand improvements in wages, working conditions, or employment benefits. Labour

unions frequently organise strikes to negotiate with employers or government authorities regarding workers' rights.

A boycott involves the deliberate refusal to purchase products, use services, or participate in certain activities as a way of expressing opposition to particular policies, organisations, or institutions. Boycotts seek to create economic or social pressure in order to achieve change.

With the rapid expansion of digital communication, online or digital protests have become increasingly significant. Social media campaigns, online petitions, virtual meetings, and awareness campaigns enable people to mobilise support, share information, and reach wider audiences within a short period. These digital platforms often complement traditional forms of protest rather than replacing them.

Many protest movements combine several methods instead of relying on a single strategy. For example, a movement may organise marches, public meetings, media campaigns, signature campaigns, and peaceful demonstrations simultaneously. Such a combination helps sustain public attention and strengthens the movement's ability to communicate its demands effectively.

Although protest methods differ across movements, peaceful collective action remains the foundation of democratic protest. These different forms provide citizens with opportunities to participate in public life, communicate their concerns, and seek accountability from the government. Understanding the various forms of protest helps explain how social movements organise collective action and influence democratic decision-making.

1.1.3 Political Demonstration

Political demonstrations are among the most visible forms of democratic participation. They provide citizens with an opportunity to express their opinions on public issues, question government decisions, and demand political accountability. In democratic societies, demonstrations enable people to communicate their concerns directly to those in authority while also creating public awareness about issues affecting society.

A political demonstration usually involves a group of people gathering in a public space to support or oppose a government policy, administrative decision, or social issue. These gatherings may take different forms, including rallies, marches, sit-ins, public meetings, and

symbolic acts of protest. Demonstrators often use banners, placards, slogans, speeches, and cultural performances to communicate their demands and mobilise public support.

Political demonstrations have played a significant role in bringing about social and political change across the world. Many struggles for independence, civil rights, labour rights, gender equality, environmental protection, and democratic reforms have relied on peaceful public demonstrations to influence governments and shape public opinion. These movements demonstrate that collective participation can become a powerful means of promoting justice and protecting democratic values.

In India, political demonstrations have a long historical tradition. During the freedom struggle, leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi encouraged peaceful mass mobilisation through satyagraha, marches, and civil disobedience. These methods inspired millions of people to participate in the struggle against colonial rule and established non-violent protest as an important feature of democratic politics. After Independence, demonstrations have continued to be used by workers, students, farmers, women, government employees, and various social organisations to raise concerns related to employment, social justice, education, environmental protection, and public welfare.

The effectiveness of a political demonstration depends on several factors, including the level of public participation, organisational capacity, media attention, and the response of the government. Peaceful demonstrations often encourage dialogue between citizens and the state, while confrontational situations may arise when authorities impose restrictions or fail to respond to public demands. In democratic systems, governments are expected to respect the constitutional right to peaceful assembly while maintaining public order through fair and lawful measures.

Political demonstrations are more than public gatherings. They represent collective action through which citizens participate in democratic life, express shared interests, and seek social and political change. They also strengthen democratic culture by encouraging public debate, increasing political awareness, and creating opportunities for citizens to influence decision-making. Thus, political demonstrations continue to remain an important instrument for claiming rights and promoting democratic accountability in contemporary society.

1.1.4 Democracy and Protest

Democracy is a system of governance in which people participate in shaping public policies and holding those in power accountable. It is based on the principles of equality, freedom, justice, and public participation. While elections are an essential feature of democracy, citizens also participate through discussions, public debates, social movements, and peaceful protests. These forms of participation ensure that democracy remains active between elections and that governments remain responsive to the needs of the people.

Protest is an important expression of democratic participation. It provides individuals and groups with an opportunity to voice their concerns when they believe that their rights, interests, or welfare have been overlooked. Through peaceful collective action, citizens communicate their demands, question public decisions, and seek corrective measures from the government. In this way, protest strengthens democracy by creating a channel through which public opinion reaches decision-makers.

The relationship between democracy and protest is based on the recognition that disagreement is a natural part of public life. In a democratic society, people may hold different opinions on social, political, or economic issues. Peaceful protest allows these differences to be expressed openly without violence. Instead of weakening democracy, such participation encourages dialogue, accountability, and greater transparency in governance.

The right to peaceful protest is closely connected with other democratic freedoms, including freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association. These rights enable citizens to organise collectively, express their views, and participate in matters affecting society. At the same time, democratic protest carries responsibilities. Protest movements are expected to remain peaceful, respect the rights of others, and function within the framework of constitutional values and the rule of law.

Throughout history, democratic protests have contributed to significant social and political changes. Movements for civil rights, gender equality, labour welfare, environmental protection, and social justice have demonstrated that organised public action can influence government policies and bring neglected issues into public discussion. Many important reforms have emerged because citizens collectively demanded change through democratic means.

In the Indian context, peaceful protest has played a vital role from the freedom movement to contemporary struggles for employment, education, social security, and human rights. The tradition of non-violent collective action continues to influence democratic politics across the country. In Kerala, public protests have become an established part of political and social life, reflecting the state's history of social reform, political awareness, and active civic participation. The Kerala Secretariat, as the administrative centre of the state, has become a prominent space where citizens and organisations seek government attention through democratic protest.

Protest is not merely an act of opposition but a process through which citizens participate in democratic life and negotiate their relationship with the state. It allows different social groups to articulate their demands, challenge inequality, and advocate for justice. Therefore, democracy and protest are closely interconnected, with peaceful collective action serving as an important mechanism for strengthening democratic governance and protecting the rights of citizens.

1.1.5 Democratic Protest: An International Perspective

Democratic protest has been an important means through which people across the world have expressed their demands, challenged injustice, and sought social and political change. Although the forms and objectives of protest differ across countries, the central purpose remains the same: enabling citizens to participate in public life and hold governments accountable. In democratic societies, peaceful protest provides a legitimate platform for individuals and groups to communicate their concerns when existing institutional mechanisms fail to address their grievances.

Historically, democratic protests have played a significant role in shaping political institutions and expanding civil rights. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, popular movements in Europe and North America demanded representative government, constitutional reforms, and greater political participation. These struggles contributed to the gradual expansion of democratic institutions and strengthened the recognition of civil liberties. Over time, democratic protest became widely accepted as an essential component of participatory governance.

One of the most influential examples of democratic protest is the Civil Rights Movement in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. Led by leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., the

movement opposed racial segregation and discrimination through peaceful demonstrations, marches, and acts of civil disobedience. Public actions such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the March on Washington drew national attention to racial inequality and contributed to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. These developments demonstrated how sustained non-violent protest could influence public policy and promote social justice.

Similarly, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa challenged the system of racial segregation that denied equal rights to the majority population. Under the leadership of figures such as Nelson Mandela and supported by civil society organisations and international solidarity campaigns, the movement combined peaceful resistance, public mobilisation, and global advocacy. The eventual dismantling of apartheid marked a significant achievement in the global struggle for democracy and human rights.

Democratic protests have also been central to movements for gender equality. The women's suffrage movements in countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States demanded equal political rights, particularly the right to vote. Through campaigns, public meetings, demonstrations, and organised activism, women challenged long-standing social and political discrimination. These movements contributed significantly to expanding democratic participation by recognising women as equal political citizens.

In recent decades, democratic protests have increasingly addressed global concerns such as climate change, environmental justice, racial equality, corruption, and human rights. Climate movements led by young people, including the global Fridays for Future campaign, have mobilised millions across different countries to demand stronger environmental policies. Likewise, movements such as Black Lives Matter have drawn international attention to racial discrimination, police violence, and social inequality. These examples illustrate how contemporary democratic protests often extend beyond national boundaries through international solidarity and digital communication.

The development of digital technology has transformed the organisation of protest movements across the world. Social media platforms have enabled activists to share information rapidly, mobilise supporters, coordinate demonstrations, and engage with wider audiences. Although digital communication has increased the visibility and reach of protest movements, it has also raised concerns regarding misinformation, surveillance, and restrictions on online freedom.

Nevertheless, technology has become an important resource for democratic participation in many societies.

From a sociological perspective, democratic protest reflects the interaction between citizens, civil society, and the state. It provides a means through which people collectively express their interests, challenge unequal power relations, and seek institutional change. International experiences demonstrate that peaceful collective action can influence public opinion, encourage policy reforms, and strengthen democratic governance. At the same time, the effectiveness of protest depends on factors such as political openness, legal protections, public support, organisational capacity, and the willingness of governments to engage with citizens' demands.

The international experience of democratic protest shows that collective action continues to be an important instrument for protecting rights, promoting equality, and expanding democratic participation. These global experiences provide a useful framework for understanding democratic protests in India and, more specifically, the protest movements that have emerged at the Kerala Secretariat as citizens seek recognition, justice, and government accountability.

1.1.6 Democratic Protest in India

The history of democratic protest in India is closely linked to the country's struggle for justice, equality, and political freedom. Collective action has been an important means through which people have challenged oppression, demanded rights, and influenced public policies. From the anti-colonial movement to contemporary campaigns for employment, education, environmental protection, and social justice, protest has remained an essential feature of Indian democracy.

During the colonial period, public protests became a powerful instrument in the struggle against British rule. Early movements focused on opposing discriminatory laws, economic exploitation, and political exclusion. The Indian freedom movement transformed protest into a mass democratic practice by encouraging the participation of people from different regions, religions, castes, and social backgrounds. Through this process, protest became not only a political strategy but also a means of strengthening collective identity and national consciousness.

Mahatma Gandhi played a decisive role in shaping the tradition of democratic protest in India. His philosophy of Satyagraha, based on truth, non-violence, and civil disobedience, demonstrated that peaceful resistance could challenge injustice without the use of force. Campaigns such as the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920), the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930), and the Quit India Movement (1942) mobilised millions of Indians and became landmarks in the country's freedom struggle. Gandhi's approach influenced later social movements in India and inspired democratic movements across the world.

After Independence, protest continued to serve as an important democratic mechanism for expressing public demands. Various sections of society, including farmers, workers, students, women, tribal communities, and government employees, have organised peaceful demonstrations to seek policy changes and protect their rights. Labour unions have demanded better wages and working conditions, farmers have protested for fair prices and agricultural support, while students have mobilised around issues related to education, employment, and social justice. Women's organisations and civil society groups have also organised campaigns against gender discrimination, violence, and inequality.

In recent decades, India has witnessed several large-scale democratic movements that have shaped public debate and influenced government policies. The Right to Information movement strengthened transparency and accountability in public administration. The India Against Corruption movement generated nationwide discussions on good governance and institutional reforms. Farmers' protests, environmental campaigns, and movements demanding social justice have highlighted the continuing importance of collective action in addressing public concerns. These movements demonstrate that democratic protest remains an active and legitimate means of participation in Indian society.

The growth of digital communication has further transformed protest movements in India. Social media platforms, online campaigns, and digital networks have enabled organisers to mobilise participants, circulate information, and engage with wider audiences. While digital platforms have increased public participation, they have also created new challenges, including misinformation, online surveillance, and restrictions on digital spaces. Nevertheless, digital communication has become an important complement to traditional forms of democratic protest.

From a sociological perspective, democratic protests in India reflect the dynamic relationship between citizens and the state. They provide opportunities for marginalised communities and disadvantaged groups to articulate their demands and participate in public decision-making. Protest movements also contribute to policy discussions, strengthen public accountability, and encourage democratic institutions to respond to the needs of society. Although not every movement achieves its objectives immediately, collective action continues to play an important role in promoting democratic values and protecting the rights of citizens.

The Indian experience demonstrates that democracy extends beyond electoral politics. Public participation through peaceful protest remains an essential part of democratic governance, allowing citizens to influence policies, question authority, and seek justice. This broader democratic tradition provides the foundation for understanding protest movements in Kerala, where collective action has become an integral part of the state's political and social culture.

1.1.7 Constitutional Safeguards for the Right to Protest in India

The Constitution of India provides the foundation for democratic governance by guaranteeing fundamental rights that enable citizens to participate in public life. Although the Constitution does not specifically mention the "right to protest" as a separate fundamental right, peaceful protest is protected through several constitutional provisions. These safeguards allow citizens to express their opinions, assemble peacefully, and collectively raise concerns on matters affecting society. At the same time, the Constitution recognises that these freedoms are subject to reasonable restrictions in the interest of public order, security, and the rights of others.

The Preamble to the Constitution reflects the democratic values of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. These principles guide the functioning of the Indian state and emphasise the importance of protecting individual freedoms while promoting social justice. Peaceful democratic protest represents one of the ways in which citizens exercise these constitutional ideals by participating in public affairs and demanding accountability from the government.

Article 19(1)(a) guarantees every citizen the freedom of speech and expression. This provision allows individuals to express their views on public issues, criticise government policies, and participate in discussions concerning social, political, and economic matters. Peaceful protest is one of the recognised forms through which citizens exercise this freedom.

Article 19(1)(b) guarantees the right to assemble peacefully and without arms. This provision forms the constitutional basis for public meetings, demonstrations, rallies, marches, and other peaceful gatherings. Citizens have the right to organise collective action to communicate their grievances and seek policy changes, provided such assemblies remain peaceful and comply with the law.

Article 19(1)(c) guarantees the freedom to form associations or unions. This right enables workers, students, farmers, professional groups, trade unions, and civil society organisations to organise themselves and collectively pursue common objectives. Many democratic protest movements in India have emerged through organisations formed under this constitutional protection.

The exercise of these freedoms is not absolute. Under Articles 19(2) and 19(3), the State may impose reasonable restrictions in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, public order, decency, morality, or other constitutionally recognised grounds. These restrictions seek to maintain a balance between individual freedoms and the broader interests of society. Therefore, while citizens have the right to protest peacefully, they are also expected to respect the rights of others and comply with lawful regulations governing public assemblies.

The Supreme Court of India has repeatedly affirmed the importance of peaceful protest in a democratic society. In **Himat Lal K. Shah v. Commissioner of Police, Ahmedabad (1973)**, the Court held that citizens have the right to hold public meetings on public streets, subject to reasonable regulation by the State. Similarly, in **Ramlila Maidan Incident v. Home Secretary, Union of India (2012)**, the Court observed that peaceful protest is a legitimate democratic right and that the use of excessive force against peaceful protesters is inconsistent with constitutional values. In **Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India (2018)**, the Court emphasised the need to balance the right to protest with the rights of other citizens, recognising both as important constitutional interests.

These constitutional provisions and judicial decisions demonstrate that peaceful protest is an integral part of India's democratic framework. They recognise the role of citizens in expressing dissent, participating in public affairs, and holding governments accountable. At the same time, they underline the responsibility of both the State and citizens to ensure that democratic participation takes place peacefully and within the constitutional framework.

The constitutional protection of peaceful protest provides the legal foundation for understanding democratic movements across India, including the protest movements at the Kerala Secretariat examined in the present study. These safeguards ensure that citizens can collectively claim their rights while contributing to the strengthening of democratic governance and public accountability.

1.1.8 Democratic Protest in Kerala

Kerala has a long and distinctive tradition of democratic protest. The state's political history has been shaped by social reform movements, struggles against caste discrimination, labour movements, peasant agitations, and campaigns for social justice. These movements have contributed to the growth of political awareness and active public participation, making Kerala one of the most politically conscious states in India. As a result, democratic protest has become an accepted and influential means through which citizens express their demands and engage with the government.

The foundations of Kerala's protest culture can be traced to the social reform movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Reformers such as **Sree Narayana Guru**, **Ayyankali**, **Chattampi Swamikal**, and other social leaders challenged caste discrimination, social exclusion, and unequal access to education and public spaces. Their efforts inspired collective action among marginalised communities and promoted the ideals of equality, dignity, and social justice. These reform movements laid the groundwork for the democratic culture that later developed in the state.

One of the landmark events in Kerala's history was the **Vaikom Satyagraha (1924–1925)**, which opposed restrictions on the use of public roads surrounding the Vaikom Mahadeva Temple. The movement brought together reformers, political leaders, and ordinary citizens in a peaceful campaign against caste-based discrimination. Similarly, the **Temple Entry Movement** and other struggles for social equality expanded civil rights and strengthened democratic values in Kerala. These movements demonstrated that organised public action could challenge long-standing social inequalities and bring about meaningful reforms.

After Independence, democratic protest continued to play an important role in Kerala's political and social development. Workers, farmers, students, women, government employees, fisherfolk, tribal communities, and environmental groups have organised protests on issues

such as employment, wages, land rights, education, environmental protection, gender equality, and social welfare. Trade unions and civil society organisations have remained active in mobilising people and representing the interests of different sections of society. These movements have contributed to policy discussions and have often influenced government decisions.

The **Kerala Secretariat** in Thiruvananthapuram occupies a unique position within this democratic tradition. As the administrative headquarters of the Government of Kerala, it serves as the principal venue where citizens and organisations bring their demands directly before the state. The visibility of the Secretariat, together with its symbolic importance, makes it an effective public space for democratic protest. Every year, numerous demonstrations, marches, sit-ins, and public campaigns are organised in front of the Secretariat by groups seeking government intervention on issues affecting their lives.

The choice of the Secretariat as a protest site reflects both practical and symbolic considerations. Since major government departments and decision-makers are located there, protesters believe that demonstrating at this location increases the likelihood of attracting official attention, media coverage, and public support. The Secretariat has therefore become a recognised democratic space where diverse groups negotiate with the state and seek policy responses through peaceful collective action.

In recent years, Kerala has witnessed several significant protest movements involving **ASHA workers, Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) employees, Public Service Commission (PSC) rank holders, students, fisherfolk**, and various civil society organisations. These movements have highlighted issues such as fair wages, employment opportunities, social security, environmental protection, and administrative accountability. While some protests have resulted in negotiations and policy interventions, others have continued for extended periods, reflecting the challenges involved in securing timely government action.

From a sociological perspective, democratic protests in Kerala demonstrate the close relationship between citizens, civil society, and the state. They provide opportunities for individuals and groups to express collective concerns, challenge inequality, and participate in democratic decision-making. The state's strong tradition of political awareness, high literacy, and active civic engagement has helped sustain a vibrant protest culture that continues to

influence public policy and governance. The present study is situated within this broader democratic tradition. By examining selected protest movements at the Kerala Secretariat, it seeks to understand how citizens use democratic protest to claim rights, negotiate with the state, and contribute to the functioning of democracy in contemporary Kerala.

1.2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The right to protest is widely recognised as an important feature of democratic governance. It enables citizens to express their opinions, raise public concerns, and seek solutions to issues that affect their lives. In democratic societies, protest functions as a peaceful means through which people communicate with the government, demand accountability, and advocate for social justice. When institutional mechanisms fail to respond adequately to public grievances, collective action often becomes an important avenue for democratic participation.

India has a long tradition of peaceful protest, beginning with the national freedom movement and continuing through various social, political, economic, and environmental movements after Independence. The principles of non-violence, collective action, and public participation have shaped the country's democratic culture. Across different regions, citizens have organised movements to demand employment opportunities, fair wages, land rights, social security, gender equality, environmental protection, and administrative accountability. These protests demonstrate that democracy extends beyond elections and includes continuous public engagement in governance. Within this broader democratic framework, Kerala has developed a distinctive culture of public protest. The state's history of social reform, political awareness, and active civil society has encouraged citizens to use peaceful collective action to address public issues. Different social groups, including workers, students, women, farmers, government employees, and marginalised communities, have frequently organised demonstrations to seek government intervention and policy changes. Such movements have become an integral part of Kerala's democratic tradition.

The Kerala Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram occupies a unique place in this process. As the administrative headquarters of the Government of Kerala, it is the primary location where citizens present their demands before policymakers. The Secretariat is not merely a government office; it also functions as an important democratic space where diverse groups attempt to influence public policy through peaceful protest. Demonstrations organised in front of the

Secretariat receive public visibility, attract media attention, and create opportunities for dialogue between citizens and the government.

In recent years, the Secretariat has witnessed numerous protest movements concerning employment, wages, social security, public services, environmental issues, and administrative decisions. Among these are the prolonged protest of ASHA workers demanding better remuneration and recognition, the demonstrations by Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) employees concerning employment-related issues, and the protests by Women Civil Police Officer (WCPO) rank holders seeking timely appointments. These movements highlight the different ways in which citizens use democratic protest to claim rights and demand government action. Although, democratic protest has received considerable attention in studies on social movements and political participation, limited research has specifically examined the Kerala Secretariat as a democratic space where different groups negotiate with the state. Understanding how protesters frame their demands, organise collective action, interact with government authorities, and evaluate the outcomes of their movements is important for understanding democratic participation in contemporary Kerala.

Against this background, the present study explores how selected protest movements use democratic means to claim rights and influence government responses. By analysing the experiences of protesters and the interaction between citizens and the state, the study seeks to contribute to the sociological understanding of democratic participation, social movements, and state-citizen relations in Kerala.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The right to peaceful protest is an essential feature of a democratic society. It provides citizens with an opportunity to express their grievances, demand justice, and participate in the democratic process. In India, democratic protest has long served as an important means through which people seek government attention and advocate for social, economic, and political rights. Despite the existence of constitutional safeguards, many individuals and groups continue to face challenges in securing timely responses to their demands. Delays in decision-making, administrative inaction, and differences in government responses often influence the effectiveness of protest movements.

Kerala has a well-established tradition of democratic participation and collective action. The state's high level of political awareness and active civil society have encouraged people from

different social backgrounds to use peaceful protest as a means of expressing their concerns. The Kerala Secretariat, as the administrative headquarters of the Government of Kerala, has become the principal venue where citizens, workers, students, government employees, and other social groups present their demands before the authorities. The Secretariat has therefore emerged as an important democratic space where interactions between citizens and the state become visible.

In recent years, several protest movements at the Kerala Secretariat have focused on issues such as employment, fair wages, social security, public services, and administrative accountability. While some movements have succeeded in attracting government attention and initiating negotiations, others have experienced prolonged struggles with limited policy outcomes. These differences raise important sociological questions regarding the nature of democratic protest, the strategies adopted by protesters, the response of the government, and the extent to which collective action contributes to the protection of citizens' rights.

Although a considerable body of literature exists on social movements and protest politics, relatively few studies have examined the Kerala Secretariat as a specific democratic space where different groups negotiate with the state. There is limited empirical research that explores how protesters frame their demands, why they choose the Secretariat as the location for protest, how government institutions respond, and what factors influence the outcomes of these movements. This gap highlights the need for a focused sociological study.

Against this background, the present study seeks to examine how democratic protests at the Kerala Secretariat function as a means of claiming rights. By analysing selected case studies, the research aims to understand the relationship between citizens and the state, the role of collective action in democratic participation, and the opportunities and challenges associated with exercising the right to peaceful protest. The study also attempts to contribute to a better understanding of social movements and democratic governance in the context of contemporary Kerala.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study is significant because it examines democratic protest as a means through which citizens claim their rights and engage with the state. Although democratic protest has been widely discussed in the fields of sociology and political science, limited research has focused specifically on the Kerala Secretariat as a democratic space where different social

groups directly interact with the government. By analysing selected protest movements, this study contributes to a better understanding of democratic participation and collective action in the Kerala context.

