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EDITOR'S NOTE

We take pride in launching *Social Orbit*, the journal of Social Sciences, of Farook College. As nobody in the academic world can overlook the maxim of the day 'publish or perish', there is a huge rush towards the print culture. Whether bound by the brunt of the new academic norms, which has cultivated among scholars a craving for self-advancement, or motivated by the urge for scholarly excellence, it has stormed the academia by flooding the world of publications through an influx of journals and books. Several such publications are mediocre in quality, which blatantly bluff the world of letters for sheer commercial interests, and simply serve as platforms for career advancement. *Social Orbit* explores a different path and commits to adhere to intellectual honesty and academic integrity.

The idea of launching a journal of social sciences, instead of any specific one of the social disciplines, is to emphasize the integral nature of social sciences and to show that they cannot be separated into water tight compartments. In this post-modern age when the objectivity claims of both natural and social science subjects are frowned upon, and when the boundaries among social science subjects are getting increasingly narrowed down, and research as a means to attain the ultimate truth is despised, to become multidisciplinary is to generate a common platform of enquiry which may help to produce a coherent set of knowledge. The skepticism raised towards social science knowledge as well as its 'pseudo'-scientific methods of enquiry also compel an interdisciplinary approach. If truth is subjective/relative, then not only social science research but even research in natural sciences would become absurd. Societies which have attained first world status or are captivated by the comfort zone of a consumerist culture, social science research may have little importance; but for the third world societies which are still reeling under multifarious social issues left unresolved by the modern and even pre-modern times, the efficacy of postmodern ethic is certainly dubious.

To run a journal then, when metanarratives steadily disappear, when dominant ideologies get washed away, and when politics of identity acquire a jubilant rise, is a very difficult task. It makes the choice of an ideological position/perspective difficult; yet, to keep distance from the trend of the times is to become outdated and obsolete. The current attraction towards the 'small' and the 'local' is a natural reaction against the destructive effects of the industrial revolution and a candid realization of the frailty of the notion of progress and the paradigm of development

advocated by modernity. But to give up a historical perspective and to extol the licentious life of consumerism would steal a global vision from us and could mislead us to social Darwinism. In search of trees we should not miss the woods. The relevance of social science knowledge is justified on the ground of the need to foster powerful ethical values and a profound social sense.

We consider the publication of a journal as an act of serious political intervention as it involves upholding vital social issues and confronting the existing iniquitous power relations in the social system. Social science research should focus on generating knowledge favourable to emancipate people on the margins of the society. Similarly, addressing issues demanding immediate attention, concerned with human existence in this universe, such as the damage caused to the environment through our own reckless exploitation of resources, also makes academic activity a significant political intervention. The aggressive appeal for gender justice is another arena which calls for immediate erudite activism. It is a political act in a further sense as it strives to challenge the trivialization of knowledge. The spread of knowledge is now on a horizontal plane – to know less and less about more and more things – but such cursory knowledge about anything would not promote healthy social discourses. Knowledge becomes an effective device for social transformation only if it becomes reflective and develops itself into a tool capable of analyzing the play of power relations in the society. This is the context in which *Social Orbit* seeks to differ from the numerous so-so journals of these days.

All the articles in this volume are not directly linked to a central theme but are on individual topics and are from various social science subjects. They explore important issues of great socio-political relevance. The deteriorating quality of research is a serious matter of concern for us all, but it should not discourage us from launching new organs and platforms for pursuing genuine social science knowledge. Keeping in mind the original mission and the great legacy of Farook College, that is to promote the educational advancement of socially marginalized groups, we reaffirm our commitment to contribute substantially to the knowledge in social sciences which is hoped to create a better social system for the future.

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CRITICAL THEORY OF
QUALITY HIGHER EDUCATION : A REVIEW*

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to review the background of the incremental alienation in the higher education sector, which has already made quality abysmally poor. Teaching and research, currently too mechanical have been focused in the paper with a critical reformist attitude compelling to point out drawbacks