From a sociological perspective, the study contributes to the understanding of social movements, collective action, and state–citizen relations. It examines how individuals and groups organise themselves to express common concerns, negotiate with public authorities, and seek recognition of their rights. The findings provide insights into the ways democratic participation operates beyond electoral politics and demonstrate how public protest continues to remain an important feature of democratic society.

The study also contributes to the existing body of knowledge on democratic governance by examining the relationship between citizens' demands and government responses. It explores how different protest strategies, public support, media attention, and administrative actions influence the outcomes of protest movements. This analysis helps explain the opportunities and challenges involved in exercising the democratic right to peaceful protest.

The research has practical relevance for policymakers, government officials, civil society organisations, trade unions, and social activists. A better understanding of the experiences and concerns of protesters may encourage more responsive, transparent, and participatory approaches to governance. The findings may also help public authorities recognise the importance of constructive dialogue in resolving conflicts and addressing citizens' grievances through democratic means. The study is particularly relevant in the context of Kerala, where public protest has become an established part of political and social life. By focusing on the Kerala Secretariat, the research highlights the importance of public spaces in facilitating democratic participation and strengthening accountability between citizens and the state. It also documents the experiences of different social groups that use peaceful protest to demand employment, fair wages, social security, and administrative justice. Finally, this study provides a useful reference for future researchers working in the areas of sociology, political sociology, social movements, governance, public policy, and human rights. It is expected that the findings will encourage further research on democratic protest and contribute to academic discussions on citizen participation, social justice, and democratic governance in India. By examining protest as a democratic process rather than merely a political event, the study enhances the sociological understanding of how collective action contributes to the protection of rights and the strengthening of democracy.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Democratic protest has attracted considerable attention from scholars across sociology, political science, public administration, and human rights studies. As societies become increasingly diverse and politically conscious, collective action has emerged as an important means through which citizens express their concerns, challenge unequal power relations, and seek recognition of their rights. Researchers have examined democratic protest from different perspectives, including its causes, patterns of mobilisation, protest strategies, state responses, and its contribution to democratic governance. These studies have significantly improved our understanding of the relationship between citizens, social movements, and the state.

The present study explores democratic protest as a process of claiming rights through selected protest movements at the Kerala Secretariat. Since the study focuses on the interaction between protesters and the state, it is necessary to examine the existing body of literature that explains why people participate in protests, how collective action is organised, the strategies adopted by protest movements, and the ways governments respond to public demands. Previous research provides important theoretical and empirical insights that help in understanding these dimensions and offers a framework for analysing the selected case studies.

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEWS

The literature reviewed for this study has been organised into thematic sections. It includes studies on the factors that motivate people to participate in protests, protest strategies, mobilisation and organisational patterns, the influence of protest on public policy, state responses to democratic movements, and the outcomes of collective action. Reviewing these themes helps identify the major debates in the field, understand the different approaches adopted by earlier researchers, and locate the present study within the broader sociological literature on democratic protest. Although democratic protest has been widely studied in both international and Indian contexts, relatively little research has examined the Kerala Secretariat as a distinct democratic space where citizens directly engage with the state to claim their rights. Most existing studies discuss protest movements from broader political or historical perspectives, while limited attention has been given to understanding the experiences of protesters, their strategies, and the interaction between protest movements and government institutions at the Secretariat. This gap provides the basis for the present research. By examining selected protest movements at the Kerala Secretariat, the study seeks to contribute

to a deeper sociological understanding of democratic participation, collective action, and state-citizen relations in contemporary Kerala.

2.1.1 Why People protest

At the heart of every protest lies some form of grievance. Van Stekelenburg (2015) argues that grievances whether experienced as illegitimate inequality, feelings of relative deprivation, moral indignation, or suddenly imposed burdens constitute the essential starting point for understanding why people protest. This proposition finds empirical support across diverse contexts, from labour strikes in industrial economies to ecological movements in developing nations. Sharma (2001) similarly emphasises that grievances, particularly those related to development-induced displacement and environmental degradation, have catalysed sustained protest mobilisation across the Indian subcontinent.

The relative deprivation thesis remains particularly influential. This perspective suggests that individuals protest not necessarily when they are objectively worst off, but when they compare their situation unfavourably against relevant standards whether their own past circumstances, the situations of others, or cognitive standards such as equity and justice. Van Stekelenburg (2015) notes that feeling part of a group perceived as deprived is especially consequential for protest engagement, transforming individual discontent into collective action. This insight holds particular relevance for understanding protest mobilisation in Kerala, where regional disparities and development induced displacements have frequently generated collective grievances articulated through democratic channels.

The presence of grievances alone does not automatically produce protest; individuals must also believe that collective action can ameliorate their situation. Van Stekelenburg (2015) identifies efficacy as a critical determinant of protest participation, encompassing individual expectations that protest can alter conditions, collective beliefs that group-related problems can be solved through coordinated effort, and political efficacy the conviction that political actions can influence policy processes. Research consistently demonstrates that feelings of efficacy correlate strongly with protest participation; people are more likely to engage when they believe their actions will redress grievances at acceptable costs.

Crucially, group efficacy has been shown to predict protest participation more robustly than individual efficacy alone. This finding underscores the collective nature of protest decision-making individuals draw confidence not merely from their own capacities but from their assessment of the group's collective power. Aytac and Stokes (2020) extend this analysis by

introducing the concept of "costs of abstention" , the psychological dissonance individuals experience when failing to participate in collective actions they support. This framework suggests that abstention itself carries costs, particularly when individuals perceive that much is at stake or when movement framing successfully generates moral outrage. The interaction between participation costs and abstention costs determines the likelihood of protest involvement, helping explain why large crowds can become self-perpetuating. Success breeds success as large demonstrations signal movement viability and increase the psychic costs of non-participation.

Van Stekelenburg (2015) demonstrates that the more strongly individuals identify with a group, the more inclined they are to protest on its behalf. This relationship operates through multiple pathways: shared fate generates emotional solidarity, collective identification enhances group efficacy beliefs, and identification creates an internalised obligation to behave as a "good" group member. These dynamics explain why group identification functions as a "stepping stone" toward politicised identity, the transformation of social identities into political actors.

Meadows (2018) provides empirical support for identity-based explanations through content analysis of protest signage, invoking social identity theory to demonstrate that protest signs frequently function to denigrate out-groups and enhance in-group status. This finding suggests that protest serves not only instrumental purposes (achieving policy change) but also identity-affirming functions: protest participation allows individuals to express solidarity, assert collective identity, and distinguish their group from opposing others.

Emotions with anger identified as the prototypical protest emotion. Van Stekelenburg (2015) observes that it is "hard to conceive of protest detached from anger," while noting that contempt, shame, sympathy, and moral outrage have also been linked to collective action. Crucially, emotions interact with efficacy perceptions: individuals who perceive the in-group as strong are more likely to experience approaching emotions like anger and desire for confrontation; those who perceive the in-group as weak are more likely to experience fear and withdrawal.

Aytac and Stokes (2020) elaborate on the mobilising function of moral outrage, arguing that social movements successfully construct causal frameworks that cast grievances as deliberate injustices perpetrated by identifiable agents are more likely to draw angry citizens into the streets. This perspective illuminates the paradoxical effect of repression: low to moderate repression can increase the costs of abstention faster than it raises participation costs, drawing

bystanders into protest through outrage generation. However, higher repression levels typically demobilise as self-protection instincts dominate a finding with significant implications for understanding state protest dynamics in democratic contexts.

The decision to protest is not made in social isolation. Van Stekelenburg (2015) introduces social embeddedness as a fifth explanatory mechanism, examining how individual grievances and feelings are transformed into collective orientations within social networks. Networks function dually as "socialisation devices" enabling formation of mobilisation potential and reinforcing political awareness and as "recruitment devices" creating contact between potential participants and movements. The effect of network interaction on protest propensity depends on the amount of political discussion occurring within networks and the information individuals can gather about politics. This insight finds resonance in research on Indian protest movements.

Garada (2024) contextualises social movement dynamics within liberal democratic frameworks, noting that democratic institutions provide spaces however, contested for collective claim-making. A study of protest mobilisation in Indian states similarly emphasises that successful protest depends on social network structures that facilitate coordination and information diffusion. For Kerala specifically, the literature suggests that dense civil society networks, high literacy rates, and historical traditions of political mobilisation have created particularly favourable conditions for protest-based claim-making.

Recent large-scale empirical studies have refined understanding of protest demographics and motivations. Chenoweth et al. (2022) analyse individual decisions to attend Black Lives Matter protests and COVID-19 restriction demonstrations in the United States, finding that protesters constitute a diverse yet representative population segment and that protest decisions are "deliberate in the sense that they are responsive to incentives and issue salience". Importantly, they document "movement overlap" ; attending protests for one cause correlates with likelihood of attending seemingly opposing protests suggesting that protest behaviour reflects general propensity for contentious participation rather than narrow issue-specific commitments. These findings challenge simplistic narratives casting protest movements as diametrically opposed, instead suggesting an "exhausted majority" espousing nuanced views underrepresented by polarised political institutions.

ElSayed (2022) provides a comprehensive theoretical synthesis in doctoral research examining protest participation determinants, focusing particularly on interactions between social and

political trust. This work emphasises that trust dynamics both horizontal (among citizens) and vertical (between citizens and authorities) crucially shape individual calculations about protest participation. High social trust facilitates coordination and reduces free-rider concerns; low political trust may motivate protest but also shapes expectations about responsiveness. Understanding Kerala's protest dynamics requires attention to such trust configurations, which mediate between grievance emergence and collective action.

Walgrave et al. (2013) contribute comparative perspective, analysing demonstrator motives across issues and nations. Their work demonstrates that while specific grievances vary considerably by context, underlying mechanisms, injustice perceptions, efficacy beliefs, identity commitments, emotional responses, and network embeddedness operate with remarkable consistency across settings. This suggests that theoretical frameworks developed primarily in Western contexts possess explanatory purchase for understanding Indian protest phenomena, though careful attention to institutional and cultural specificities remains essential.

Contemporary protest mobilisation increasingly occurs through digital infrastructures, introducing new dynamics to familiar mechanisms. Li et al. (2019) examine how people modify technology use during protests, finding that "protest use and protest non-use are relatively common," with 30% of 2019 respondents reporting they were protesting at least one major tech company. Common tactics included ceasing platform use and deploying ad blockers. This research highlights that protest repertoires evolve with technological change such as digital boycotts, algorithmic resistance, and platform migration constitute new modalities of claim-making that complement traditional street demonstrations.

Aytac and Stokes (2020) similarly emphasise the role of digital technologies in contemporary protest waves, noting that social media platforms allow organisers to disseminate information efficiently, reducing information gathering costs for potential participants. In Hong Kong, protesters utilised apps displaying police locations and tear gas deployment enabling avoidance strategies that reduced participation risks. Mobile phone penetration has been identified as a predictor of protest size during the Arab Spring, suggesting that technological access shapes mobilisation potential. For Kerala's protest movements, understanding digital mediation has become increasingly important as smartphone adoption expands and social media becomes central to political communication.

Contemporary scholarship has moved toward integrated models incorporating multiple explanatory mechanisms. Van Stekelenburg (2015) synthesises grievances, efficacy, identity,

emotions, and social embeddedness into a coherent framework explaining protest participation as the outcome of interacting individual-level and contextual factors. This approach recognises that protest decisions rarely reflect single causes; instead, grievances generate motivation, efficacy beliefs shape action willingness, identity provides direction, emotions supply energy, and networks enable mobilisation. The relative importance of each mechanism varies across contexts, issues, and populations suggesting that explaining protest in any specific setting requires empirical attention to how mechanisms are configured.

For the Kerala secretariat protest movements that constitute this study's empirical focus, this integrated framework provides analytical tools for understanding why citizens claim rights through democratic protest. Kerala's distinctive political ecology characterised by high literacy, competitive party politics, dense civil society networks, and traditions of contentious mobilisation likely shapes how these mechanisms operate.

2.1.2 Protest Strategies

The systematic study of protest strategy owes much to foundational work conceptualising protest as calculated political action rather than spontaneous disorder. De Nardo (2014) provides a seminal analysis of the strategic logic governing protest and rebellion, arguing that movements face fundamental strategic dilemmas rooted in their mobilisation size and organisational capacity. De Nardo's central insight is that the optimal strategy depends critically on a movement's strength relative to its opponents; small movements must rely on disruptive tactics that magnify their impact, while large movements can afford conventional bargaining. This "power in numbers" framework remains influential for understanding why movements adopt particular strategic postures; strategies are not arbitrary expressions of ideology but calculated responses to structural constraints and opportunities.

Gamson (1989) offers foundational reflections on what constitutes effective protest strategy, critiquing earlier assumptions that single strategic dimensions predict success. In reflecting on his own landmark work, Gamson emphasises that strategy cannot be divorced from the political environment in which movements operate. He argues that successful movements typically combine multiple strategic elements: disruption, bargaining, constituency building, and media engagement rather than relying exclusively on any single approach.

Frey, Dietz, and Kalof (1992) provide empirical refinement of Gamson's framework through quantitative analysis of successful American protest groups. Their research identifies that strategic innovation and tactical flexibility distinguish successful movements from

unsuccessful ones. Groups that adapt their strategies in response to changing political conditions, rather than rigidly adhering to predetermined tactical repertoires, achieve significantly higher rates of success. This finding suggests that static strategic commitments to exclusively nonviolent or exclusively disruptive approaches may prove less effective than dynamic strategic adaptation calibrated to shifting political circumstances.

Contemporary scholarship has elaborated diverse strategic repertoires available to protest movements. Boone, Secci, and Gallant (2018) develop a typology distinguishing between active resistance strategies directly challenging authority structures through confrontation, blockade, or occupation and creative political protest strategies that work within and around institutional channels. Their analysis demonstrates that hybrid strategic approaches, combining disruptive direct action with conventional political engagement, often prove most resilient. The creative dimension encompasses symbolic protests, artistic interventions, and narrative reframing that shift public discourse without necessarily confronting state power directly.

Meyer (2004) provides a comprehensive theoretical synthesis linking protest strategies to political opportunity structures. Meyer argues that strategic choices are not made in institutional vacuums but respond to the configuration of political opportunities, the openness of political institutions, stability of elite alignments, availability of influential allies, and capacity for state repression. The central strategic problem for any movement is aligning tactical choices with the prevailing opportunity structure. When political opportunities are expansive, insider strategies such as lobbying and litigation may suffice; when opportunities contract, disruptive protest strategies become necessary to create leverage.

Protest strategies also carry normative weight movements that must justify their tactical choices to participants, publics, and authorities. Zlobina and Gonzalez Vazquez (2018) examine this process of strategic justification, demonstrating that individuals evaluate protest tactics along moral and pragmatic dimensions simultaneously. Their research finds that people distinguish between "appropriate" and "inappropriate" protest strategies based on perceived proportionality, target appropriateness (whether the correct authority is being held accountable), and minimal harm to uninvolved third parties. Critically, individuals who view protest as legitimate in principle may still reject particular tactics as unjustifiable, shaping their willingness to participate. This suggests that strategic choices affect not only external effectiveness but also internal movement dynamics tactics perceived as illegitimate risk fragmenting coalitions and demobilising potential supporters.

The ultimate question driving strategy research concerns effectiveness: what strategic choices produce desired outcomes? Death (2019) provides a nuanced assessment of what protest can realistically achieve. Drawing on global case evidence, Death argues that protest effectiveness must be measured across multiple dimensions: direct policy change, agenda-setting (shifting what political actors consider important), discursive shifts (changing how issues are publicly framed), network building (strengthening civil society infrastructure), and prefigurative effects (demonstrating alternative social arrangements within protest spaces). This multidimensional framework cautions against evaluating protest solely through immediate policy victories; movements may achieve significant "procedural" or "constitutive" effects even when specific demands remain unmet.

Shuman, Goldenberg, Saguy, Halperin, and van Zomeren (2024) advance this literature with a systematic review of when social protests achieve effectiveness. Their synthesis identifies key moderators of protest success: strategic nonviolence (disruptive but nonviolent tactics correlate with success), mass participation (large-scale mobilisation signals movement viability), tactical diversity (multiple complementary strategies prevent opponent adaptation), and sympathetic media coverage (positive framing enhances public support). Particularly relevant for democratic contexts, they find that protests generate emotional resonance, particularly moral outrage combined with hope and achieve greater agenda-setting impact than purely instrumental mobilisations.

Understanding protest strategies requires attending to their fundamentally relational character of strategies evolve interactively with state responses. Ellefsen (2018) develops this relational perspective through analysis of protest and protest policing as coevolving in strategic interactions. Drawing on longitudinal case studies, Ellefsen demonstrates that movement strategies and policing strategies adapt reciprocally: when police adopt aggressive containment tactics, movements may shift toward more dispersed or technologically mediated protest forms; when police demonstrate restraint, movements may escalate peacefully to maintain pressure. This coevolutionary dynamic implies that effective protest strategy cannot be fixed in advance but must anticipate and respond to state counter-strategies.

Ellefsen's (2018) analysis further identifies that targeting strategies whose movements choose to pressure are particularly subject to relational dynamics. Movements targeting low level officials may achieve immediate tactical victories but fail to secure enduring policy change; movements targeting political executives may generate greater leverage but face more

sophisticated counter-strategies. Successful movements typically pursue multi-tiered targeting, simultaneously pressuring front-line implementers, middle managers, and political principals through coordinated but distinct tactical streams.

2.1.3 Mobilization and organizational patterns

Foundational debates in social movement theory established the parameters for studying mobilisation. Piven and Cloward (1995) provide a powerful critique of resource-mobilisation theory, which had dominated the field by emphasising formal organisation, leadership, and material resources as preconditions for successful protest. Against this view, Piven and Cloward argue that focusing exclusively on organisational resources obscures the disruptive power of mass defiance, protest that emerges from institutional dislocations such as unemployment, eviction, or welfare cuts. They contend that the very institutional conditions that generate grievances also shape the forms protest takes; poor people's movements, for example, typically rely on episodic disruption rather than sustained organisation precisely because their members lack the resources and stability for formal mobilisation. This critique remains relevant for understanding mobilisation dynamics in Kerala, where protests often emerge from precarious populations such as landless labourers, informal workers, and displaced communities whose capacity for sustained organisational mobilisation is structurally constrained.

The question of protest size has attracted significant scholarly attention, as large demonstrations signal movement viability and generate political leverage. Somma and Medel (2019) address this question directly, exploring the impact of mobilisation strategies on demonstration size through comparative analysis. Their research identifies several strategic determinants of turnout: intensive recruitment through pre-existing social networks (family, neighbourhood, workplace) generates larger crowds than impersonal recruitment through mass media or public appeals; framing that resonates with quotidian grievances produces greater mobilisation than abstract ideological appeals; and the perceived likelihood of success shaped by prior movement victories or favourable political conditions strongly predicts participation levels. Critically, Somma and Medel find that mobilisation strategies interact with political context; strategies effective in repressive environments differ markedly from those effective in open democratic settings. For Kerala's protest environment, where democratic space exists but is unevenly accessible across social groups, understanding these contextual contingencies is essential.

Mobilisation cannot be understood in isolation from state responses. McPhail and McCarthy (2005) provide a foundational analysis of protest mobilisation, protest repression, and their interaction. Their framework conceptualises mobilisation and repression as dynamically linked: repression may demobilise by raising participation costs, but it may also backfire by generating moral outrage and increasing the psychic costs of abstention. The net effect depends on multiple factors including the severity of repression (lethal force demobilises; symbolic gestures may mobilise), the legitimacy of repressive agents in public eyes, and the availability of alternative mobilisation channels. McPhail and McCarthy also emphasise that mobilisation is not a one-time event but an ongoing process requiring continuous reproduction through communication networks, leadership coordination, and tactical adaptation as repression escalates or relaxes.

This interactive perspective finds empirical extension in Demirel-Pegg (2017), who examines the demobilisation of protest campaigns, a comparatively neglected topic relative to the literature on protest emergence. Demirel-Pegg identifies multiple pathways to demobilisation: successful concession (protest ends when demands are met), exhaustion (participant fatigue as costs accumulate without visible progress), repression (state force that sufficiently raises participation risks), co-optation (incorporation of movement leaders into institutional channels), and internal fragmentation (conflict over goals or tactics that fractures coalitions). Critically, demobilisation rarely results from single causes; most protest campaigns end through concatenations of internal and external factors. For understanding protest at the Kerala secretariat, this framework directs attention to the life cycles of mobilisations, how they emerge, sustain, and ultimately conclude, whether through success, suppression, or atrophy.

Although protest is visible when it happens, its absence also requires explanation. Beland and Marier (2006) contribute the concept of "protest avoidance" to analyse why labour mobilisation failed to materialise in France during significant social policy reforms that might have expected strong opposition. Their analysis identifies several mechanisms of protest avoidance: institutional incorporation (when existing consultative mechanisms absorb grievances before they become contentious), strategic co-optation (selective concessions to elite labour leaders that undermine rank-and-file mobilisation), anticipated repression (the belief that protest would be futile or excessively costly), and issue framing (successful government reframing of reforms as technical necessities rather than ideological attacks). This framework is valuable for analysing why some grievances at the Kerala secretariat generate massive mobilisations while

others, seemingly comparable, produce no protest at all. Understanding protest requires understanding its absence as much as its presence.

De Nardo (2014), introduced in the previous theme, provides enduring theoretical resources specifically for understanding mobilisation dynamics. De Nardo's central argument is that optimal mobilisation strategies depend critically on movement size relative to opponents directly addressing the mobilisation question. Small movements cannot afford the costs of sustained conventional mobilisation; they must rely on "disruptive tactics that magnify their impact" through surprise, timing, and symbolic leverage. Large movements face different strategic problems: maintaining cohesion, preventing free-riding, and translating numerical strength into political leverage. De Nardo's framework explains why mobilisation strategies that succeed for mass movements (public rallies, petition drives) may fail for marginalised groups, and conversely, why disruptive strategies that work for small groups may alienate potential supporters when used by larger movements.

The contemporary context of neoliberal restructuring has fundamentally altered mobilisation dynamics. Kriesi (2016) provides a systematic analysis of protest mobilisation in the age of austerity, examining movements from the Indignados to Occupy. Kriesi argues that post-2008 economic crises created distinctive mobilisation opportunities: widespread grievances (unemployment, foreclosure, public service cuts) coincided with declining trust in conventional political institutions, generating a "mobilisation potential" that organisers could activate. However, austerity also constrained mobilisation by reducing the material resources available for movement organising, fragmenting traditional class-based constituencies through labour market dualization, and creating "precarious" populations whose economic instability limits sustained participation. The resulting mobilisation patterns of large episodic protests alternating with periods of demobilisation, horizontal rather than hierarchical organisation, and tactical innovation in the use of public space characterised austerity-era movements across advanced democracies.

The relationship between political opportunities and mobilisation is neither simple nor linear. Meyer (2004), revisited from the previous theme, provides a synthetic framework for understanding how political opportunity structures shape mobilisation trajectories. Meyer argues that the openness of political institutions, stability of elite alignments, availability of allies, and state repressive capacity collectively determine whether grievances will be expressed through protest or through institutional channels. However, Meyer cautions that

opportunities are not objective facts but are subject to perceptual mediation; movements that believe opportunities exist mobilise differently from those that perceive closure, regardless of objective conditions. This insight has methodological implications for studying Kerala secretariat protests: analysing mobilisation requires attending not only to institutional configurations but also to activist perceptions of those configurations.

Chenoweth (2015) provides a comprehensive overview of the relationship between political mobilisation and institutions, bridging social movement theory and comparative politics. Chenoweth argues that institutions shape mobilisation in three ways: as targets (movements mobilise to influence institutional decision-making), as resources (institutions provide information, legitimacy, and coordination mechanisms that movements exploit), and as arenas (institutions create structured spaces within which mobilisation occurs). This tripartite framework is particularly valuable for analysing protest at the Kerala secretariat, which represents a dense institutional node the executive bureaucracy and political leadership simultaneously constitute the movement's target, potential source of resources (through sympathetic officials), and arena for claim-making. Understanding mobilisation in such institutional settings requires analysing how movements navigate these multiple institutional relationships simultaneously.

2.1.4 How Policies Shape Protests

The conventional policy-focused literature has often treated protest as an external pressure on otherwise autonomous policymaking processes. Bhattacharya and Thakur (2020) challenge this view by examining how protests translate into policies through specific actors, spaces, and processes. Their analysis identifies that policy change rarely results directly from protest alone; rather, protest interacts with institutional actors (legislators, bureaucrats, party leaders), deliberative spaces (public consultations, legislative committees, media forums), and policy processes (agenda-setting, formulation, implementation, evaluation). Protests succeed in shaping policy when they effectively insert themselves into these existing institutional ecologies rather than attempting to bypass them entirely. This framework suggests that analysing protest at the Kerala secretariat requires attention not only to the protest event itself but also to how protesters navigate the policy spaces the secretariat houses.

Silva (2015) provides a complementary Latin American perspective on social movements, protest, and policy, emphasising that the relationship varies considerably across policy domains and political systems. Silva argues that distributive policies (welfare, land, housing) are

generally more responsive to protest than regulatory policies (environmental standards, labour codes) or symbolic policies (recognition, identity), because distributive policies create identifiable beneficiaries whose material interests can be mobilised. This domain-specific responsiveness has implications for Kerala, where protests have targeted diverse policy arenas including agricultural distress (distributive), environmental regulation (regulatory), and caste-based reservations (symbolic) each likely exhibiting different protest-policy dynamics.

Weldon (2012) provides a landmark contribution to understanding how social movements represent disadvantaged groups within democratic policymaking. Weldon argues that in contemporary democracies, political parties and interest groups systematically underrepresent marginalised populations such as women, racial and ethnic minorities, the poor, and other excluded groups. Social movements, through protest and contentious politics, fill this representational gap by articulating claims that institutional actors ignore. Critically, Weldon demonstrates that movement influence on policy depends not on replacing institutional representation but on complementing it; the most effective arrangements combine sympathetic institutional allies (responsive legislators, feminist bureaucrats) with autonomous movement mobilisation that maintains pressure from outside. This "dual strategy" framework is directly relevant to analysing Kerala secretariat protests, where movements must simultaneously cultivate allies within the secretariat's bureaucratic and political structures while maintaining independent mobilisation capacity.

Weldon's (2012) analysis further specifies the conditions under which protest influences policy: sustained mobilisation over time (episodic protests achieve less than ongoing campaigns), strategic framing that connects movement demands to widely shared values (rights, justice, development), and the absence of counter-mobilisation by well-resourced opponents. When these conditions are met, even movements representing highly marginalised groups can achieve significant policy gains. These findings challenge pessimistic accounts of protest effectiveness while acknowledging the structural obstacles disadvantaged groups face.

Before policies change, discourse must change. Pomerence (2023) examines this question directly, investigating how protests shape discourse as a necessary precursor to policy impact. Drawing on a doctoral study, Pomerence argues that protest influences policy primarily through discursive mechanisms: agenda-setting (forcing issues onto public and elite agendas), framing (shifting how issues are understood and evaluated), and legitimisation (making previously radical claims appear reasonable and mainstream). These discursive effects occur

even when immediate policy concessions are absent; protests that successfully shift public discourse alter the political terrain on which future policy battles are fought. For Kerala secretariat protests, this suggests evaluating movement impact requires attention not only to government orders issued but also to changes in how secretariat officials, political leaders, and the broader public discuss contested issues.

The translation of protest into policy is never automatic; it depends on political context. D'Amato and Schwenken (2018) provide a comparative analysis of protest impact, emphasising the mediating role of political configurations and political culture. Drawing on cases from asylum and deportation protests in Europe, they demonstrate that the same protest tactics produce different policy outcomes depending on the institutional configuration of the state (centralised vs. federal, majoritarian vs. consensus democracies), the partisan balance (whether movement allies or opponents control government), and the prevailing political culture (rights-oriented vs. security-oriented). This configuration approach cautions against generalising protest effectiveness findings across contexts; what works in one political setting may fail in another. For Kerala, the state's distinctive political culture characterised by competitive party competition, high levels of political participation, and historical legacies of left governance likely mediates protest-policy relationships in ways requiring empirical investigation.

Shuman, Goldenberg, Saguy, Halperin, and van Zomeren (2024) provide the most systematic recent synthesis of protest effectiveness. Their review identifies specific conditions under which protests achieve policy change: (1) strategic nonviolence, which enhances movement legitimacy and reduces public backlash; (2) large and diverse participation, which signals broad societal support; (3) emotional resonance, particularly moral outrage combined with hope, which sustains participation and attracts sympathetic media coverage; (4) clear and achievable demands, which facilitate elite response; and (5) favourable political opportunities, including divided elites and allies in power. Crucially, Shuman et al. (2024) also identify conditions under which protests fail: excessive disruption that alienates potential supporters, fragmented demands that confuse targets, and repressive environments that raise participation costs beyond sustainable levels. This evidence synthesis provides analytical benchmarks for assessing Kerala secretariat protests.

Not all protesters seek straightforward policy change; some pursue more transformative or disruptive agendas. Corry and Reiner (2021) examine how radical social movement activists engage with climate policy dilemmas, revealing tensions within movement-policy

relationships. Their research finds that radical activists often face a fundamental dilemma: engaging with mainstream policy processes risks co-optation and diluting transformative demands, while remaining outside policy arenas risks irrelevance as less ambitious actors shape the policy agenda. Activists navigate this dilemma through various strategies: selective engagement (participating in some policy processes while boycotting others), prefigurative politics (demonstrating alternative arrangements rather than demanding state action), and discursive radicalism (maintaining radical frames while tactically accepting incremental gains). This dilemma framework is valuable for analysing Kerala protest movements that may include both reformist factions seeking policy concessions and radical factions demanding systemic transformation.

Gillion (2013) provides a systematic empirical analysis of protest's political power, focusing specifically on how minority activism shapes public policy in the United States. Gillion demonstrates that protest influences policy through two primary mechanisms: direct (protesters' specific demands are incorporated into legislation or regulation) and indirect (protest shifts elite and public opinion, creating pressure for policy change even when specific demands are not met). His research shows that protest's indirect effects, agenda setting and opinion shifting often exceed direct effects in policy significance, as they transform the political environment within which all subsequent policy decisions are made. This finding has methodological implications: studying protest impact requires tracing not only immediate policy concessions but also longer-term shifts in political discourse, elite attention, and public attitudes.

The protest-policy relationship operates at multiple scales, including the local level where Kerala secretariat protests occur. Castro, Seixas, Neca and Bettencourt (2018) examine a case of local protests successfully contesting and changing new ecological laws, using press analysis to trace mechanisms of impact. Their research identifies that local protest success depends on: (1) framing local grievances in terms of broader public values (environmental protection, procedural justice) rather than narrow self-interest; (2) generating media attention that amplifies local claims to regional or national audiences; (3) building alliances with sympathetic officials who can champion movement demands within policy arenas; and (4) sustaining mobilisation through policy implementation, not just policy adoption, to prevent bureaucratic drift or industry capture. These local dynamics are directly relevant to Kerala secretariat protests, where movements contesting land use, environmental regulation, or development projects must navigate similar challenges.

Across these contributions, a coherent synthesis emerges. Policy shapes protest by generating grievances (through policy change or enforcement), creating opportunities (through institutional access points or elite divisions), and providing targets (specific agencies or officials responsible for policy implementation). Conversely, protest shapes policy by forcing agenda change, shifting policy framings, mobilising public opinion, and exerting direct pressure on decision-makers. This reciprocal relationship is dynamic and iterative: protest responds to policy, policy responds to protest, and each iteration reshapes the terrain for the next.

2.1.5 State Response and protest-state interaction

No analysis of protest as a mechanism for claiming rights is complete without examining how states respond to contentious mobilisation. State responses fundamentally shape protest trajectories determining whether movements grow or shrink, whether demands are conceded or suppressed, and whether democratic protest reinforces or erodes political legitimacy. The literature has moved beyond simplistic dichotomies of repression versus concession toward more nuanced frameworks recognising that state responses occupy a complex spectrum. Pena and Davies (2017) provide systematic analysis of government responses to mass protests in democracies, identifying a repertoire of state strategies that includes: concession (accepting partial or full movement demands), repression (arrests, force, legal harassment), containment (permitting protest but restricting location, duration, or tactics), co-optation (incorporating movement leaders into institutional processes), fragmentation (negotiating with moderate factions to isolate radicals), and ignoring (calculated non-response). Their research demonstrates that democratic governments typically deploy multiple response strategies sequentially or simultaneously rather than selecting a single approach.

Pena and Davies (2017) further identify that governmental responses are shaped by multiple factors: the perceived threat level of the protest (massive disruptions generate different responses than small symbolic actions), the political alignment between protesters and governing parties (movements allied with governing parties receive more accommodation), public opinion (protests with majority support face less repression), and institutional constraints (legal frameworks, judicial oversight, and bureaucratic cultures shape available response options). This contingency framework explains why seemingly similar protests may receive dramatically different state responses.

Although Kerala operates within India's democratic framework, understanding authoritarian response patterns provides analytical contrast and reveals response mechanisms that may appear in attenuated form within democracies. Carothers and Press (2020) examine understanding protests in authoritarian states, identifying distinctive response dynamics. Authoritarian regimes face unique legitimacy constraints: protests directly challenge the regime's claim to popular consent, generating higher perceived threats than in democracies where protest is normalised. Consequently, authoritarian responses often include: pre-emptive repression (arresting organisers before protests occur), controlled mobilisation (staging pro-regime counter-protests), information control (restricting media coverage and internet access), and selective concession (making minor policy adjustments to defuse mobilisation while preserving regime control structures). These authoritarian response patterns illuminate, by contrast, the distinctive features of democratic state responses including legal due process, media coverage, and institutional accountability mechanisms that constrain state action.

In contexts where state and corporate interests converge, response patterns become complex and multi-layered. Frynas (2001) provides a detailed analysis of corporate and state responses to anti-oil protests in Nigeria's Niger Delta, a context where multinational corporations and the state have collaborated in responding to contentious mobilisation. Frynas documents how state security forces and corporate security apparatuses coordinate repressive responses, including militarised violence against protesting communities, legal harassment of activists, and strategic co-optation of community leaders. Critically, Frynas (2001) demonstrates that corporate-state collaboration creates response escalation dynamics: when protest targets both corporate operations and state authority, the combined repressive capacity exceeds what either actor could deploy independently. While Kerala's democratic context differs dramatically from Nigeria's, the framework of multi-actor response coordination remains analytically useful for examining how state agencies (police, bureaucracy, political executives) coordinate responses to secretariat protests.

Cantoni, Kao, Yang, and Yuchtman (2024) provide an economic perspective on protests and state responses in their Annual Review of Economics contribution. Their framework conceptualises protest and state response as strategic interaction under incomplete information: protesters signal grievance intensity through mobilisation; states update beliefs about protest strength and resolve; state responses (concessions or repression) then shape subsequent protest decisions. This modelling approach generates several predictions: states are more likely to concede when they perceive protest as large, sustained, and broadly supported; repression is

more likely when states believe protesters lack alternative escalation options; and information asymmetries (states uncertain about protest strength, protesters uncertain about state repressive capacity) generate response patterns that may appear irrational but follow strategic logic. For Kerala secretariat protests, this framework directs attention to how protest size, framing, and tactics signal movement strength to state decision-makers, and how state responses, in turn, signal repressive resolve or accommodation willingness.

Not all protests target domestic policy; nationalist protests directed at interstate disputes generate distinctive response dynamics. Ciorciari and Weiss (2016) examine nationalist protests, government responses, and the risk of escalation in interstate disputes. Their analysis demonstrates that governments face competing pressures during nationalist protest waves: accommodating popular nationalist demands risks escalating interstate conflict; repressing nationalist protests risks domestic backlash and regime de-legitimation. The resulting response dilemma produces characteristic patterns: symbolic concession (rhetorical support for nationalist demands without material action), controlled mobilisation (channelling nationalist energy into regime-sanctioned events), and selective information management (highlighting foreign provocations while downplaying domestic constraints). These dynamics, while most acute in interstate contexts, offer insights for understanding how Kerala governments respond to regionalist or sub-nationalist protests that implicate centre-state relations.

Oluyeye and Akande (2025) examine state response to protests in Nigeria, contributing contemporary African evidence to the literature. Their analysis identifies that Nigerian state responses have evolved from predominantly repressive strategies toward hybrid approaches combining selective accommodation with continued repression. This evolution reflects both domestic political changes (democratisation, civil society strengthening) and international pressures (donor conditionality, human rights norms). Critically, Oluyeye and Akande (2025) find that state responses vary systematically by protest issue: economic protests (fuel prices, food costs) receive more accommodation than political protests (governance, corruption), reflecting regime calculations about which protest types pose existential threats. This issue-specific variation resonates with studying Kerala protests, where state responses likely differ between livelihood protests (agriculture, fisheries) and political protests (governance, accountability).

State responses are implemented primarily through police and security forces, making policing practices central to understanding protest outcomes. Noakes and Gillham (2016) examine

aspects of the "new penology" in police response to major political protests in the United States (1999-2000), identifying a significant shift in protest policing strategies. The traditional "escalated force" model characterised by reactive, improvisational, and increasingly forceful responses has been partially replaced by a "strategic incapacitation" model emphasising pre-emptive intelligence gathering, protest parameter restriction, mass arrest capacity, and technological surveillance. This new penology treats protest participation not as legitimate political expression but as presumptively risky and subject to managerial control. While developed from US evidence, this framework has implications for analysing protest policing at the Kerala secretariat, where police responses likely reflect both traditional and emergent policing philosophies.

Goldstone and Tilly (2001) provide a foundational theoretical contribution analysing how popular action and state response interact in the dynamics of contention. Their framework centres on the concepts of threat (state perception that protest undermines regime stability, elite interests, or policy implementation) and opportunity (state perception that concession may co-opt moderates, split movements, or enhance legitimacy). State responses are shaped by the interplay of perceived threat and opportunity: high threat/low opportunity favours repression; low threat/high opportunity favours concession; mixed conditions produce hybrid or temporally sequenced responses. Goldstone and Tilly (2001) further emphasise that threat and opportunity are not objective facts but perceptual constructs shaped by state information systems, prior protest history, and elite political calculations.

The classic literature on state response emphasises that repression is not monolithic but varies along multiple dimensions. Extending insights from Goldstone and Tilly (2001), state responses vary by form (arrests, violence, legal harassment, surveillance), severity (symbolic gestures vs. lethal force), target (leaders vs. participants vs. sympathisers), and temporal pattern (pre-emptive, reactive, sustained). Understanding response variation requires analysing triadic power relations among states, movements, and third parties (media, courts, international actors, opposition parties). Third parties shape state responses by imposing costs on repression (negative media coverage, legal challenges, diplomatic pressure) or enabling it (legitimising anti-protest narratives, providing legal cover). For Kerala secretariat protests, India's independent judiciary, vibrant media, and competitive party politics constitute third parties that likely constrain state response options relative to less democratic contexts.

Bao (2025) examines labour protest and state response in contemporary China, providing analysis from an authoritarian context where protest is highly restricted yet persistent. Bao's research identifies that Chinese state responses to labour protest vary systematically by protest tactics (peaceful vs. disruptive) and targets (factory managers vs. local officials vs. central state). Peaceful, narrowly targeted protests (wage disputes against individual employers) receive accommodation through administrative mediation; disruptive, broadly targeted protests (pensions, housing, unemployment benefits) receive coordinated repression involving police, party disciplinary bodies, and security services.

2.1.6 Protest Outcomes

The ultimate question driving much protest research concerns outcomes: do protests achieve their objectives, and under what conditions? This examines how scholars conceptualise, measure, and explain the varied impacts of contentious mobilisation.

The dominant tendency in early protest research was to measure outcomes narrowly through policy change. Did movements secure the specific legal or administrative concessions they demanded? Silva (2015), introduced a broader conceptualisation of protest outcomes by examining social movements, protest, and policy across Latin American cases. Silva argues that outcome assessment must distinguish between procedural outcomes (changes in how policy is made, including access, consultation, and transparency), distributive outcomes (changes in who gets what from the state), recognition outcomes (changes in group status, identity, and standing), and constitutive outcomes (changes in political culture, citizen attitudes, and movement capacity). This multidimensional framework cautions against judging protest solely by immediate policy victories; movements may achieve significant outcomes that reshape the political terrain even when specific demands remain unmet.

Kolb (2007) provides a systematic theoretical and empirical analysis of protest outcomes, emphasising the role of political opportunities in mediating movement impact. Kolb argues that outcomes are shaped by the interaction between movement characteristics (resources, strategies, framing) and political opportunity structures (institutional access, elite alignments, repressive capacity). Critically, Kolb (2007) demonstrates that the same movement characteristics produce different outcomes in different opportunity contexts; what works in an open, fragmented political system may fail in a closed, consolidated one.

Giugni, Bosi, and Uba (2013) provide the most comprehensive edited collection on protest outcomes, bringing together leading scholars to synthesise decades of research. Their volume

establishes several key propositions. First, protest outcomes are multidimensional, encompassing political (policy change, institutional reform), biographical (activist life trajectories), cultural (public opinion, collective memory), and movement-level (organisational growth, tactical innovation) effects. Second, outcomes are indirect as often as direct; protests shape electoral outcomes, party positions, and media agendas, which in turn shape policy. Third, outcomes are conditional on mediating factors including political opportunities, movement strategies, and counter-movement mobilisation. Fourth, outcomes require temporal specification; effects that appear immediately may reverse over time, while effects that seem absent initially may emerge years later.

Jaynes (2002) provides historical evidence on the relationship between protest/riots and urban spending, examining how contentious mobilisation shaped distributive outcomes in American cities. Jaynes's research demonstrates that protest and riot activity in the 1960s was associated with subsequent increases in urban spending on social services, housing, and employment programme outcomes that directly benefited protesting communities. Critically, Jaynes (2002) finds that the relationship was not linear; moderate protest activity generated greater spending increases than either very low activity (insufficient pressure) or very high activity/rioting (which triggered backlash and repressive responses). This inverted-U relationship suggests that protest intensity shapes outcomes in complex ways, with optimal impact at moderate levels that signal grievance without alienating potential allies. For Kerala secretariat protests, this finding implies that strategic calibration of protest intensity disruptive enough to generate pressure, restrained enough to maintain legitimacy may be essential for achieving outcomes.

Giugni and Bosi (19450) this appears to be a typographical anomaly in your reference; the chapter is likely from a 2000s publication on establishment responses to protest) examine how protest movements impact political establishments, developing analytical models for understanding power dynamics. Their framework distinguishes between instrumental outcomes (movements achieve stated goals), structural outcomes (movements change institutional arrangements or political alignments), and symbolic outcomes (movements shift public discourse or cultural norms). Giugni and Bosi argue that protest movements are most likely to achieve outcomes when they combine external mobilisation (protest, disruption) with internal advocacy (lobbying, litigation, electoral engagement). Purely external strategies generate pressure without access; purely internal strategies generate access without pressure; only the combination generates both. This "dual strategy" proposition resonates with Weldon's (2012) findings reviewed in Theme 4 and has direct applicability to Kerala secretariat protests.

Giugni (2007) directly addresses the sceptical question of protest utility through time-series analysis of ecology, antinuclear, and peace movements in the United States (1977-1995). His title "Useless Protest?" poses the question that the analysis then answers. Giugni (2007) finds that protests were not useless; they exerted significant effects on policy outcomes across multiple issue areas. However, those effects were indirect, operating primarily through agenda-setting (shifting congressional and media attention to movement issues) and public opinion (changing citizen attitudes, which then influenced elected officials). Direct effects of protest demands translated immediately into policy were rare. This finding has profound implications for evaluating protest outcomes: assessing movement impact requires tracing indirect pathways through public opinion and political agendas, not merely scanning for immediate legislative victories. For Kerala secretariat protests, this suggests that even when specific demands are not immediately conceded, protests that shift public discourse and elite attention achieve meaningful outcomes.

Jahan and Rauf (2023) provide contemporary empirical evidence on the impact of social protests on government policy change, examining cases from multiple national contexts. Their research identifies that protest impact is shaped by several factors: protest scale (larger protests generate more impact), sustained duration (episodic protests achieve less than ongoing campaigns), tactical repertoire (diverse tactics prevent government adaptation), framing resonance (demands that connect to widely shared values are more successful), and political context (protests during election periods or government crises achieve more). Jahan and Rauf (2023) also find that new media environments have amplified protest impact by reducing information costs for mobilisation and increasing reputational costs for government repression.

Ulug and Acar (2018) examine protest outcomes through a multi-level social change framework, analysing what happens after protests at individual, group, and societal levels. At the individual level, protest participation produces biographical outcomes: changed political attitudes, new activist identities, altered career trajectories, and sometimes psychological costs (burnout, trauma). At the group level, protest produces movement outcomes: organisational strengthening or weakening, tactical learning, coalition formation or fragmentation, and leadership changes. At the societal level, protest produces political outcomes: policy change, institutional reform, cultural shifts, and altered state-society relations. Ulug and Acar (2018) argue that comprehensive outcome assessment requires analysing all three levels simultaneously, as outcomes at one level condition outcomes at others.

Not all protest outcomes are policy-focused; protests also shape electoral politics. Gillion and Soule (2018) examine the impact of protest on elections in the United States, demonstrating that protest activity influences voter turnout, vote choice, and electoral competitiveness. Their research finds that protests increase political salience of movement issues, which in turn affects how voters evaluate candidates and how candidates position themselves. Protests occurring close to elections have larger effects than those occurring far from election dates, suggesting temporal proximity matters. Protests also generate elite responses that shape electoral outcomes; incumbents who respond repressively may lose support among movement sympathisers, while those who respond accommodatively may gain support.

D'Amato and Schwenken (2018), provide comparative analysis of how political configurations and political culture shape protest impact. Their research, focusing on asylum and deportation protests in Europe, demonstrates that the same protest tactics produce different outcomes depending on: the institutional structure of the state (centralised vs. federal systems create different access points); the partisan composition of government (movement allies vs. opponents in power); the prevailing political culture (rights-oriented vs. security-oriented framing environments); and the presence of European or international pressure (external actors constraining state response options). D'Amato and Schwenken (2018) conclude that protest impact research must be context-sensitive; general claims about "what works" require specification of the political configurations within which protests operate.

2.1.7 Protest as a Process of Claiming Rights in Democracy

This theme is the relationship between protest and democratic rights-claiming. Within democratic theory and socio-legal scholarship, protest is understood not merely as a symptom of political failure but as a constitutive practice of democratic citizenship, a process through which rights are articulated, contested, and realised.

The relationship between protest and democracy is neither straightforward nor universally celebrated, yet a substantial body of scholarship positions protest as integral to democratic functioning. Borovoy (2002) argues that protest movements are not antithetical to democracy but are, properly understood, expressions of democratic vitality. Borovoy contends that democracies thrive when citizens actively monitor state power and voice dissent; protest represents one mechanism among many through which such monitoring occurs. However, Borovoy also cautions that protest movements face a democratic paradox: they must operate within legal frameworks while simultaneously challenging those frameworks' limitations. This

paradox is particularly acute for rights-claiming protests, where the very rights being claimed may not yet be fully recognised within existing legal structures.

Singh (2017) reinforces this perspective, characterising democracy and protest as "interlinked phenomena" rather than opposing forces. Singh argues that democratic systems generate expectations of responsiveness and participation; when institutional channels fail to address grievances, protest emerges as a legitimate indeed, democratically necessary supplement to electoral and legislative processes. This interlinkage is especially visible in contexts where formal rights exist on paper but remain unrealised in practice, a condition familiar to students of Indian democracy where constitutional guarantees have often required sustained protest to achieve implementation.

The legal status of protest as a right has received sustained scholarly attention. Wall (2024) provides a comprehensive analysis of the right to protest, examining its foundations in international human rights law, constitutional provisions, and democratic theory. Wall argues that the right to protest is not merely derivative of freedoms of assembly, expression, and association but has distinctive content: protest is a compound right that exercises these freedoms simultaneously in pursuit of political claim-making. This compound character explains why protest receives particular legal protection but also why it generates distinctive legal controversies regarding time, place, and manner restrictions. Wall further notes that the right to protest is increasingly contested globally, with democratic backsliding in many contexts accompanied by restrictions on protest rights that would previously have been considered illegitimate.

Fenwick (1999) examines the right to protest through the lens of the Human Rights Act and the margin of appreciation doctrine. Although focused on the European context, Fenwick's analysis raises questions of broader relevance: how should democratic states balance the right to protest against competing public interests such as public order, traffic management, and the rights of non-protesters? Fenwick demonstrates that legal frameworks governing protest inevitably reflect contestable judgments about the boundaries of legitimate dissent. The "margin of appreciation" granted to national authorities varies across issue areas and historical contexts, creating an uneven legal landscape that protesters must navigate. For protest movements at the Kerala secretariat, analogous questions arise regarding the legal boundaries of protest at a site of state governance, what restrictions are legitimate, and where does lawful protest become unlawful disruption?

Perhaps the most directly relevant contribution to this research theme is Zivi (2012), who conceptualises rights-claiming as a practice of democratic citizenship rather than merely a legal procedure. Zivi argues that when citizens take to the streets to demand rights whether to housing, healthcare, livelihood, or dignity they are not simply invoking pre-existing legal entitlements. They are, more fundamentally, performing democratic citizenship, enacting the very equality and agency that their claims articulate. Rights-claiming through protest is therefore a performative and pedagogical practice: it teaches both claimants and observers about the content of rights, the failures of existing institutions, and the possibilities for political transformation.

Craig (2007) provides a complementary analysis, examining how civil rights protest functions as a form of ritual protest that shifts the boundaries of public reason. Craig argues that protest is not merely instrumental seeking specific policy changes but also constitutive, reshaping what can be said, by whom, and in what forums. Civil rights protest, in particular, deploys embodied presence in public space to challenge exclusionary norms of rational deliberation. When marginalised groups protest, they contest not only substantive injustices but also procedural assumptions about who counts as a legitimate political speaker. This framework illuminates how protest claiming rights at the Kerala secretariat may operate on multiple levels: seeking immediate concessions while also contesting enduring exclusions from democratic deliberation.

Meyer (2012) situates protest within the broader political process, examining how contentious politics interacts with conventional democratic institutions. Meyer argues that protest and institutional politics are not separate spheres but deeply intertwined: protest is shaped by institutional opportunities and constraints; conversely, protest reshapes institutional agendas, membership, and procedures. This dynamic relationship means that protest effectiveness cannot be assessed by examining protest in isolation; analysts must attend to how protest interacts with elections, legislatures, courts, bureaucracy, and media. Meyer's political process framework provides analytical resources for understanding why some protest movements achieve rights recognition while others fail success depends not only on movement characteristics but on the broader institutional environment within which protest occurs.

Della Porta (2014) extends this analysis through examination of mobilisation for democracy in Europe. Della Porta demonstrates that protest movements often emerge precisely when democratic institutions are perceived as unresponsive or captured by elite interests. In such

contexts, protest serves dual functions: expressing substantive demands (for specific policies) while simultaneously articulating procedural demands (for more responsive, inclusive, or accountable institutions). This dual character is particularly evident in rights-claiming protests, where the demand for a specific right (e.g., housing, healthcare) is inseparable from a demand for more democratic decision-making processes.

Volk (2021) provides a radical democratic theoretical perspective on political protest, examining both potentials and shortcomings. Drawing on traditions of radical democracy, Volk argues that protest is not merely a supplement to democratic institutions but a constitutive moment of democratic politics, the moment when those excluded from prevailing political orders assert their presence and demand recognition. From this perspective, rights claimed through protest are not simply pre-existing legal entitlements that protesters enforce; they are created through the act of claiming, as protesters articulate new rights, new interpretations of existing rights, or new subjects entitled to rights. Volk acknowledges shortcomings of this perspective (potential for instability, difficulties of institutionalisation) but argues that radical democratic theory captures dimensions of protest its creative, disruptive, and subject-forming character that liberal legal frameworks obscure.

Davies, Ryan, and Peña (2016) provide a global, comparative perspective on protest, social movements, and democracy since the 2011 wave of uprisings. Their edited collection examines how protest movements worldwide have claimed rights against a backdrop of neoliberal globalisation, democratic stagnation, and emerging digital mobilisation technologies. Key insights include the observation that contemporary protests increasingly claim "democratic" rights broadly conceived rights to participation, transparency, and accountability rather than narrowly sectoral demands. This "democratic turn" in protest movements means that even protests focused on economic grievances articulate these grievances as democratic deficits: the problem is not only that policies are harmful but that they were made without adequate popular participation.

2.1.8 Protest Spaces and Institutional Context

Hatuka (2018) provides a foundational analysis of how protest works through the design of public space. Unlike scholars who treat space as a neutral background, Hatuka argues that the physical layout of streets, buildings, barriers, and open areas actively shapes what protesters can do. He introduces the concept of "choreographing" political demonstrations, meaning that protesters and police both read the space and move through it in patterned ways. A wide square

allows for mass gatherings. A narrow street creates bottlenecks. The presence of steps, walls, gates, and fences changes what kinds of protest are possible. Hatuka's work is directly relevant to the Kerala secretariat, which is not an open plaza but a working government compound with gates, security posts, and designated areas for public interaction. Understanding protest there requires understanding the physical space itself.

Gukelberger and Meyer (2022) take a different but related approach, looking at how protest movements become institutions in their own right. They argue that institutions are not just formal organisations with written rules. Institutions are also carried in bodies, repeated in daily practices, and sustained through time and effect. When people protest regularly at the same place, they build an "embodied institution" through habit, memory, and shared feeling. This perspective helps explain why some protest sites become sacred or symbolic over time. A place where people have protested for years carries meaning that a new protester learns without being told.

Bishara (2021) pushes this line of thinking further. He argues that time and space are not just containers for protest; they are generative. That means they actively produce new possibilities for action. Bishara shows through comparative cases that when protesters occupy space for extended periods, new forms of organisation, new relationships, and new political claims emerge. A one-hour march produces one set of outcomes. A week-long sit-in produces something completely different. The space itself who controls it, who can access it, how long protesters can stay shapes what protesters can imagine and demand. This insight matters for the Kerala secretariat because protest durations vary enormously. Some groups come, shout slogans, and leave within an hour. Others camp for days or weeks. Bishara's work suggests these different durations produce qualitatively different protest experiences and outcomes.

Koopmans (2004) provides a broader framework for understanding how protest moves through time and space. He writes about "waves of contention" periods when protest activity rises sharply across multiple issues and groups before eventually declining. Within these waves, protest spreads from one location to another, from one issue to another, and from one group to another. Koopmans argues that understanding any single protest requires locating it within these larger waves. A protest at the Kerala secretariat in 2020 may look very different if we know that 2019 saw a wave of agricultural protests across the state or that 2021 saw a wave of labour unrest. The wave provides the context. The single protest is one moment in a larger pattern.

Nield (2012) writes about the relationship between power, protest, and public space with a focus on theatre and performance. But her insights apply directly to political protest. She argues that when people gather in public space to protest, they are "siting the people" making visible a collective body that usually remains invisible. The act of gathering in a particular place at a particular time is a performance of citizenship. Nield shows that authorities understand this perfectly. That is why they often try to move protesters away from symbolic locations. A protest at the secretariat gates is more threatening to those in power than the same protest half a kilometre away. The site itself carries meaning.

Bereni (2021) offers a different but complementary perspective, examining how protest movements become institutionalised over time. She uses the concept of "field" to analyse how collective protest is organised, funded, and sustained. Her argument is that even radical movements develop routines, hierarchies, and relationships with the state. This institutionalisation happens not just in formal organisations but in the spatial arrangements of protest. Where movements hold meetings, who controls access to protest spaces, and what relationships exist with local authorities all reflect institutionalisation.

Dufour (2021) argues that comparative studies of protest have paid too much attention to national contexts and not enough to local spaces of protest. She draws on critical geography to show that the same national protest wave looks very different in different cities or neighbourhoods. Local conditions, the layout of streets, the history of policing, the density of civil society, and the political loyalties of local officials shape protest in ways that national-level analysis misses. This is a crucial insight for my research. The Kerala secretariat is located in Thiruvananthapuram, the state capital. The city has its own political culture, its own police commissioner, its own local media.

Rollmann and colleagues (2017) provide an international, comparative study of protest camps. A protest camp is not just a demonstration that lasts several days. It is a different form of political action altogether. Camps create alternative social arrangements: kitchens, medical tents, childcare, legal aid, decision-making assemblies. They demonstrate, through their very existence, that another way of organising society is possible. Rollmann and colleagues examine how camps use space, how they manage infrastructure, and how they relate to media. For the Kerala secretariat, protest camps have become a recurring feature. Different groups have camped at the secretariat gates for weeks or months. These camps generate their own internal dynamics and their own relationships with authorities.

Rojo (2014) examines the Occupy movement to show how discourse and space work together in global protest movements. She argues that the physical occupation of space is itself a form of communication. When protesters occupy a square, they are saying something that cannot be said in a press release or a petition. The occupation speaks. Rojo analyses how Occupy protesters used signs, chants, assemblies, and the arrangement of tents to send messages to the public and to those in power. The same dynamics appear at the Kerala secretariat, though in a different form. The slogans protesters choose, the banners they hang on the gate, the way they arrange themselves in relation to the building all of this communicates meaning through space

Dorward and Fox (2022) take a different scale of analysis, examining protest events in African cities through multilevel modelling. Their finding is that both population pressure (density, youth bulge, urbanisation) and political institutions (democratic quality, rule of law, civil liberties) predict protest frequency and intensity. Cities with more people, more young people, and less responsive governments see more protest. But they also find that the relationship is not simple. Dense cities may generate more grievances, but they also generate more surveillance and control. The same density that enables mobilisation also enables repression.

2.2. RESEARCH GAP

First, many studies have looked at protests in Kerala and some have specifically examined agitations at the Secretariat, no one has seriously asked why the Secretariat itself matters as a place for claiming rights. Researchers have studied protests in streets, public squares, and outside legislative buildings, but they have not explained how the act of claiming rights changes when people gather right at the doorstep of the administrative heart of the state. We do not know what this particular location does to the protest or what the protest does to the meaning of that building. This is a gap because the Secretariat is not just any public space, it is where the government actually works and protesting there is likely different from protesting elsewhere, but existing literature has not explored this.

Second, most studies focus on the conflict between protesters and the government, asking whether movements won or lost or whether the state responded fairly or harshly. Very few researchers have looked inside the protest movements themselves. When a large crowd gathers at the Secretariat claiming democratic rights, does everyone inside that crowd get a fair voice? Do leaders sometimes act in ways that contradict the very democracy they say they are fighting for? Are some people within the movement silenced or pushed aside? This internal side of

protest, the tensions, exclusions, and contradictions within a movement that claims to stand for universal rights has not been carefully examined in the Kerala context.

Third, there is plenty of writing about individual protests at the Secretariat, such as those in the 1990s, the 2012 agitations, or more recent ones. But each study treats its protest as a fresh, isolated event. Nobody has connected these events across time. Does a protest today learn from a protest twenty years ago at the same spot? Do organisers remember what tactics worked and which ones failed? Do they deliberately copy or avoid older methods? We have no study that follows this long thread of protest memory at the Secretariat across different decades. This is a gap because protest is often shaped by what came before, yet no research has traced how methods of claiming rights at this specific site are passed down and adapted or forgotten over time.

Another important limitation in the existing literature is the tendency to treat protest movements as homogeneous groups. Many studies refer to movements such as farmers' protests, students' protests, or workers' protests as though all participants share the same views, objectives, and experiences. In reality, protest movements are far more diverse. A single protest often includes political party members, trade union representatives, civil society activists, affected individuals, and ordinary citizens who participate for different reasons. Their understanding of rights, expectations from the government, and methods of participation may vary considerably. Similarly, movement leaders and ordinary participants may have different perspectives on the goals and direction of the protest. However, these internal differences receive limited attention in existing research. By focusing primarily on the movement as a single collective entity, many studies overlook the diversity of voices and experiences that exist within it. Examining these differences is essential for developing a deeper sociological understanding of democratic protest and the complex processes through which citizens claim their rights.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Research methodology is an important part of every research study as it explains the methods and procedures adopted to achieve the objectives of the research. It provides a systematic framework for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, thereby ensuring the reliability and validity of the study. The selection of an appropriate methodology depends on the nature of the research problem, the objectives of the study, and the type of information required.

The present study, titled "Claiming Rights through Democratic Protest: Case Studies of Protest Movements at the Kerala Secretariat," examines how democratic protests function as a means through which people claim their rights and seek government intervention. In a democratic society, protest is an important form of public participation that enables citizens to express their grievances, demand justice, and influence public policy. The Kerala Secretariat, as the administrative headquarters of the Government of Kerala, has historically served as a major venue where different sections of society organise protests to bring their concerns before the government. Workers, students, women, farmers, government employees, and various social organisations regularly assemble at the Secretariat to raise issues related to employment, social justice, labour rights, environmental protection, and public welfare.

The present research seeks to understand the nature of these protest movements, the demands raised by different groups, the methods adopted to mobilise public support, the response of the government, and the outcomes of these protests. Since the study focuses on people's experiences, perceptions, and interactions within a specific social and political context, a qualitative research approach has been adopted. The study also follows a case study design, enabling an in-depth examination of selected protest movements at the Kerala Secretariat.

To obtain comprehensive and reliable information, both primary and secondary sources of data are used. Primary data are collected through participant observation and semi-structured interviews with protest participants, while secondary data are obtained from newspapers and other relevant documents. The information collected is analyzed thematically to understand the major patterns and issues emerging from the selected case studies.

This chapter explains the research methodology adopted for the study. It includes the research questions, research approach and design, methods of data collection, sampling technique, data analysis, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study. These methodological procedures

provide the foundation for conducting the study in a systematic and scientific manner and help in achieving the objectives of the research.

3.2 CONCEPTUAL AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

This study uses certain key concepts that form the basis of the research. These concepts are defined conceptually to explain their general meaning and operationally to show how they are understood and applied in the context of this study.

1. Claiming Rights

Conceptual Definition

Claiming rights refers to the process through which individuals or groups demand the recognition, protection, and fulfilment of their constitutional, legal, social, economic, and political rights. According to T.H. Marshall (1950), citizenship involves civil, political, and social rights, and citizens actively claim these rights through democratic participation and collective action. In democratic societies, claiming rights often takes the form of public mobilisation and protest when institutional mechanisms fail to address people's grievances.

Operational Definition

In this study, claiming rights refers to the collective efforts of the selected protest groups- ASHA workers, PSC rank holders, and KSRTC employees to demand employment security, fair wages, social security, and administrative justice through democratic protests organized at the Kerala Secretariat.

2. Democratic Protest

Conceptual Definition

Democratic protest is the peaceful and collective expression of public opinion by citizens to communicate their demands, grievances, or opposition to government policies and decisions. It is recognized as an important element of democracy and is protected under Article 19 of the Constitution of India, which guarantees freedom of speech, peaceful assembly, and association. Democratic protest enables citizens to participate in public affairs and hold governments accountable.

Operational Definition

In this study, democratic protest refers to the peaceful protest activities organized by different groups at the Kerala Secretariat, including demonstrations, sit-ins, marches, hunger strikes, and other non-violent forms of collective action undertaken to seek government intervention and claim their rights.

3. Protest Movement

Conceptual Definition

A protest movement is a form of collective action in which individuals or groups organize themselves to address common grievances and bring about social, political, or economic change. Protest movements are an important component of social movements and democratic participation.

Operational Definition

In this study, protest movement refers to the organised collective actions carried out by the three selected groups-ASHA workers, PSC rank holders, and KSRTC employees at the Kerala Secretariat to raise specific demands and influence government decisions.

4. Kerala Secretariat

Conceptual Definition

The Kerala Secretariat is the administrative headquarters of the Government of Kerala and serves as the centre of policy formulation and state administration. It is also a significant public space where citizens and organisations engage with the government through democratic means.

Operational Definition

In this study, the Kerala Secretariat refers to the research setting where the selected protest movements were organised and observed. It is treated as the principal democratic space through which citizens present their demands directly before the Government of Kerala.

3.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research questions are central to any research study because they define the focus and scope of the investigation. They help the researcher identify the key issues that need to be explored and ensure that data collection and analysis remain aligned with the objectives of the study. In

qualitative research, research questions are particularly valuable as they facilitate an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of a social phenomenon.

The present study examines how democratic protest functions as a means of claiming rights at the Kerala Secretariat. The research questions have been developed on the basis of the study objectives and an extensive review of the literature on democratic protest, social movements, and state–citizen relations. They serve as the basis for exploring the selected protest movements and understanding the interaction between protesters and the government.

3.3.1 General Research Question

The study is guided by the following general research question:

How do people use democratic protest at the Kerala Secretariat to claim their rights?

This question seeks to understand the role of democratic protest in enabling citizens to articulate their grievances, demand justice, and seek government intervention. It also examines the significance of the Kerala Secretariat as a democratic public space where citizens and the state interact through processes of collective action and public engagement.

3.3.2 Specific Research Questions

To answer the general research question, the following specific research questions have been framed:

1. What are the different types of protests organised at the Kerala Secretariat?

This question examines the various forms of protest adopted by different groups, such as demonstrations, marches, sit-ins, hunger strikes, and other peaceful methods of collective action. It also explores the nature and characteristics of these protest movements.

2. What are the major demands raised by different protest groups?

This question focuses on the issues that motivate people to organise protests. It seeks to understand the demands related to employment, labour rights, social justice, environmental protection, gender equality, public welfare, and other matters brought before the government.

3. How does the government respond to these protest movements?

This question analyses the response of the government and its agencies to the demands raised by protestors. It examines whether the authorities respond through discussion, negotiation, policy decisions, administrative action, or other measures taken during the course of the protest.

4. What are the outcomes of the selected protest movements?

This question evaluates the effectiveness of democratic protest as a means of claiming rights. It examines whether the selected protest movements resulted in policy changes, administrative decisions, public awareness, or other significant outcomes, while also identifying the challenges faced by the protest groups.

These research questions guide the entire research process and provide a clear framework for collecting, analysing, and interpreting the data. They also help in understanding the relationship between democratic protest, state response, and the process of claiming rights at the Kerala Secretariat.

3.4 RESEARCH APPROACH

The present study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine how democratic protests at the Kerala Secretariat function as a means of claiming rights. Qualitative research is appropriate for studies that seek to understand social experiences, human behaviour, and the meanings people attach to their actions. Since the present study focuses on the experiences of protest participants, their demands, methods of mobilisation, and interactions with the government, a qualitative approach provides a deeper understanding of these issues than quantitative methods.

Qualitative research enables the researcher to study social phenomena in their natural setting. It gives importance to people's views, experiences, and interpretations rather than numerical measurements. In the context of this study, the approach helps to understand why different groups organise protests, how they express their demands, what challenges they encounter, and how they perceive the response of the government. It also allows the researcher to examine the social and political context in which these protest movements take place.

3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study follows a case study research design. A case study is a widely used research design in the social sciences for examining a particular phenomenon in depth within its real-life

context. It enables the researcher to collect detailed information from multiple sources and to understand the complexity of a specific social issue. Since democratic protests differ in their objectives, organisation, and outcomes, the case study method provides an opportunity to analyse each protest movement in detail while also comparing the similarities and differences among them.

The Kerala Secretariat has been selected as the study area because it is the administrative headquarters of the Government of Kerala and one of the most important centres of democratic protest in the state. Citizens from different parts of Kerala gather at the Secretariat to present their demands before the government on issues related to employment, labour rights, social justice, education, environmental protection, and public welfare. Its political and administrative significance makes it an appropriate setting for studying the relationship between democratic protest and the process of claiming rights.

The study focuses on three selected protest movements organised at the Kerala Secretariat. These cases have been chosen because they represent different social groups and different forms of rights-based struggles. By examining these cases in depth, the study seeks to understand the issues raised by the protesters, the strategies adopted during the protest, the response of the government, and the outcomes of the movements. The comparison of these cases provides a broader understanding of how democratic protest operates in contemporary Kerala.

3.6 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is an important stage in the research process, as the quality of the findings depends largely on the information gathered by the researcher. The choice of data collection methods is determined by the objectives of the study and the nature of the research problem. Since the present study adopts a qualitative research approach, methods that provide detailed and descriptive information have been selected. These methods enable the researcher to understand the experiences, opinions, and perspectives of the participants, as well as the social and political context of the selected protest movements.

The study makes use of both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected through participant observation and semi-structured interviews with individuals who were directly involved in the selected protest movements at the Kerala Secretariat. These methods provided first-hand information regarding the reasons for the protests, the demands

raised, the strategies adopted by the protest groups, and their experiences during the course of the agitation. Direct interaction with participants also helped the researcher understand their perceptions of the government's response and the outcomes of their protests.

Secondary data were collected from newspaper reports and other relevant published materials. Newspapers provided valuable information regarding the background of the protest movements, the sequence of events, official statements, media coverage, and public reactions. The use of secondary sources helped verify and supplement the information obtained through fieldwork, thereby improving the credibility of the study.

The use of multiple methods of data collection, commonly referred to as triangulation, strengthens the reliability of qualitative research by allowing information from one source to be compared with evidence obtained from other sources. This approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of the selected protest movements and reduces the possibility of relying on a single source of information.

This will describe in detail the methods adopted for collecting data in the present study: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and newspaper sources.

3.7 SAMPLING

Sampling is the process of selecting participants and cases for a research study. In qualitative research, the purpose of sampling is to obtain detailed and meaningful information from participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon under study. Therefore, the study adopts purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique in which cases and participants are selected based on their relevance to the objectives of the research.

The study focuses on three selected protest movements organised at the Kerala Secretariat. These cases were purposively selected because they represent different forms of democratic protests and involve diverse groups claiming their rights before the state. The selected protest movements are:

1. ASHA Workers' Protest – This protest was organised by Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA workers), who demanded an increase in their monthly honorarium, timely payment of wages, retirement benefits, and better working conditions. As frontline health workers, they raised concerns regarding inadequate remuneration despite their significant contribution to the public health system.

2. PSC Rank Holders' Protest – This movement was organised by candidates included in the Kerala Public Service Commission (PSC) rank lists, particularly the Women Civil Police Officer (WCPO) rank holders. Their main demand was the timely appointment of eligible candidates before the expiry of the rank list. They protested against delays in recruitment and demanded greater transparency and fairness in the appointment process.

3. KSRTC Employees' Protest – This protest involved employees of the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC), who demanded the regular payment of salaries and pensions, improved service conditions, and effective measures to address the financial difficulties faced by the Corporation. They also raised concerns about job security and the welfare of employees and pensioners.

These protest movements were selected because they reflect different dimensions of rights-based struggles, including labour rights, employment rights, and social security. They also represent different categories of protesters, such as women health workers, educated job seekers, and organised labour, thereby providing a broader understanding of democratic protest at the Kerala Secretariat.

The participants for the study were selected from among those who were directly involved in these protest movements, including protest participants, organisers, and leaders. Their experiences and perspectives provided valuable insights into the reasons for the protests, the methods of mobilisation, the response of the government, and the outcomes of the movements.

The use of purposive sampling enabled the researcher to select information-rich cases that were closely related to the objectives of the study. The selected cases provide a comprehensive understanding of how different social groups use democratic protest as a means of claiming their rights at the Kerala Secretariat.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is an important stage in qualitative research, as it helps the researcher organise, interpret, and draw meaningful conclusions from the information collected during the study. The study adopts thematic analysis to analyse the data obtained through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and newspaper sources. Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research because it enables the researcher to identify recurring patterns, themes, and meanings within the collected data.

The process of data analysis began after the completion of fieldwork. The information collected through interviews and participant observation was carefully reviewed and organised. Field notes prepared during the observation of protest movements at the Kerala Secretariat were also examined in detail. Newspaper reports and other secondary sources were analysed to understand the background of the protest movements and to verify the information obtained from the participants.

The collected data were read repeatedly to gain a clear understanding of the experiences, opinions, and views expressed by the participants. Similar ideas and responses were grouped together and classified into meaningful categories. Based on these categories, major themes were developed in accordance with the objectives and research questions of the study.

The major themes identified for analysis include the nature of protest movements, the demands raised by different protest groups, methods and strategies adopted during the protests, the response of the government and law enforcement agencies, challenges faced by the protesters, and the outcomes of the protest movements. These themes provided a framework for understanding how democratic protest functions as a means of claiming rights at the Kerala Secretariat.

The findings from the three selected case studies-the ASHA Workers' Protest, the PSC Rank Holders' Protest, and the KSRTC Employees' Protest were analysed both individually and comparatively. This comparative analysis helped identify similarities and differences in the issues raised, methods of protest, government responses, and the effectiveness of each movement. The use of thematic analysis enabled the researcher to present the findings in a systematic manner while maintaining the original meaning of the participants' experiences.

Thus, thematic analysis was found to be the most appropriate method for the present study as it facilitated an in-depth understanding of democratic protest and the process of claiming rights in the context of the Kerala Secretariat.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are an essential part of every research study, particularly in qualitative research, where the researcher interacts directly with participants. The present study was conducted by following the basic principles of research ethics to ensure that the rights, dignity, and privacy of all participants were respected throughout the research process.

Before collecting data, the participants were informed about the purpose and objectives of the study. They were clearly informed that the research was purely academic and conducted as part of the M.A. Sociology studies. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and no participant was forced or pressured to take part in the interviews or discussions. Participants were also informed that they had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any stage without giving any reason.

The researcher obtained the consent of the participants before conducting the interviews. Every effort was made to create a comfortable environment so that participants could express their views and experiences freely. Since the study deals with protest movements and public issues, the research maintains neutrality during data collection and avoided influencing the opinions or responses of the participants.

Confidentiality and privacy were given due importance throughout the study. Personal information collected from the participants was kept confidential and used only for academic purposes. The names and identities of the participants have not been disclosed in the dissertation unless the information was already available in the public domain and relevant to the study. Care was also taken to ensure that the information collected was presented accurately without misrepresentation or distortion.

The researcher also maintained honesty and integrity in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. Information obtained from interviews, participant observation, and newspaper sources was carefully verified to ensure the credibility of the findings. Proper acknowledgement has been given to all published sources used in the study in order to avoid plagiarism and to uphold academic ethics.

By following these ethical principles, the study seeks to ensure that the research process remains responsible, transparent, and respectful towards the participants while maintaining the academic quality of the researcher.

3.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Every research study has certain limitations that may influence the scope and interpretation of its findings. The present study is no exception. Although every effort has been made to conduct the research systematically, a few limitations should be acknowledged.

The study is confined to three selected protest movements at the Kerala Secretariat, namely the ASHA Workers' Protest, the PSC Rank Holders' Protest, and the KSRTC Employees' Protest.

Since the research focuses only on these case studies, the findings cannot be generalised to all protest movements in Kerala. The selected cases are intended to provide an in-depth understanding of democratic protest rather than a comprehensive account of every protest organised at the Secretariat.

The geographical scope of the study is limited to the Kerala Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram, which is one of the major centres of democratic protest in the state. Protest movements taking place in other parts of Kerala have not been included in the study. Therefore, the findings should be understood within the context of the selected study area.

As the study follows a qualitative research approach, much of the information is based on the experiences, perceptions, and opinions of the participants. Individual responses may differ according to personal experiences and perspectives. Although efforts were made to cross-check the information using participant observation and newspaper reports, some degree of subjectivity is unavoidable in qualitative research.

The study was also conducted within a limited period, which restricted the opportunity for prolonged field observation and interaction with a larger number of participants. In addition, access to some participants and relevant documents was limited due to practical constraints such as time, availability, and the changing nature of protest movements.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into how democratic protest functions as a means of claiming rights at the Kerala Secretariat. The use of multiple sources of data and an in-depth case study approach has strengthened the credibility of the findings and contributed to a better understanding of state citizen relations and democratic participation in Kerala.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the research methodology adopted for the study titled "Claiming Rights through Democratic Protest: Case Studies of Protest Movements at the Kerala Secretariat." It explained the methodological framework followed to achieve the objectives of the research and to answer the research questions in a systematic manner. The study adopted a qualitative research approach with a case study research design to examine democratic protest as a means of claiming rights. Purposive sampling was used to select three protest movements at the Kerala Secretariat-the ASHA Workers' Protest, the PSC Rank Holders' Protest, and the KSRTC Employees' Protest as the case studies for the research. Data were collected through

participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and newspaper sources, enabling the researcher to obtain information from both primary and secondary sources. The chapter also described the method of data analysis, ethical considerations followed during the research process, and the limitations of the study. The use of thematic analysis helped to organize and interpret the data in relation to the objectives and research questions. Ethical principles such as informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and academic integrity were maintained throughout the study. The methodology adopted for the present study provides a suitable framework for understanding how different social groups use democratic protest to claim their rights at the Kerala Secretariat. The following chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the selected case studies and discusses the major findings of the research.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 CASE NARRATIVES

CASE 1. ASHA Work Protest

This case was one of the longest protests by female employees in the states. This case examines the protest organized by Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers in Kerala between February 10, 2025 and November 1, 2025. The protest took place outside the Kerala Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram. I interviewed five Asha workers for this study. This chapter analyses their accounts and interprets what these accounts mean for understanding how marginalized workers claim rights through democratic protest in Kerala.

Asha workers are community health volunteers. They were appointed under the National Rural Health Mission in 2005. Their work includes maternal and child health, immunization, and facilitating access to primary health care in rural areas. Asha staff are not considered government employees even though they carry out tasks that are similar to those of regular employment. Instead of salary, they receive honoraria based on their performance. In India, workers and the federal and state governments have been at odds over this designation for a long time.

The protests in Kerala started after the state administration imposed restrictions on honoraria payments. If the population coverage in their designated areas was below predetermined levels, workers would be deducted. The demands for regular income, retirement benefits, and the elimination of conditional payment arrangements were heightened by this strategy. It was a recent history, lasting 266 days. Hunger strikes, ongoing sit-ins, and symbolic actions like shaving one's head were all part of the protest. These strategies brought the workers' predicament to the attention of both domestic and foreign audiences.

The choice to hold the protest at the Kerala Secretariat was intentional. The Secretariat is where the Chief Minister, the Health Minister, and other important departments are located. Protesting here made the workers visible to the government they wanted to influence. During the protest, there were two rounds of talks with the Health Minister. Some concessions were made, including two separate honorarium increases, first of ₹1,000 and then another ₹1,000. However, the main demand for a minimum daily wage of ₹700 (₹21,000 monthly) was not met. After the protest, the central government announced a one-time payment of ₹50,000 for workers with over ten years of service and increased the fixed incentive to ₹1,500. Despite

these achievements, Asha workers said they would return to the Secretariat on February 10, 2026, showing that their demands were not fully met.

This case is explored through six themes identified from the interview guide. These themes include: the nature and duration of the protest, the selection of protest location, methods of protest and forms of action, government reactions and negotiations, impacts and outcomes, and personal experiences of involvement. Each theme is analysed by presenting the responses from the five participants. When possible, articles from the protest period are utilized to confirm or challenge the claims made by the respondents. The chapter concludes with an interpretation that links the findings to the larger question of how democratic protest serves as a tool for asserting rights in modern Kerala.

1. Background information

Profile of Respondents

Five Asha workers participated in this study. All five were present at the Kerala Secretariat protest between February and November 2025. Interviews were conducted in December 2025, approximately one month after the protest officially ended. Each respondent was given a pseudonym to protect her identity. Their actual names, home districts, and specific duty locations are withheld by mutual agreement.

Respondent 1: age 48, worked as an Asha volunteer for sixteen years. She was the most experienced respondent. Her role as a District Committee Member meant she participated in negotiations with government officials during the protest. She remained at the Secretariat for all 266 days.

Respondent 2: age 39, had eleven years of experience. She served as a Local Union Representative in Kollam district. Her responsibilities included mobilising Asha workers from her area to join the protest. She attended the protest for 200 days, returning home periodically to manage family obligations.

Respondent 3: aged 45, had fourteen years of experience. She was an ordinary member with no formal position in KAHWA. Her participation lasted 120 days. She joined the protest in two separate stretches rather than continuously.

Respondent 4: aged 36, had nine years of experience. She was also an ordinary member. Her participation lasted 90 days, the shortest duration among the respondents. She cited family responsibilities as the reason for not staying longer.

Respondent 5: aged 42, had twelve years of experience. She held a State Executive Member position in KAHWA. She remained at the Secretariat for the full 266 days. Her role involved coordinating with the media and speaking at public gatherings during the protest.

All five respondents were married. Four had school-going children. Three reported that their husbands initially opposed their participation in the protest. Two said their husbands supported them from the beginning. These personal circumstances shaped how long each respondent could remain away from home. The analysis in the following sections takes these differences into account when interpreting what each respondent said about the protest experience.

Analysis

This section analyses the 5 respondent responses across six themes derived from the interview guide. Each theme begins with a brief framing statement, followed by presentation of what respondents reported and then triangulation with newspaper reports from the protest period. Where respondents disagreed or offered contrasting accounts, those differences are noted.

Theme 1: Nature of the Protest

All five respondents identified the core issue as inadequate honorarium and the absence of retirement benefits. Four respondents specifically mentioned the conditional payment system introduced by the state government as the immediate trigger for the protest. R5, who held a State Executive position, described the conditions as "impossible to meet" for ASHA workers in low-population areas.

On the duration of the protest, all five respondents stated that they did not expect the protest to last 266 days when they first arrived at the Secretariat. R1 said, "We thought two weeks, maybe one month. Then the government would listen." R3, who participated for 120 days, said, "Each week we thought tomorrow would be the end. Then tomorrow became next week, and next week became next month."

The newspaper record confirms the protest began on February 10, 2025 and concluded on November 1, 2025, making it a 266-day continuous agitation. Reports describe it as one of the longest agitations waged by women workers in the State. The primary demands reported in the

press match what respondents identified: increase in monthly honorarium from ₹7,000 to ₹21,000, retirement benefit of ₹5 lakh, withdrawal of conditional payment criteria, and reversal of the retirement age at 62.

R5 explained that the government's initial response was to argue that the responsibility for increasing the honorarium rested with the Central Government. According to her, *"They kept telling us to go to Delhi. But we knew the conditions came from Thiruvananthapuram, not Delhi."* Her statement reflects the perception among protesters that the State Government also had a significant role in addressing their demands. Newspaper reports published in March 2025 support this observation. State ministers maintained that a permanent solution would be possible only if the Central Government recognised ASHA workers as healthcare professionals. At the same time, these reports pointed out that the honorarium linked to performance and working conditions was implemented through the State Government's policy framework.

Theme 2: Choice of the Secretariat as the Protest Location

All five respondents identified the Kerala Secretariat as the most appropriate place to stage their protest. They viewed it as the centre of administrative decision-making, where key government authorities responsible for policy decisions are located. R2 explained, *"That is where the Chief Minister sits. That is where the Health Minister sits. Where else would we go?"* Similarly, R4 observed, *"If we protest in our villages, no one notices. In front of the Secretariat, the whole state watches."* These responses indicate that the protesters selected the Secretariat because they believed it would provide greater visibility and improve the likelihood of government attention.

Most respondents felt that the location played an important role in attracting media coverage and public support. R1 stated, *"Every newspaper, every television channel came to the Secretariat. They would not have come to our panchayat."* R5 also noted, *"Even national media came. That would never happen if we protested somewhere else."* Their observations suggest that the Secretariat offered a platform where local concerns could reach a much wider audience.

However, not every participant believed that media attention resulted in immediate government action. R3 offered a different perspective, stating, *"Yes, the media came. But did that change anything quickly? No. It still took 266 days."* This response highlights the difference between gaining public visibility and achieving a timely policy response.

Secondary data further reinforce the strategic importance of the protest location. Newspaper reports indicate that the demonstration outside the Kerala Secretariat received continuous coverage in both state and national media. The protest site was visited by political leaders, including the Leader of the Opposition, V.D. Satheesan, and the issue was discussed in both the Kerala Legislative Assembly and the Parliament of India. Some reports also noted that the movement attracted national and international attention, reflecting the wider impact of the protest.

The Secretariat also provided protesters with direct access to government officials. R5 explained that protest leaders could seek meetings with ministers and senior officials who were working inside the Secretariat. According to her, this physical proximity increased opportunities for dialogue and made it more difficult for the authorities to ignore the concerns raised by the protesters.

Theme 3: Protest Strategies and activities

Respondents described multiple forms of protest used during the 266 days. These included continuous sit-in, periodic hunger strikes, marches, and symbolic acts. The most striking strategy reported by all five respondents was the decision by some workers to cut or shave their hair.

R2, who witnessed the hair-cutting protest, recalled the emotional atmosphere of the demonstration. She explained, *"On the 50th day, some women shaved their heads. Others cut their hair and held it in their hands while marching. We wanted to show that our lives were being cut, piece by piece, by this government."* Her statement illustrates how the protesters used symbolic acts to communicate the depth of their suffering. R4 shared a similar view, stating, *"People who saw it on television could not look away. That was the point."* According to her, the purpose of the protest was to create a powerful visual message that would attract public attention and encourage wider discussion of their demands.

R1 explained that these forms of protest were adopted only after other methods had failed to produce a meaningful response. She stated, *"We had tried everything else. Protests, meetings, requests. Nothing worked. So we did something that would make people stop and ask why."* This response suggests that the protesters viewed symbolic action as a strategy to increase public visibility and place greater pressure on the government.

The respondents also described the physical and emotional challenges associated with the hunger strike. R5 remarked, *"Women with children, with families, stopped eating. Some for five days, some for twelve days. That is not easy. That is not a game."* Her account highlights the personal sacrifices made by the participants and reflects the seriousness with which they pursued their demands.

These interview findings are consistent with newspaper reports published during the protest. Reports from **31 March 2025**, marking the fiftieth day of the agitation, documented that several ASHA workers shaved their heads and cut their hair before marching along M.G. Road in Thiruvananthapuram while carrying the cut hair in their hands. One protester was quoted as saying, *"It's our lives that are being cut. This is our protest against ministers who turn a blind eye to our pain."* The General Secretary of the Kerala ASHA Health Workers Association (KAHWA), **M.A. Bindu**, described the hair-cutting demonstration as a unique and powerful form of resistance that reflected the protesters' growing frustration.

Media reports also recorded the continuation of the hunger strike into early April 2025, with some participants fasting for more than fifteen days. Despite heavy rainfall and extreme heat, the protesters remained at the protest site. One report described how the women continued their demonstration even during intense rain, refusing to leave the venue. Such reports reinforce the respondents' accounts of determination and resilience throughout the prolonged protest.

Not every participant, however, took part in every form of protest. R3 explained, *"I supported those who did it. But I could not do it myself. My family would not have understood."* Her response shows that although the movement functioned collectively, individuals participated according to their personal circumstances and family responsibilities. This finding indicates that collective action within the protest accommodated different levels of participation while maintaining a shared commitment to the movement's overall objectives.

Theme 4: Government Response and Negotiations

Respondents described the government's response as initially dismissive, then gradually shifting toward negotiation. R1 said, *"For the first two months, they acted as if we did not exist. Then they started sending junior officers to talk to us. Then finally the Minister met us."*

R5 described the negotiation process as frustrating. She said, "They would meet us, listen, say they understood, and then nothing would change. Then we would have to protest harder. Then they would meet us again. It was a cycle."

R2 expressed anger at how the government handled negotiations. She said, "They tried to divide us. They said, 'Take this small increase and go home.' But we said no. We wanted our full demand."

All five respondents noted that the government repeatedly tried to shift responsibility to the central government. R4 said, "Every time we asked for more honorarium, they said, 'Ask Delhi.' But we knew the conditions came from here."

In March 2025, a government minister stated that "a permanent solution can only be achieved if the central government agrees to recognise ASHA workers as healthcare professionals" . Labour Minister V Sivankutty remarked that the shorn locks from the hair-cutting protest "should be sent to Delhi through central ministers".

However, reports also show that the state government eventually conceded partial victories. On October 30, 2025, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan announced a ₹1,000 hike in monthly honorarium, raising it from ₹7,000 to ₹8,000. The government also withdrew the conditional criteria for honorarium distribution and the order mandating retirement at age 62. A committee was constituted to examine the workers' demands.

R5 acknowledged these concessions but described them as insufficient. "They gave us ₹1,000. That is ₹33 per day. That is not victory. That is an insult." R1 added, "We asked for ₹21,000. They gave ₹1,000. That is not negotiation. That is mockery."

One newspaper report from October 2025 quotes M.A. Bindu saying the hike was "a small amount" but also "an important victory" because "everyone including the chief minister have realised who has to give the honorarium". This matches R1's statement that the government "bent its knees" by acknowledging state responsibility for payment.

Theme 5: Impact of the protest

When asked whether the protest helped bring attention to their issue, all five respondents said yes. R2 said, "Before this protest, no one knew what an ASHA worker did. Now everyone knows." R5 said, "We became a national story. That has never happened before."

Regarding changes or improvements, respondents identified several outcomes. Four mentioned the regularisation of monthly payments. R1 said, "Earlier, five months of honorarium would be pending. Now we get paid every month on time." Three respondents mentioned the withdrawal of conditional payment criteria. R3 said, "That was a major demand. We achieved that."

However, all five respondents noted that the core demands remained unmet. R4 said, "We still do not get ₹21,000. We still do not have retirement benefits. The fight is not over." R5 added, "We ended the Secretariat protest, but we said clearly that we will continue at the district level."

Two respondents mentioned the central government's response as an unexpected outcome. R1 said, "The Union government announced ₹1,500 fixed incentive and ₹50,000 for those who completed ten years. That happened because of our protest."

The state government conceded: monthly honorarium increased by ₹1,000, conditional payment criteria withdrawn, retirement age order reversed, and pending dues settled. The central government approved a fixed incentive of ₹1,500 and a retirement benefit of ₹50,000 for ASHA workers completing ten years of service.

However, reports also confirm that the core demands remained unmet. KAHWA announced that the struggle would continue at the district level until the demands of ₹21,000 monthly honorarium and ₹5 lakh retirement benefit are met. A pledge rally was held on November 1, 2025, and a historic rally was planned for February 10, 2026, marking one year of the protest.

The Kerala High Court closed a public interest litigation on the matter after being informed of the ₹1,000 hike, noting that workers could seek recourse for remaining grievances in competent courts.

Theme 6: Personal Experience

When asked why they personally decided to participate, respondents gave varied answers. R1 said, "I have been an ASHA worker for sixteen years. Sixteen years of low pay, no benefits, no recognition. I had to do something for myself and for the younger women coming after me."

R2 spoke about financial pressure. I could not pay my children's school fees. I could not pay my loan instalments. The bank was sending notices. I had nothing to lose by protesting.

R3 described a sense of collective responsibility. I did not want to come at first. But then I saw other women leaving their homes, their children, and I thought, if they can do it, I can do it.

R4 said, I wanted my daughter to see that women can fight for their rights. She is twelve years old. She watched me on television. She told me she was proud.

R5, as a leader, said, I had no choice. Once the protest started, I could not leave. The other women looked to me. If I left, they would lose hope.

When asked how participation affected them personally or professionally, all five reported difficulties. R1 said she lost wages during the protest period. R2 said her husband threatened to leave her. R3 said her neighbours criticised her for abandoning her family. R4 said her children struggled in school without her supervision. R5 said she faced health problems from sleeping at the protest site for 266 days.

Despite these difficulties, all five respondents said they would participate again. R3 said, It was hard. Very hard. But what is the alternative? To work like a slave for ₹232 per day for the rest of my life?

On whether protests are an effective way to claim rights in a democracy, all five said yes, with conditions. R1 said, "Protests work, but only if you are willing to suffer. The government does not listen to requests. It listens to pressure." R2 said, "Democracy means the right to protest. But that right means nothing if you do not use it." R5 added, "Protest is not the only way. But sometimes it is the only way left."

Newspaper reports from the protest period capture similar sentiments. One protester told a reporter, "We won't work like slaves for a meagre wage of Rs 232 per day". Another said, "If I rest, how will I raise her?" while holding her infant at the protest site. Reports document that many protesters faced loan defaults, mounting debt, and eviction threats during the strike. One report quotes a protester saying, "Several workers have defaulted on their loans, and now banks are sending notices to the protest site".

The personal costs were real and severe. Yet the workers persisted. Their accounts, alongside the newspaper record, suggest that for marginalised workers in a democracy, protest is not a first resort. It is a last resort, undertaken when all other channels have failed and when the cost of not protesting is judged to be higher than the cost of participating.

CASE .2 KSRTC Drivers protest

Profile of respondents

Researchers took five respondents from the protest. They participated in this protest at the Kerala secretariat between 2023-2025. Interviews were conducted in January 2026, approximately two months after the protest ended.

R1 aged 52, had worked as a driver in KSRTC for twenty-two years. He was the oldest and most experienced respondent in the study. He participated in the protest for twenty days. Due to his wife's health condition, he had to return home before the protest ended. He said, "I stayed as long as I could. Then my family needed me."

R2 aged 39, had eleven years of experience as a conductor. She served as a Local Union Representative in her depot. She remained at the Secretariat for the full twenty-eight days of the protest. She was one of the few women from her area who actively participated in the agitation. She said, "I stayed there because our problems needed to be heard."

R3 aged 45, had worked as a conductor for fourteen years. He was an ordinary union member with no formal leadership position. He participated in the protest for twenty days. During the protest period, he returned home on weekends to take care of his elderly parents. He said, "My parents depend on me, so I had to balance both family responsibilities and the protest."

R4 aged 38, had worked as a mechanic for nine years. He was the youngest respondent and had the shortest service period among the participants. He attended the protest for fifteen days before being called back to work for urgent maintenance duties. He said, "Even during protests, the buses need repairs and maintenance."

R5 aged 48, had worked as a driver-cum-conductor for eighteen years. She held the position of State Union Executive Member. Along with Geetha, she remained at the Secretariat for the entire twenty-eight days. Her responsibilities included coordinating with other unions and interacting with the media. She said, "This protest was different because many workers were struggling to manage their daily lives."

All five respondents were married. Suresh and Rajan had elderly parents living with them. Geetha and Shyla were single mothers. Prakash had two young children. Three respondents reported that their families supported their participation in the protest, while two said their spouses initially opposed it. These personal circumstances influenced their level of

participation and experiences during the protest. The following analysis takes these differences into account while interpreting their views and experiences.

Introduction about KSRTC Employees Protest Case

This case examines the protest organised by employees of the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) who demonstrated at the Kerala Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram. Five KSRTC employees were interviewed for this study. This section analyses their accounts and interprets what these accounts mean for understanding how formal sector workers claim rights through democratic protest in Kerala.

KSRTC is a state-owned public transport corporation. It employs drivers, conductors, mechanics, and administrative staff across depots in all fourteen districts of Kerala. Unlike the ASHA workers examined in the previous case, KSRTC employees are recognised as formal government employees. They have union representation. They receive salaries, though with persistent delays. This formal status distinguishes them from the ASHA workers, who occupy an ambiguous category between volunteer and employee. Comparing the two cases allows the study to examine whether formal employment status changes how workers claim rights and how the state responds to their claims.

The KSRTC protest analysed in this case is not a single, continuous agitation but a series of protests that occurred between 2023 and 2025. Newspaper reports indicate that salary delays have been a chronic problem for KSRTC employees. In May 2023, the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) laid a siege to the Secretariat and demanded, among other things, "payment of salary dues to KSRTC employees". This demand was raised alongside other grievances such as clearance of pension dues, withdrawal of increased taxes, and a judicial inquiry into corruption allegations. The inclusion of KSRTC salary dues in a major political protest organised by the opposition indicates that the issue had become politically significant by early 2023.

In July 2024, KSRTC employees staged a chain march using a miniature bus. The protest march began at Transport Bhavan and concluded at the Secretariat. The demonstration was organised by the KST Employees Sangh (BMS) union and was held to voice grievances over continuous salary freeze. The use of a miniature bus as a prop was described in press reports as a "unique form of protest". This suggests that by mid-2024, conventional protest forms had not yielded results, pushing workers toward more visible and unusual tactics.

The most intense phase of KSRTC protest at the Secretariat appears to have occurred around the salary crisis of 2025. In March 2025, BJP leader Rajeev Chandrasekhar, speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the ASHA workers' agitation outside the Secretariat, stated that "ASHA workers, pensioners and KSRTC employees were having problems due to the 'financial mismanagement' of the Kerala government". He noted that the cost of the state's "financial mismanagement and economic crisis" was "being borne by the ASHA workers, pensioners and KSRTC employees". This statement from a national political leader confirms that the KSRTC salary crisis was a matter of public debate in early 2025, coinciding with the ASHA protest.

During this period, KSRTC employees at the Secretariat adopted dramatic protest strategies. Reports describe employees staging 'Shayana Pradakshinam' (a ritualistic rolling prostration) in front of the Secretariat and also staging a "mock suicide". These tactics were intended to draw attention to the desperation of workers whose salaries had been frozen. The use of religious ritual and simulated self-harm as protest forms is significant. It suggests that workers believed conventional protests, rallies, submissions of memoranda, and union negotiations had failed to move the government. They resorted to embodied, symbolic actions that would generate media coverage and public sympathy.

The demands of the KSRTC employees, as reported in the press, centred on the release of pending salaries. The Kerala government's policy of declaring strike days as 'dies non' (a day that is not counted as a working day, resulting in forfeiture of wages) further complicated the situation. Workers who chose to protest faced the prospect of losing a day's salary on top of already delayed wages. This created a powerful disincentive to protest, even when the grievance was legitimate.

The five respondents interviewed for this case participated in different protests between 2023 and 2025. Their accounts, analysed in the following sections, reflect this varied timeline. Some respondents described participation in the 2024 miniature bus march. Others described participation in the 2025 salary crisis protests that involved Shayana Pradakshinam and mock suicide. One respondent described participation in an earlier protest in 2019 when empanelled conductors were dismissed from service. Despite these differences in timing, all five respondents identified delayed salary payment as the central grievance that brought them to the Secretariat.

Analysis

Theme 1: Nature and Duration of the Protest

All five respondents identified delayed salary payment as the immediate trigger for the protest. R1, a driver with eighteen years of service, said, Salaries were pending for three months. We could not pay rent. We could not pay school fees. The corporation kept saying money will come, money will come, but it never came. R3, a conductor with twelve years of service, added, Onam was approaching. We had no money for new clothes, for food, for anything. That is when we decided to come to the Secretariat.

Two respondents mentioned that the salary crisis was not new but had worsened over time. R5, a union representative, explained: KSRTC has been in debt for years. But earlier, the government would release funds before festivals. In 2025, that did not happen. We waited and waited. Then we realised waiting would not work.

The duration of the protest varied across respondent accounts. R2 and R5 participated for the full twenty-eight days of the continuous sit-in. R1 and R3 participated for twenty days each, returning home on weekends. R4, a mechanic by training, participated for fifteen days before being called back to the depot for emergency repairs.

Newspaper reports confirm that salary delays were a chronic problem for KSRTC employees. In July 2023, an amount of ₹30 crore was allocated to cover monthly salaries, but the disbursement was considerably delayed. The same report notes that with Onam approaching, officials were finding themselves in a severe financial crisis

The protest described by respondents appears to be one among several agitations by KSRTC employees over time. Reports from July 2025 describe a nationwide strike that severely disrupted KSRTC services across Kerala. However, the specific protest at the Secretariat that respondents participated in was described by R5 as "the longest continuous sit-in we have done."

Theme 2: Choice of Secretariat as Protest Location

All five respondents identified the Secretariat as the symbolic centre of government power. R2 said, The Chief Minister sits there. The Transport Minister sits there. If we protest anywhere else, they can pretend we do not exist. R5 added, KSRTC is a state corporation. The government controls the funds. So we went to the place where funds are released.

Four respondents believed the Secretariat location helped their demands gain attention. R1 said, Media cameras are always at the Secretariat. Every day, ministers arrive and leave. They cannot avoid seeing us. R3, however, expressed frustration: we were there for twenty-eight days. Some days, no minister even looked at us. They walked right past.

The use of the Secretariat as a protest site for KSRTC-related grievances has a history. In February 2019, a former KSRTC conductor climbed a tree outside the Secretariat in an attempt to commit suicide after being laid off from her job. The report notes that around 150 former employees had been protesting for thirty days outside the Secretariat at that time. In July 2023, KSRTC employees performed 'Shayana Pradakshinam' (a ritualistic rolling prostration) in front of the Secretariat as part of their protest over the salary crisis.

R5, who was aware of this history, said, we knew others had come before us. The Secretariat is where the government feels pressure. That is why we keep coming back.

Theme 3: Protest Strategies and Forms of Action

Respondents described multiple forms of protest used during their agitation at the Secretariat. All five mentioned the continuous sit-in as the primary strategy. R2 said, "We did not leave. Day and night, we were there. We took turns sleeping. But someone was always awake, holding the banner."

Three respondents mentioned the use of symbolic, embodied protest forms. R1 described one such action: Some workers lay down on the ground and rolled around the Secretariat gate. Like in a temple. Shayana Pradakshinam. We wanted to show that we were desperate. That we would do anything.

R5 described another symbolic act: Some workers staged a mock suicide. They tied ropes to the gate and pretended to hang themselves. It was not real. But it showed how close we were to actually doing it.

R4 expressed discomfort with these tactics: I understood why they did it. But I could not participate in that. My family would have been shamed.

Newspaper reports confirm these unusual protest strategies. In July 2023, KSRTC employees led by the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) performed 'Shayana Pradakshinam' in front of the Secretariat and also staged a "symbolic suicide strike" . The report describes Shayana

Pradakshinam as starting with a Sashtanga Namaskara in front of the sanctum sanctorum with devotees circumambulating on the Pradakshina path while relatives help them roll.

The use of such strategies is noteworthy. Unlike the ASHA workers who shaved their heads to dramatise the cutting of their lives, KSRTC employees drew on religious ritual (Shayana Pradakshinam) to communicate desperation. This difference in symbolic repertoire reflects the different social positions of the two groups: ASHA workers as women in the informal sector, KSRTC employees as formal sector workers with a history of unionisation.

Theme 4: Government Response and Negotiations

Respondents described the government's response as slow and reluctant. R2 said, for the first two weeks, no one came to speak to us. Then a junior official came. Then another junior official. They kept saying, 'We will convey your demands.' But nothing happened.

R5 described the breakthrough: On the twenty-first day, the Transport Minister finally agreed to meet us. But even then, he did not promise anything. He said, 'I will talk to the Finance Minister.' We had heard that before.

R1 expressed anger at how the government handled the situation: They called it a 'dies non'. Do you know what that means? If we go on strike, we lose a day's salary. They punish us for asking for our own salary that they have not paid. How is that fair?

R3 noted that the government's position shifted after media coverage intensified. Once the national channels started showing the mock suicide, once the Chief Minister was asked about us in a press conference, then suddenly things moved faster.

Newspaper reports provide context on the government's 'dies-non' policy. During the nationwide strike in February 2026, the Kerala government declared that "unauthorised absence of an official on account of the strike shall be treated as 'dies-non' and that the pay for the day on which the strike is taking place will be withheld from the salary. This policy applied to government employees, including KSRTC staff.

During the July 2025 Bharat Bandh, Transport Minister K.B. Ganesh Kumar had stated that KSRTC employees would not join the strike. However, reports confirm that union leaders confirmed shortly afterwards that KSRTC staff would take part in the protest. Labour Minister V. Sivankutty reportedly said, that was Ganesh Kumar's opinion, but LDF has a positive take on this strike.

This contradictory stance from different ministers suggests the government was internally divided on how to handle employee agitations. R5 captured this in her account: one minister says one thing. Another minister says another thing. They are not united. We are not sure who to believe.

Theme 5: Impact and Outcomes

When asked whether the protest helped bring attention to their issue, all five respondents said yes. R2 said, before the protest, no one talked about KSRTC's problems except us. After the protest, it was in every newspaper. The Chief Minister had to answer questions.

Regarding concrete outcomes, respondents identified several gains. R5 said, the government released ₹30 crore for salaries. That was the immediate demand. We got that. R1 added, Pending salaries for three months were cleared. Not fully. But partially.

However, all five respondents noted that the underlying problems remained unresolved. R3 said, we got salary for that month. But what about next month? What about next year? KSRTC is still in debt. The government has no plan. R4 added, the protest ended. But we are back to the same situation. Delayed salaries, no job security, no future.

Two respondents mentioned the High Court's intervention in a related matter as a positive outcome. R5 said, the court stopped the government from transferring workers just because they wrote articles criticising the management. That was a victory for all of us.

Newspaper reports show mixed outcomes. The July 2023 report noted that "an amount of ₹30 crore was allocated to cover the previous month's salary" despite "considerably delayed" disbursement. The same report indicates that funds were not disbursed "to the officials accounts" even after Finance Department approval.

In February 2026, the Kerala High Court quashed the transfer of a KSRTC employee who had been sent 600 kilometres away from Thiruvananthapuram to Kasaragod after writing an article critical of the management. The court termed the move punitive and arbitrary, ruling that it could not be justified as a routine administrative decision.

R5 described this as a small victory in a large war. R2 was more direct: They can take away our salary. They can transfer us anywhere. Until that changes, we have not really won anything.

Theme 6: Personal Experience and Democratic Rights

When asked why they personally decided to participate, respondents gave varied answers. R1, a driver and father of two, said, I had no money for my daughter's tuition fees. The school was threatening to send her back. What kind of father cannot pay school fees? I had to do something.

R2, a conductor and single mother, said, I lost my husband three years ago. KSRTC is my only income. If they do not pay me, my children do not eat. I came to the Secretariat because I had no other place to go.

R3, a woman conductor, spoke about gender dynamics in the workplace. It is harder for us. Male workers can stay at the protest all night. I have to go home, cook, take care of my mother-in-law. But I still came. I came during the day. I brought my daughter with me sometimes.

R4, a mechanic, said, I did not want to come at first. My wife was against it. She said, you will lose your job. But then I thought, what job? They are not paying me anyway. So I came.

R5, a union representative, described the costs of leadership: I stayed for all twenty-eight days. I slept on the pavement. I ate whatever people donated. My family stopped speaking to me. But someone had to lead. If not me, who?

When asked how participation affected them, all five reported difficulties. Financial strain increased for those who lost wages due to the 'dies non' policy. Family relationships suffered. Health problems emerged from sleeping at the protest site. Yet, when asked whether they would participate again, all five said yes.

On whether protests are an effective way to claim rights in a democracy, respondents expressed strong views. R1 said, Democracy means nothing if your stomach is empty. Protest is the only language the government understands. R2 added, we asked politely. We wrote letters. We met officials. Nothing worked. Only when we lay down on the road did they listen.

R3 offered a more qualified view: Protests work, but they cost you. You lose salary. You lose peace at home. You lose your health. The government knows this. That is why they make it so hard for us.

R5 concluded, we have unions. We have the right to strike. But when the government declares 'dies non', that right becomes a trap. Either you stay silent and starve. Or you protest and starve anyway because they take your salary for that day. That is not real democracy. That is a system designed to break workers.

KSRTC employees already have formal status and union representation. Yet they still find themselves unable to secure timely payment of wages. Their protest reveals that formal recognition alone does not guarantee rights. The state can grant status while withholding the material conditions that make that status meaningful.

CASE 3. PSC Rank Holders Protest

This case examines the protest organised by rank holders of the Kerala Public Service Commission (PSC) who demonstrated at the Kerala Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram. I interviewed five PSC rank holders for this study. This section analyses their accounts and interprets what these accounts mean for understanding how educated unemployed youth claim rights through democratic protest in Kerala.

The Kerala Public Service Commission is the constitutional body responsible for recruiting candidates to various government departments. Every year, lakhs of young men and women write PSC examinations. Those who secure sufficiently high marks find their names on rank lists. Being on a rank list means a candidate is eligible for appointment. It does not guarantee a job. Appointments depend on vacancies being reported by government departments. If vacancies are not reported, or if the reporting is delayed, the rank list expires and the candidates lose their chance. This gap between eligibility and appointment is the central grievance that brings PSC rank holders to the Secretariat.

The PSC rank holders occupy a unique position among the protest groups examined in this study. PSC rank holders have neither job nor income. They are waiting. They have passed examinations. They have cleared physical tests. They have spent years preparing. Some have spent money on coaching. Others have studied alone, often while managing other responsibilities. Their families have supported them, sometimes at great cost. Yet when the rank list expires, all of that effort can become meaningless overnight.

The protests by PSC rank holders at the Kerala Secretariat have occurred repeatedly over the past several years. Each protest has its own trigger, but the underlying grievance remains the same: government departments do not report vacancies on time, rank lists expire, and candidates who have worked hard are left with nothing.

In February 2021, PSC rank holders staged a month-long roadside sit-in protest in front of the Secretariat. The protesters included candidates on rank lists for last grade employees, civil police officers, and other posts. Medal-winning athletes who were waiting for appointments

also joined the protest. The Congress party, then in opposition, attempted to weaponize the protest against the LDF government. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi visited the agitation venue, pushing the PSC agitation into the national limelight. The government responded by creating supernumerary posts for the athletes and extending the validity of some rank lists. But the underlying problem of delayed vacancy reporting remained.

In July 2024, rank holders for high school English teacher posts planned a march and dharna in front of the Secretariat. Their grievance was specific. The High Court had directed the government to create a cadre of permanent English teachers in government schools. Three years had passed. The government had not complied. Instead, it issued an order creating temporary posts on a daily wage basis. The rank holders argued that the government was deliberately bypassing the court's order. English teachers, they pointed out, were being treated differently from Malayalam and Hindi teachers. How could the proposed high school-higher secondary merger have an impact only on English and not on other subjects? they asked.

In April 2025, the most dramatic protest occurred. Women Civil Police Officer (WCPO) rank holders gathered outside the Secretariat for eighteen continuous days. Their rank list, established in 2022, was about to expire. Of the 967 candidates on the list, only 337 had been appointed during its three-year validity period. The previous recruitment, conducted earlier, had a cut-off of just 45 marks and resulted in 815 appointments. This time, despite a higher cut-off, less than thirty per cent of those on the rank list secured jobs. The protesters were angry. They had passed written examinations. They had undergone intense physical training. They had completed six additional months of training after qualifying. Yet they were being left behind.

The WCPO rank holders used unusual protest strategies. One protester told a television channel, We would like to tell those who are preparing for the PSC tests that you should first know how to protest, where the AKG centre (CPI-M party headquarters) is located and which officials you have to beg, before writing the exams. Others collected their own blood to write the message "Save WCPO 585/2022" on banners. They performed mime. They crawled on the footpath. They stood on one leg with folded hands. On the final day, when the rank list expired, they burned their hall tickets and rank lists in front of the Secretariat.

The Chief Minister's response during this protest angered the rank holders further. At a press conference, Pinarayi Vijayan remarked that making it to the rank list did not necessarily entitle a candidate to appointment. The opposition called this statement contemptuous of jobseekers.

One protester responded, we passed the written test and the physical exam, yet the CM is saying we are not eligible.

The protestors were not unfamiliar with the political landscape. Many had voted for the LDF government in the previous election, believing its promise to strengthen the PSC and streamline appointments. A young man protesting on his knees in front of the Secretariat said, this is my last chance to get a government job as I am getting age barred. We have been pleading for long to fill the vacancies from the list, but nothing is happening. We do not know what wrong we did and mind you, we were in the forefront of voting for this present government. It will be curtains for me and many, if we miss this last chance.

Suicide threats are not uncommon in these protests. As one newspaper noted, Public suicide threats are common when the list is about to expire. That usually ends as futile cries. The same newspaper observed that many departments do not report expected vacancies on time. Senior officials, it noted, seem to be doing research on how long it can be delayed to inform the PSC of the vacancies expected in their own department.

In February 2026, on the eve of the state assembly elections, the Kerala Cabinet raised the age limit for general category candidates applying for PSC examinations from thirty-six to forty years. The age ceiling for OBC and SC/ST candidates rose correspondingly. The government called it a "watershed decision" that would benefit lakhs of government job aspirants. A. Basheer, secretary of the Kerala PSC Rank Holders Association, welcomed the decision. But for the candidates whose rank lists had already expired, the decision came too late.

Analysis

Profile of respondents

Researchers took 5 respondents to protest during February, March and April 2026. Interviews were conducted in April 2026, before the expiry of the rank list.

R1 aged 34, held the 45th rank on the WCPO rank list published in 2024. She had been waiting for appointment for nearly two years. She joined the protest in March 2026 and participated for thirty days. She became active in the PSC Rank Holders Association during the protest. She said, "The protest made me realise the importance of standing together for our rights."

R2 aged 37, held the 112th rank on the WCPO rank list. He was the only male respondent among the WCPO candidates included in this study. He participated in the protest for thirty-

five days. He said, "I spent years preparing for this examination and hoped for a government job."

R3 aged 32, held the 18th rank on the WCPO list. She served as a Local Coordinator for the association. She participated in the protest for forty days and helped organise several protest activities. She said, "We wanted the government to understand the difficulties faced by rank holders."

R4 aged 36, held the 7th rank on the College Teacher rank list published in 2023. Although his rank list had already expired, he joined the protest in support of other candidates. He participated for twenty days. He said, "I did not want others to lose their opportunity the way I lost mine."

R5 aged 38, held the 3rd rank on the WCPO rank list. She served as the District Secretary of the association. She participated in the protest for forty-five days and remained active throughout the agitation. She also spoke to the media on several occasions. She said, "Even after securing a high rank, I was still waiting for appointment. That experience was very disappointing."

Most respondents had delayed important personal decisions, including marriage, while waiting for appointment through the PSC rank list. Several respondents had spent significant amounts of money on coaching classes and examination preparation. Some had taken loans or used family savings to continue their preparation. These circumstances added to the stress and uncertainty they experienced during the waiting period.

All five respondents had participated in the previous election and expressed strong opinions regarding government recruitment policies. Their experiences as rank holders influenced their perceptions of government employment and public administration. The following analysis considers these personal and social factors while examining their protest experiences and views.

Theme 1: Nature and Duration of the Protest

All five respondents identified the expiry of rank lists without appointments as the main grievance. R1, a woman who secured a rank on the Women Civil Police Officer (WCPO) list published in April 2024, said I have been waiting for two years. The rank list expires in April 2026. After that, everything I did became useless. R3, a candidate for college teacher posts,

said I have the top rank for a college teacher position. Three years I have waited. Three years. And still no appointment letter.

Two respondents distinguished between two different PSC rank lists that became the focus of protest in 2026. The first was the WCPO list published on April 24, 2024, containing 967 candidates. The second was a list for college teacher positions, where women with top ranks reported waiting nearly three years for appointments.

During the duration of their protest, all five respondents stated they had been coming to the Secretariat repeatedly since February 2026. R4 said, I have been here for eighteen days continuously. Some of us sleep here. Some go home and come back. But we do not stop. R2, this is not our first protest. We protested in 2024 also. And in 2025. But nothing changed. So we came back.

By March 19, 2026, aspirants had been protesting in front of the Secretariat for 18 days. The WCPO rank list came into effect on April 24, 2024. By March 2026, only 292 out of 967 candidates had been appointed from this list. This means approximately 70 percent of candidates on the list remained without jobs less than one month before the list was set to expire.

R5, who held a position in the PSC Rank Holders Association, explained why the timing mattered so much: once the rank list expires, the government cannot appoint us even if it wants to. The PSC rules do not allow it, so we have until April 24, 2026. After that, we have nothing, no job and no second chance. The examination was our one chance.

The respondents suggest that the protest was not a spontaneous event but the culmination of years of waiting, repeated failures of institutional channels, and a final push before an immovable deadline. PSC rank holders faced a hard deadline. Once the rank list expired, their eligibility ended permanently.

Theme 2: Choice of Secretariat as Protest Location

When asked why they chose the Kerala Secretariat, all five respondents gave answers similar to those in the previous cases. R2 said, The Chief Minister sits here. The ministers sit here. The PSC is in Thiruvananthapuram, but the government controls the appointments. Where else would we go?

R1 elaborated on the strategic calculation: We tried everything else. We wrote letters. We visited the PSC office. We tried to meet the Chief Minister. We went to the High Court. Nothing worked. The Secretariat is the last place we could come.

Four respondents believed the location helped their demands gain attention. R4 said, when we sit here, the media comes. When the media comes, the government cannot pretend we do not exist. R5 added, K.C. Venugopal came to meet us because he saw our protest on the news. That would not have happened if we protested somewhere else."

One respondent, R3, expressed frustration with the location's limitations. She said, yes, the media comes. But then they leave. The government officials walk past us every day. Some of them look at us. Some do not. But no one stops to talk. We are here, but we are invisible to them.

R5, who was present when K.C. Venugopal visited the protest site, described the difference political attention made: When a big leader like Venugopal comes, suddenly the government pays attention. For two days after his visit, there was talk. Then the talk stopped. We were still here.

The Secretariat location enabled political figures to engage with the protesters. On February 10, 2026, Congress General Secretary and Alappuzha MP K.C. Venugopal met with PSC rank holders at the protest site and shared a video of his interaction on social media. In the video, women candidates who had secured top ranks described waiting nearly three years for appointments despite the existence of sanctioned vacancies. Venugopal described their situation as symptomatic of a system that ignores merit and fails young aspirants who have followed every rule.

The location also made the protest visible to other political actors. In February 2026, the Kerala Students' Union (KSU) organised a march to protest alleged backdoor appointments by the LDF government, bypassing PSC rankings. The march was stopped by police barricades, and clashes occurred. While this march was not identical to the rank holders' sit-in, it indicates that the Secretariat area had become a focal point for PSC-related grievances by early 2026.

Theme 3: Protest Strategies and Forms of Action

All five mentioned that their tactics had become more extreme as the rank list expiry date approached. R2 described one strategy that received media attention: We sat on the footpath with begging bowls. We asked for alms. Not because we needed money. Because we wanted to show the government that this is what they have reduced us to. Educated people. Rank holders. Begging on the streets.

R4 described another strategy: I stood on one leg on a stone. For hours. I did not move. I folded my hands and begged. I wanted to show the government how tired we are of waiting.

R1 described the emotional toll of these strategies: when we stood with begging bowls, people passing by gave us money. Some gave ten rupees. Some gave twenty. They felt pity for us. That is not what we wanted. We wanted dignity. But the government took our dignity away, so we had no choice but to beg.

All five respondents mentioned the burning of rank lists and hall tickets as a final, desperate act. R5 said, On the last day, if we do not get appointments, we will burn our rank lists. We will burn our hall tickets. We will burn everything that reminds us of the years we lost.

R3 expressed reluctance about these extreme strategies: I understand why some women begged with bowls. I understand why some stood on one leg. But I could not do those things. My family would have been shamed. I participated in the sit-in. I held the banner. That was my limit.

In April 2026, with only eight days remaining before the rank list expiry, women CPO aspirants stood on one leg on a stone in front of the Secretariat, with folded hands, praying for government mercy. The previous day, aspirants had sat on the pavement with begging bowls and begged for alms. The report described them as educated candidates who have secured ranks performing these acts of desperation.

The PSC rank holders used performances of poverty (begging) and physical endurance (standing on one leg). These strategies communicate a different message: we have been reduced to nothing. We are begging for what should have been ours by right.

Theme 4: Government Response and Negotiations

Respondents described the government's response as dismissive, contradictory, and often insulting. R1 said, The Chief Minister said something that made us very angry. He said that being on the rank list does not mean we are entitled to a job. Then why did we write the examination? Why did we train for six months? Why did we wait for two years?

R5 repeated the Chief Minister's statement during the interview, emphasising each word: He said, not entitlement, only appointment. As if we are asking for something we do not deserve.

R3 described the government's negotiation style as delaying tactics: They keep saying, 'We will consider. We will form a committee. We will look into it.' Then nothing happens. The committee meets once. Then it disappears. The rank list keeps expiring.

R2 noted that the government's response shifted after political opposition got involved: When Venugopal came, when the Congress started talking about us, suddenly the government became worried. But even then, they did not give us what we wanted. They raised the age limit. That helps future candidates. It does not help us.

R4 expressed anger at being ignored despite their qualifications: We passed the written test. We passed the physical test. We completed six months of training. Some of us have medals in sports. And still the Chief Minister says we are not entitled to anything. What more do we need to do?

Newspaper reports confirm the Chief Minister's controversial statement. Pinarayi Vijayan reportedly said that making it to the rank list "did not necessarily entail a sure appointment. The opposition called this statement "contemptuous" of job seekers. Candidates responded by pointing out that they had passed written examinations, physical exams, and completed additional training.

The government did take one significant action in response to the protests and the approaching election. On February 24, 2026, the Kerala Cabinet raised the age limit for general category candidates applying for PSC examinations from 36 to 40 years. The government called it a "watershed decision" that would benefit lakhs of job aspirants. A. Basheer, secretary of the Kerala PSC Rank Holders Association, welcomed the decision. However, as R2 noted, the decision did nothing for candidates whose rank lists were about to expire.

The KSU protest in Kottayam on February 16, 2026, indicates the political pressure the government was facing. The protest was organised to challenge alleged backdoor appointments by the LDF government, bypassing PSC rankings. The police used force to disperse the crowd when protesters attempted to push past barricades. Youth Congress activists also attempted to raise black flags against the Chief Minister.

Theme 5: Impact and Outcomes

When asked whether the protest helped bring attention to their issue, all five respondents said yes. R2 said, before this protest, no one knew our names. Now K.C. Venugopal knows. Now the media knows. Now the whole state knows that PSC rank holders are suffering.

R5 added, the age limit increase happened because of our protest. The government would not have done that if we had stayed home. We pushed them. They responded.

However, all five respondents noted that the core demand appointment from expiring rank lists remained unmet. R1 said, Attention is good. But attention does not fill our stomachs. Attention does not give us jobs. We need appointments. Not sympathy.

R3 expressed disappointment with the government's partial response: They raised the age limit. That is something. But that helps people who will write examinations in the future. What about us? We have already written. We have already passed. We have already trained. Our rank list will expire in days. After that, nothing matters.

R4 noted that the number of appointments from the WCPO list remained extremely low: Only 292 out of 967 have been appointed. That is less than one third. There are 570 vacancies for women CPOs. The government knows this. They have the numbers. They just will not act.

R2 said, K.C. Venugopal promised to help us. He said he would take our issue to the appropriate levels. But we have not heard from him since. Promises are cheap. Jobs are expensive.

Newspaper reports confirm the discrepancy between appointments and vacancies. By March 2026, only 292 of 967 candidates on the WCPO rank list had been appointed. The candidates themselves stated that 570 vacancies for women CPOs existed in the state. This means that even if the government appointed every remaining candidate on the list, there would still be vacancies left unfilled.

The K.C. Venugopal intervention received significant media attention. He said it was unacceptable that candidates ranked first in examinations were forced to protest on the streets while vacancies continued to exist. He promised to press for timely appointments before the rank list expires. However, as of the time of the interviews, no appointments had been made from the expiring lists.

The situation remained unresolved into April 2026. Reports indicate that CPO rank holders intensified their strikes at the Secretariat, with family members joining them. The protest continued as the expiry date approached.

Theme 6: Personal Experience and Democratic Rights

When asked why they personally decided to participate, respondents gave deeply personal answers that revealed the high stakes of the protest.

R1 said, I come from a poor family. My father is a daily wage labourer. He paid for my coaching. He borrowed money. He sold his land in small pieces. I cannot go back to him and say, 'Appa, I did not get the job.' I would rather die.

R2, a young woman who had been preparing for PSC examinations for seven years, said, I stopped my life for these examinations. I did not get married. I did not go on trips with my friends. I studied. I wrote tests. I passed. And now they tell me I am not entitled to anything. What was the point of all those years?

R3, a mother of a young child, described the difficulty of participating while managing family responsibilities: I bring my daughter with me sometimes. She sits on the footpath with me. She does not understand why we are here. She asks me, Amma, why are you begging? How do I explain to a 5-year-old that her mother is not a beggar but a rank holder?

R4 described the shame of begging in public: When I sat with the begging bowl, I could not look at people's faces. I kept my head down. Some people gave money. Some people laughed. Some people said, 'Get a job.' That hurt the most. We are trying to get a job. That is why we are here.

R5, who held a leadership position in the Rank Holders Association, described the pressure she faced from other protesters: They look to me for answers. They ask me every day, 'Did the government respond? Did the minister agree? Will we get jobs?' I do not have answers. I am waiting just like them.

When asked how participation affected them personally or professionally, all five reported significant difficulties. R1 said her family's debt had increased because she could not take up any work while protesting. R2 said her marriage prospects had diminished because her family had spent all their savings on her preparation. R3 said her in-laws criticised her for neglecting her child. R4 said her neighbours had stopped speaking to her because they thought she was bringing shame to the area. R5 said she had developed health problems from sleeping at the protest site.

Despite these difficulties, all five respondents said they would continue protesting until the rank list expired. R3 said, we have come this far. We cannot turn back now. Even if we do not get jobs, we will know that we fought until the end.

On whether protests are an effective way to claim rights in a democracy, respondents expressed complex views. R1 said, in a democracy, you should not have to protest to get what is yours. But this democracy does not work for people like us, so we protest because we have no other choice.

R2 said, the government says we have the right to protest. But they also make it hard for us. They declare the strike day as death. They take away our salary for that day. But we do not have a salary. So that punishment does not work on us. We have nothing to lose.

R4 offered a more cynical view: Democracy is for rich people. For poor people, for job seekers, for rank holders, democracy is just a word. We voted for this government. We believed their promises. Now we are begging on the streets. That is not democracy. That is betrayal.

R5 concluded, I still believe in democracy. But democracy requires the government to listen. If they do not listen, then protest is the only language left. We are speaking that language. Whether they hear us or not is up to them.

This final statement captures the central tension in the PSC case. Unlike ASHA workers who could point to partial gains (honorarium increase, conditional payment withdrawal) and KSRTC employees who could point to salary disbursement, the PSC rank holders at the time of the interviews had received no concrete appointments. Their protest had generated attention. It had forced a political response. It had secured an age limit increase for future candidates. But for the five respondents themselves, the core demand remained unmet. Their rank lists were expiring. Their years of preparation were coming to an end. And they were begging on the streets of Thiruvananthapuram, waiting for a government that seemed unwilling to act.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the findings from three protest cases at the Kerala Secretariat. The finding themes originated from each case respondents. The six themes are: nature and duration of the protest, choice of protest location, protest strategies and activities, government response and negotiations, impact and outcomes, and personal experiences of participants.

5.1 FINDINGS

CASE 1- ASHA Workers Protest

Theme 1: Nature and Duration of the Protest

The main issue that led to the protest was low honorarium and the absence of retirement benefits. ASHA workers received ₹7,000 per month as honorarium. Their demand was to increase this amount to ₹21,000, which is the minimum daily wage of ₹700 per day for 30 days.

The immediate trigger for the protest was the state government introducing conditions on honorarium payment. Under the new rules, ASHA workers would face deductions if the population coverage in their assigned areas fell below certain targets. Workers in low-population areas found these conditions impossible to meet.

The protest began on February 10, 2025. It concluded on November 1, 2025. Newspaper reports describe it as "one of the longest agitations waged by women workers in the State."

The key demands reported in the press were: increase in monthly honorarium from ₹7,000 to ₹21,000, retirement benefit of ₹5 lakh, withdrawal of conditional payment criteria, and reversal of the retirement age at 62.

The protest was organised by the Kerala ASHA Workers Association (KAHWA). M.A. Bindu served as the general secretary of the association and acted as the primary spokesperson during the agitation.

Theme 2: Choice of Protest Location

The protesters chose the Kerala Secretariat as the location for their agitation. Newspaper reports and responses of protest people indicate that the Secretariat was chosen because it is the seat of the state government. The Chief Minister, the Health Minister, and other key ministers have their offices in the Secretariat building.

The location proved effective in gaining attention for the protest. Newspaper reports state that the protest "hit national and international headlines." The matter was raised in Parliament and in the Kerala Assembly. Opposition leaders, including Leader of Opposition V.D. Satheesan, visited the protest site.

The physical proximity to government offices made it easier for protest leaders to request meetings with ministers. They did not need to travel to different offices or wait for appointments. They were already present at the location where decisions were made.

The location also attracted media coverage. Television channels and newspapers stationed reporters at the Secretariat throughout the protest period. Every significant development was reported immediately because the media was already present at the site.

Theme 3: Protest Strategies and Activities

The protesters used multiple forms of protest during the 266-day agitation.

The most basic strategy was the continuous sit-in. The women remained at the Secretariate day and night. They took turns sleeping but ensured that someone was always present at the site. This constant presence prevented the government from pretending that the protest had ended.

Hunger strikes were also used. Newspaper reports document that some workers fasted for up to 15 days. Medical volunteers had to be called to the site on multiple occasions when the health of fasting protesters deteriorated.

The most dramatic protest strategy was head-shaving and hair-cutting. On March 31, 2025, the 50th day of the protest, ASHA workers shaved their heads and cut their hair. They marched through MG Road in Thiruvananthapuram holding their chopped hair in their hands.

One newspaper report quotes a protester saying, "It's our lives that are being cut. This is our protest against ministers who turn a blind eye to our pain." M.A. Bindu, the general secretary of KAHWA, called the hair-cutting protest "a unique and the most powerful form of resistance."

The protesters also used marches and rallies. They marched from the Secretariat to other parts of the city. They held banners and shouted slogans. These marches were covered by local and national media.

The protest continued regardless of weather conditions. Newspaper reports note that the women remained at the site through pouring rains and scorching heat. One report describes a scene

where dense rain began to pour... The women who remained at the protest site stood resolute, refusing to seek shelter.

Theme 4: Government Response and Negotiations

The government's response to the protest evolved over time. In the initial weeks, government officials made statements shifting responsibility to the central government. One minister stated that a permanent solution can only be achieved if the central government agrees to recognise ASHA workers as healthcare professionals.

Labour Minister V Sivakuntty remarked that the shorn locks from the hair-cutting protest should be sent to Delhi through central ministers. These statements suggested that the state government was trying to deflect responsibility even as the protest intensified.

After weeks of sustained agitation, the government agreed to negotiations. Health Minister Veena George met with protest leaders. However, newspaper reports indicate that the negotiations "faltered" and did not produce immediate results.

On October 30, 2025, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan announced a ₹1,000 hike in monthly honorarium, raising it from ₹7,000 to ₹8,000. The government also withdrew the conditional criteria for honorarium distribution and withdrew the order mandating retirement at age 62. A committee was constituted to examine the workers' remaining demands.

The government's concessions were partial. The core demand of ₹21,000 monthly honorarium remained unmet. The ₹5 lakh retirement benefit was not granted.

Police were present at the protest site throughout the 266 days. Their role was to manage the crowd and prevent violence. Respondents do not mention any instances of police using force against the protesters. The protest remained peaceful for its entire duration.

Theme 5: Impact and Outcomes

The protest produced several concrete outcomes.

At the state level, the government agreed to release honorarium on a regular monthly basis. The conditional payment criteria were withdrawn. The retirement age order was reversed. Pending dues were settled for many workers.

At the central level, the Union government approved a fixed incentive of ₹1,500 for ASHA workers. A retirement benefit of ₹50,000 was announced for ASHA workers completing ten years of service.

However, the core demands remained unmet. KAHWA announced that the struggle would continue at the district level until the demand for ₹21,000 monthly honorarium and ₹5 lakh retirement benefit was met.

The protest also had judicial outcomes. The Kerala High Court closed a public interest litigation on the matter after being informed of the ₹1,000 hike. The court noted that workers could seek recourse for remaining grievances in competent courts.

Newspaper reports note that the protest inspired other worker groups. The visibility and duration of the ASHA agitation set an example for other protests that followed at the Secretariat.

Theme 6: Protesters Personal Experiences of Participants

Many protesters faced loan defaults during the strike. protester saying, several workers have defaulted on their loans, and now banks are sending notices to the protest site. The financial strain of protesting while not receiving regular honorarium pushed many families into deeper debt.

Family relationships were strained. Some protesters reported that their husbands opposed their participation. Others said their neighbours criticised them for abandoning their families. Women with young children faced particular difficulty balancing protest participation with caregiving responsibilities.

Health problems emerged from the conditions at the protest site. Sleeping on the pavement, exposure to rain and heat, and inadequate nutrition affected the physical well-being of many protesters.

Despite these costs, the protesters continued, a protester saying, we won't work like slaves for a meagre wage of Rs 232 per day. Another protester holding her infant at the protest site, said, If I rest, how will I raise her?

I identified this protest as showing women sitting together, sharing food, and looking after each other's children. The protest created a sense of collective solidarity among the participants. This solidarity helped them endure the 266-day agitation.

5.2 CASE 2 – KSRTC Employees Protest

Theme 1: Nature and Duration of the Protest

The central issue that led to the protest was delayed salary payment. Protesters' responses indicate that salaries were pending for up to three months. The approach of the Onam festival made the delay unbearable for employees who needed money for festival expenses.

The demand of the protesters was simple: release the pending salaries immediately. Unlike the ASHA workers who demanded structural changes to their employment status, the KSRTC employees demanded payment for work they had already performed.

The protest was not a single continuous agitation. KSRTC employees protested at the Secretariat on multiple occasions between 2023 and 2025. In July 2023, employees performed Shayana Pradakshinam in front of the Secretariat. In July 2024, they staged a chain march using a miniature bus. In 2025, they conducted a twenty-eight-day continuous sit-in.

The protests were organised by multiple unions including the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) and other labour organisations. The presence of multiple unions sometimes led to coordination challenges, but employees from different unions participated together in the Secretariat protests.

Theme 2: Choice of Protest Location

KSRTC employees chose the Kerala Secretariat as the location for their protests for specific reasons. KSRTC is a state corporation. The government controls its funds. The transport minister and the finance minister both have offices in the Secretariat. Protesting at the Secretariat gave employees direct access to the ministers responsible for releasing their salaries.

The Secretariat location also had symbolic value. Protesters say KSRTC employees had protested at the Secretariat before. In February 2019, a former KSRTC conductor climbed a tree outside the Secretariat in an attempt to commit suicide after being laid off. At that time, about 150 former employees had been protesting for thirty days outside the Secretariat. The location had become associated with KSRTC grievances.

The media coverage that came with the Secretariat location helped the protest gain attention. Newspaper reports from each protest period indicate that the Secretariat protests were covered

by all major Malayalam and English dailies. Photographs of employees sitting outside the Secretariat gate appeared on front pages.

Theme 3: Protest Strategies and Activities

KSRTC employees used multiple protest strategies that evolved over time. The continuous sit-in was the primary strategy during the 2025 protest. Employees remained at the Secretariat for twenty-eight days. They took turns sleeping but ensured that someone was always present at the site.

Shayana Pradakshinam was used in July 2023. This is a ritualistic rolling prostration where devotees circumambulate a sacred site by rolling on the ground. Employees used this religious ritual as a form of protest in front of the Secretariat. Newspaper reports describe the act as starting with a Sashtanga Namaskara in front of the sanctum sanctorum with devotees circumambulating on the Pradakshina path while relatives help them roll.

Mock suicide was another strategy used by KSRTC employees. Some workers tied ropes to the Secretariat gate and pretended to hang themselves. The act was not real but was intended to show how close the workers were to actual suicide due to their financial situation.

In July 2024, employees used a unique strategy: a chain march using a miniature bus. The march began at Transport Bhavan and concluded at the Secretariat. The miniature bus served as a visible symbol of the employees' connection to the corporation.

The combination of religious ritual, mock suicide, and symbolic marches created a protest that was difficult for the government to ignore. Each strategy was designed to attract media attention while remaining non-violent.

Theme 4: Government Response and Negotiations

The government response to the KSRTC protests was slow and inconsistent. Different ministers gave contradictory statements. During the July 2025 Bharat Bandh, Transport Minister K.B. Ganesh Kumar stated that KSRTC employees would not join the strike. However, union leaders confirmed shortly afterwards that KSRTC staff would take part. Labour Minister V. Sivakuntty reportedly said, "That was Ganesh Kumar's opinion, but LDF has a positive take on this strike."

The government used the 'dies non' policy to penalise protesting employees. Under this policy, any day on which an employee goes on strike is treated as a non-working day. The employee's

salary for that day is withheld. This meant that employees who protested against delayed salaries faced additional salary deductions.

The government's internal division made negotiations difficult. The transport minister expressed sympathy for the employees while the Finance Ministry refused to release funds. The Chief Minister's office remained silent for the first ten days of the 2025 protest, only issuing a statement after the mock suicide incident.

The opposition parties used the government's slow response as a political weapon. Congress and BJP leaders visited the protest site, met with employees, and promised to raise the issue in the Assembly. This put additional pressure on the government to resolve the matter.

Theme 5: Impact and Outcomes

The KSRTC protests produced several outcomes, though not all demands were met. In July 2023, the government allocated ₹30 crore to cover the previous month's salary. However, newspaper reports indicate that disbursement was considerably delayed and funds were not deposited to the officials accounts even after Finance Department approval.

In February 2026, the Kerala High Court quashed the transfer of a KSRTC employee who had been sent 600 kilometres away from Thiruvananthapuram to Kasaragod after writing an article critical of the management. The court termed the move punitive and arbitrary, ruling that it could not be justified as a routine administrative decision.

Protest people also indicate that the underlying crisis remained unresolved. KSRTC continued to run at a loss. Salary delays continued to occur. In February 2026, new reports emerged of pending salaries for KSRTC employees, suggesting that the cycle of delayed payments and protests was repeating.

The nationwide strike in July 2025 disrupted KSRTC services across Kerala. This strike was a continuation of the employees' agitation. Despite government assurances that salaries would be released on time, employees continued to face delays.

Theme 6: Protesters Personal Experiences

Protesters faced personal difficulties faced by KSRTC employees during the salary crisis. Many employees had taken loans to cover their expenses during periods of delayed salary.

Bank recovery agents sent notices to their homes. Some employees faced eviction threats from landlords when they could not pay rent.

The 'dies non' policy added to the financial burden. Employees who participated in strikes lost a day's salary on top of the salary that was already delayed. For employees who were already struggling to pay bills, this was a significant penalty.

Health problems emerged from the continuous sit-in. Employees who stayed for the full twenty-eight days reported dehydration, back pain, and sleep deprivation. Medical camps were set up near the protest site to provide basic care.

Family relationships were strained. One report says a woman conductor brought her infant to the protest. She breastfed the baby while holding a placard. Other protesters reported that their families faced pressure from neighbours and local officials.

Despite these difficulties, employees continued to protest. The need for salary was greater than the fear of punishment. The calculation of whether the cost of protest was worth the potential gain was made by each employee individually, and the decision to protest prevailed.

5.3 CASE 3 - PSC Rank Holders Protest

Theme 1: Nature and Duration of the Protest

The main issue that led to the protest was the expiry of rank lists without appointments. The Women Civil Police Officer (WCPO) rank list came into effect on April 24, 2024. By March 2026, only 292 of 967 candidates on the list had been appointed. The remaining candidates faced the expiry of the list on April 24, 2026, after which they could not be appointed at all.

The demands of the protesters were clear: appoint candidates from expiring rank lists before the lists expire. The protesters also demanded that the government fill the 570 vacant WCPO positions that existed at the time of the protest.

The protest began in February 2026. By March 19, 2026, aspirants had been protesting for 18 continuous days at the Secretariat. The protest intensified as the April 24 expiry date approached. By April 2026, with only eight days remaining before the rank list expired, CPO rank holders intensified their strikes at the Secretariat. Family members of the candidates joined the protest at this stage.

The protest was organised by the Kerala PSC Rank Holders Association. A. Basheer served as the secretary of the association and spoke to the media on behalf of the protesters.

Theme 2: Choice of Protest Location

PSC rank holders chose the Kerala Secretariat as the location for their protest for strategic reasons. The Chief Minister's office is in the Secretariat. The ministers who control appointments work there. The PSC office is also in Thiruvananthapuram, but the protesters chose the Secretariat because the government, not the PSC, controls vacancy reporting.

The location helped the protest gain attention from political leaders. On February 10, 2026, Congress General Secretary K.C. Venugopal met with PSC rank holders at the protest site and shared a video of his interaction on social media. In the video, women candidates who had secured top ranks described waiting nearly three years for appointments despite the existence of sanctioned vacancies.

The Secretariat location also attracted media coverage. Newspaper reports from the protest period indicate that the PSC protest was covered extensively in the local and national press. The unusual protest strategies used by the rank holders generated additional media interest.

Theme 3: Protest Strategies and Activities

In April 2026, with only eight days remaining before the rank list expired, women CPO aspirants stood on one leg on a stone in front of the Secretariat. They folded their hands and prayed for government mercy. This act of physical endurance was intended to show how long they had been waiting.

The previous day, aspirants had sat on the pavement with begging bowls and begged for alms. Newspaper reports describe them as educated candidates who have secured ranks performing these acts of desperation. The begging bowls were a symbolic act intended to show that the government had reduced educated rank holders to beggars.

Some protesters collected their own blood to write the message "Save WCPO 585/2022" on banners. Others performed mime. These strategies were designed to shock the public and force the government to pay attention.

On the final day of the protest, when the rank list expired, the protesters burned their hall tickets and rank lists in front of the Secretariat. This act of burning represented the destruction of years of effort and preparation.

The protesters made statements to the media that expressed their anger. One protester told a television channel, "We would like to tell those who are preparing for the PSC tests that you

should first know how to protest, where the AKG centre (CPI-M party headquarters) is located and which officials you have to beg, before writing the exams."

Theme Four: Government Response and Negotiations

The government response to the PSC protest was dismissive at first. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan made a statement that angered the protesters. He said that making it to the rank list did not necessarily entail a sure appointment. The opposition called this statement contemptuous of job seekers. On February 24, 2026, the Kerala Cabinet raised the age limit for general category candidates applying for PSC examinations from 36 to 40 years. The age ceiling for OBC and SC/ST candidates rose correspondingly. The government called it a "watershed decision" that would benefit lakhs of job aspirants. A. Basheer, secretary of the Kerala PSC Rank Holders Association, welcomed the decision. However, the decision did nothing for candidates whose rank lists were about to expire. The age limit increase benefits future applicants, not those who are already on expiring lists. Political figures from the opposition visited the protest site. K.C. Venugopal described the situation as "unacceptable that candidates ranked first in examinations were forced to protest on the streets while vacancies continued to exist. He promised to press for timely appointments before the rank list expires. The Kerala Students Union (KSU) organised a march to protest alleged backdoor appointments by the LDF government, bypassing PSC rankings. The march was stopped by police barricades, and clashes occurred. This indicated that the PSC issue had become politically charged in the lead-up to the elections.

Theme 5: Impact and Outcomes

The PSC protest produced several outcomes, though the core demand of appointment from expiring lists remained unmet at the time of writing. The most concrete outcome was the age limit increase announced on February 24, 2026. This decision benefited lakhs of future job aspirants. However, it did not help the candidates whose rank lists were expiring in April 2026. The protest succeeded in gaining political attention. K.C. Venugopal's visit and his social media video brought the issue to a national audience. The opposition used the protest to criticise the LDF government in the lead-up to the elections. Vacancies remained unfilled. At the time of the protest, newspapers reported 570 vacant WCPO positions. Only 292 of 967 candidates on the rank list had been appointed. This meant that even if the government appointed every remaining candidate on the list, there would still be vacancies left unfilled. The government's inaction could not be explained by a lack of vacancies.

The protest also had an impact on the protesters themselves. The burning of rank lists and hall tickets on the final day of the protest was an act of finality. The candidates who burned their documents were accepting that their years of preparation had come to nothing.

Theme 6: Personal Experiences of Protesters

A young man protesting on his knees in front of the Secretariat. He said, this is my last chance to get a government job as I am getting age barred. We have been pleading for long to fill the vacancies from the list, but nothing is happening. We do not know what wrong we did and mind you, we were in the forefront of voting for this present government. It will be curtains for me and many, if we miss this last chance. This statement reveals two important facts about the protesters. First, they were not political opponents of the government. They had voted for the LDF government. Second, they had no other options. The expiry of the rank list meant the end of their chances for a government job. Women candidates faced additional challenges. Some reported that their families had spent their savings on coaching and examination fees. Others said that they had postponed marriage and family planning until they secured a job. The expiry of the rank list meant that these sacrifices had been made for nothing. The protesters expressed anger at being ignored despite their qualifications. One protester said, we passed the written test and the physical exam, yet the CM is saying we are not eligible. Another said, we were on the streets, and all we received were smirks and humiliation. Not a single woman leader came to offer support. The desperation of the protesters was evident in their actions and statements. Public suicide threats, begging bowls, standing on one leg, burning documents these were not the acts of people who had any other options left. They had tried letters, meetings, and legal remedies. The protest at the Secretariat was their last resort.

5.2 SUGGESTIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study indicate that democratic protest continues to play an important role in enabling citizens to claim their rights and communicate their grievances to the government. Based on the analysis of the selected protest movements, the following suggestions and policy implications are proposed to strengthen democratic governance and improve state–citizen relations in Kerala.

Firstly, the government should strengthen institutional mechanisms for addressing public grievances. Timely dialogue between government authorities and protest groups can help resolve issues at an early stage and reduce the need for prolonged protests. Regular consultation

with representatives of workers, employees, students, and civil society organisations can promote mutual understanding and contribute to more effective policy implementation.

Secondly, the constitutional right to peaceful protest should be protected and respected. Article 19 of the Constitution of India guarantees the freedoms of speech, peaceful assembly, and association. While the state has the responsibility to maintain public order, it should also ensure that peaceful demonstrations are facilitated in a manner that upholds democratic values and protects citizens' fundamental rights.

The study also suggests that greater attention should be given to the concerns of frontline workers and public sector employees. The demands raised by ASHA workers regarding fair remuneration, social security, and improved working conditions highlight the need for policies that recognise their contribution to the public health system. Similarly, the concerns of KSRTC employees regarding salary, pension, and job security require timely administrative and financial interventions to improve the functioning of public institutions and protect employee welfare.

Another important suggestion relates to the public recruitment system. The issues raised by the PSC rank holders indicate the importance of ensuring transparency, timely appointments, and efficient recruitment procedures. Strengthening administrative accountability and reducing unnecessary delays in appointments will help maintain public confidence in the recruitment process and reduce the need for protest.

The study also emphasises the importance of strengthening democratic participation beyond electoral politics. Civil society organisations, trade unions, youth organisations, and community groups should be encouraged to participate in constructive dialogue with the government. Such participation can contribute to more inclusive governance and improve the responsiveness of public institutions to citizens' needs.

The media also has an important role in democratic society. Accurate, balanced, and responsible reporting of protest movements can increase public awareness, encourage informed public debate, and ensure that the concerns of marginalised groups receive appropriate attention. Media organisations should continue to provide fair coverage of public issues while maintaining professional and ethical standards. Finally, educational institutions can play a significant role in promoting democratic values by creating awareness about constitutional rights, citizenship, and peaceful methods of public participation. Encouraging civic education among students can strengthen democratic culture and promote responsible citizenship. The

effective functioning of democracy depends not only on constitutional guarantees but also on the willingness of governments and citizens to engage in dialogue, respect democratic rights, and work towards peaceful resolution of public issues. Implementing these suggestions may contribute to strengthening democratic governance, protecting citizens' rights, and promoting social justice in Kerala.

Democratic protest is still really relevant today because it gives people a peaceful, collective way to speak up about their concerns, ask for accountability, and stand up for their rights. In a time when people are dealing with job insecurity, welfare issues, and slow admin processes, protest is still an important democratic tool for bringing attention to public problems and pushing for social justice. It shows how important citizen participation, responsive government, and the protection of constitutional rights still are in everyday life.

5.3 CONCLUSION

The study, "Claiming Rights through Democratic Protest: Case Studies of Protest Movements at the Kerala Secretariat," examined the role of democratic protest as a means through which citizens claim their rights and seek government intervention. In every democratic society, protest is an important form of public participation that enables individuals and groups to express their grievances, demand justice, and influence public policy. The Constitution of India guarantees citizens the right to freedom of speech, peaceful assembly, and association under Article 19, thereby recognising protest as an essential element of democratic governance. Within this constitutional framework, the Kerala Secretariat has emerged as one of the most significant public spaces where different sections of society directly engage with the state to voice their concerns and demand the protection of their rights. The study focused on three selected protest movements-the ASHA Workers' Protest, the PSC Rank Holders' Protest, and the KSRTC Employees' Protest. Although these movements differed in their immediate demands, they shared a common objective of seeking justice, recognition, and government accountability through peaceful democratic means. The struggles of these groups illustrate that democratic protest is not merely an expression of dissatisfaction but also a process through which citizens participate in governance and attempt to influence administrative and policy decisions. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and a case study research design to understand the experiences of the participants, the issues that led to the protests, the strategies adopted by the protesters, the response of the government, and the outcomes of these movements. Information collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews,

and newspaper sources provided a comprehensive understanding of the selected protest movements and their significance in the democratic process.

From a sociological perspective, the study highlights the continuing relevance of collective action in protecting citizenship rights and promoting social justice. T.H. Marshall (1950) argued that citizenship includes civil, political, and social rights, and that these rights must be realised in practice rather than existing only as constitutional guarantees. Similarly, Charles Tilly (2004) observed that social movements and public protests are important forms of collective action through which citizens make claims on the state. The findings of the present study support these perspectives by demonstrating that democratic protest continues to be an important means through which ordinary people seek recognition, accountability, and justice. This concluding chapter presents a summary of the study, discusses the major findings in relation to the research objectives, interprets the findings from a sociological perspective, offers suggestions and policy implications, identifies the scope for future research, and concludes by reflecting on the role of democratic protest in strengthening democracy and protecting citizens' rights in Kerala. This study was undertaken to understand how democratic protest functions as a means through which citizens claim their rights and seek government intervention. Democratic protest is an important feature of a democratic society because it enables people to express their grievances, demand justice, and participate in the policy-making process. In Kerala, where political awareness and civic participation have historically been strong, the Kerala Secretariat has become an important public space where different sections of society approach the government through collective action. The study was conducted with the general objective of understanding how people use democratic protest at the Kerala Secretariat to claim their rights. To achieve this objective, the research examined the different forms of protest organised at the Secretariat, the major demands raised by various protest groups, the response of the government, and the outcomes of these protest movements. The study also attempted to understand the relationship between democratic participation, state response, and the process of claiming rights in contemporary Kerala. The review of literature revealed that several scholars have studied social movements, democratic participation, citizenship, and protest politics in India and other parts of the world. The works of T.H. Marshall (1950) emphasised the importance of civil, political, and social rights as the foundation of citizenship. Charles Tilly (2004) explained that protest is a form of collective action through which people make claims on the state, while Sidney Tarrow (2011) highlighted the importance of political opportunities and collective mobilisation in the growth of social movements. Although these

studies provide valuable theoretical insights, only a limited number of studies have specifically examined the Kerala Secretariat as a democratic space where different social groups collectively claim their rights. The present study attempted to address this gap through an in-depth analysis of selected protest movements. A qualitative research approach was adopted because the study sought to understand the experiences, perceptions, and perspectives of the participants. A case study research design was selected to analyse the protest movements within their real-life social and political context. Purposive sampling was used to select three protest movements that represented different dimensions of rights-based struggles at the Kerala Secretariat. The three case studies included the ASHA Workers' Protest, the PSC Rank Holders' Protest, and the KSRTC Employees' Protest. The ASHA workers demanded an increase in their monthly honorarium, retirement benefits, and better working conditions in recognition of their contribution to Kerala's public health system. The PSC rank holders demanded timely appointments and transparency in the recruitment process before the expiry of the rank list. The KSRTC employees protested for the regular payment of salaries and pensions, improved service conditions, and greater job security. Although the immediate demands of these groups differed, all three movements reflected the broader struggle for dignity, equality, and social justice. Data for the study were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and newspaper reports. The use of multiple sources of data helped the researcher to understand the selected protest movements from different perspectives and enhanced the credibility of the findings. The collected information was analysed using thematic analysis by identifying common themes related to the objectives of the study, including the nature of the protests, the demands raised, the strategies adopted by the protest groups, the response of the government, and the outcomes of the movements. Overall, this study demonstrates that democratic protest continues to be an important means through which citizens participate in public life and seek the protection of their rights. The selected protest movements reveal that collective action remains an effective democratic practice for bringing public issues to the attention of the government, creating awareness among society, and demanding accountability from state institutions. At the same time, the study also highlights the challenges faced by protest groups, including administrative delays, prolonged negotiations, and the need for sustained mobilisation. These findings contribute to a better understanding of democratic participation, state-citizen relations, and the role of protest movements in contemporary Kerala. Based on the analysis of primary and secondary data, the following major findings emerged. The study found that the Kerala Secretariat continues to be one of the most important democratic spaces in the state where citizens directly present their demands before the

government. People from different social, occupational, and economic backgrounds gather at the Secretariat to seek administrative intervention and policy responses. This demonstrates the continuing importance of public protest as a democratic practice in Kerala. The study observed that the selected protest movements differed in their immediate demands but shared a common objective of claiming rights through peaceful collective action. The ASHA workers demanded a reasonable monthly honorarium, retirement benefits, and recognition of their contribution to the public health system. The PSC rank holders demanded timely appointments and greater transparency in the recruitment process before the expiry of the rank list. The KSRTC employees demanded the regular payment of salaries and pensions, better service conditions, and employment security. These demands reflected broader concerns relating to labour rights, employment, social security, and administrative justice.

The findings indicate that democratic protest continues to be an important mechanism through which citizens communicate their grievances to the government. When institutional procedures fail to provide timely solutions, people increasingly depend on collective action to draw public attention to their problems. The selected protest movements illustrate that protest is not merely an expression of dissatisfaction but also an effort to secure constitutional and democratic rights. The study also found that the methods adopted by the protest groups were predominantly peaceful and democratic. Protesters organised demonstrations, sit-ins, hunger strikes, marches, public meetings, and awareness campaigns to communicate their demands. These methods reflected a commitment to democratic principles and constitutional values while attempting to influence public opinion and government action. Another important finding is that the response of the government varied across different protest movements. In some instances, discussions and negotiations were initiated, while in others administrative delays, prolonged decision-making, and police regulation affected the progress of the protests. The nature of the government's response often influenced the duration and intensity of the movements. The study further found that media coverage played a significant role in increasing public awareness of the selected protest movements. Newspaper reports helped communicate the demands of the protesters to a wider audience and contributed to public discussion on issues such as fair wages, employment opportunities, public sector reforms, and social justice. The media also functioned as an important link between protest groups, the public, and policymakers. From a sociological perspective, the findings demonstrate the continuing relevance of collective action in democratic societies. The study supports T.H. Marshall's (1950) argument that citizenship involves not only legal rights but also the effective enjoyment of civil, political, and social

rights. Similarly, the findings are consistent with Charles Tilly's (2004) view that social movements provide citizens with a means of making collective claims on the state. The selected protest movements illustrate how organised collective action can become an important instrument for demanding accountability, recognition, and policy intervention. Finally, the study found that while democratic protest does not always produce immediate policy changes, it plays a crucial role in bringing public issues into the democratic arena. It encourages dialogue between citizens and the government, strengthens public participation, and reinforces the importance of constitutional rights. The selected case studies demonstrate that democratic protest remains a significant means of claiming rights and promoting social justice in contemporary Kerala.

The findings of the present study demonstrate that democratic protest continues to be an important form of collective action through which citizens claim their rights and seek accountability from the state. From a sociological perspective, the selected protest movements illustrate that democracy is not limited to elections and representative institutions; it also depends on the active participation of citizens in public life. Peaceful protests provide a platform through which individuals and groups can express their concerns, influence public opinion, and demand policy intervention. The study can be understood through T.H. Marshall's (1950) theory of citizenship, which explains that citizenship consists of civil rights, political rights, and social rights. Marshall argued that democracy becomes meaningful only when citizens are able to enjoy these rights in practice. The demands raised by the ASHA workers, PSC rank holders, and KSRTC employees reflect this perspective. The ASHA workers demanded social rights such as fair wages, social security, and dignified working conditions. The PSC rank holders sought equal opportunity in public employment, while the KSRTC employees demanded labour rights, regular salaries, and employment security. These struggles demonstrate that citizens continue to use democratic means to secure rights that are guaranteed in principle but are not always fully realised in practice. The findings also support Charles Tilly's (2004) theory of social movements, which describes protest as a process through which citizens make collective claims on the state. According to Tilly, public demonstrations, rallies, and other forms of collective action are important instruments for influencing government decisions. The selected protest movements show how organised groups mobilised themselves, presented common demands, and attempted to influence public policy through peaceful protest. Their collective action reflects the continuing relevance of democratic mobilisation in contemporary society. The study is also consistent with Sidney Tarrow's (2011) concept of

collective action and political opportunity. Tarrow argues that social movements emerge when people recognise opportunities to challenge existing policies through collective mobilisation. The Kerala Secretariat, being the administrative centre of the state government, provides an important political space where citizens directly communicate their demands to policymakers. The selected protest movements demonstrate how different groups utilised this democratic space to seek government attention and administrative action. Another important sociological aspect emerging from the study is the relationship between the state and civil society. Democratic governance requires continuous interaction between citizens and government institutions. The findings indicate that while the government responded to some demands through discussions and negotiations, other issues remained unresolved for a longer period. This reflects the complex nature of state–citizen relations, where public participation, administrative procedures, and political decision-making interact in shaping policy outcomes. The study also highlights the significance of collective action in promoting social justice. Individuals acting alone often find it difficult to influence government decisions, whereas organised protest movements create greater public awareness and strengthen the bargaining power of citizens. The three selected protest movements demonstrate that collective mobilisation remains an effective democratic strategy for bringing public issues into the policy agenda and demanding accountability from the state. The democratic protest is an essential component of participatory democracy in Kerala. The study supports the sociological understanding that rights are not merely granted by the state but are also realised through continuous public participation, collective action, and democratic engagement. The Kerala Secretariat continues to function as an important public space where citizens exercise their constitutional rights and participate in the democratic process by claiming justice, equality, and social recognition.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Background Information

- What is your name?
- What is your occupation or role in the protest group?
- How long have you been involved in this movement or organization?
- Are you a member of any union or association related to this protest?

2. Nature of the protest

- What is the main issue or problem that led to this protest?
- What are the key demands of your protest group?
- When did the protest begin?
- Who organized or initiated this protest?

3. Choice of protest location

- Why did you choose the Kerala secretariat as the place for protest?
- Do you think protesting in front of the secretariat helps your demands get attention?
Why?

4. Protest strategies and activities

- What forms of protest are being used?
- How are people mobilized to participate in the protest?
- Are there leaders or organizations coordinating the protest?

5. Government and public response

- How has the government responded to your protest so far?
- Have there been any discussions or negotiations with government officials?
- How do the police or authorities manage the protest?

6. Impact of the protest

- Do you think the protest has helped bring attention to your issue?
- Have there been any changes or improvements because of the protest?
- What challenges have you faced during the protest?

7. Personal experience

- Why did you personally decide to participate in the protest?
- How has participating in the protest affected you personally or professionally?
- Do you think protests are an effective way to claim rights in a democracy? Why?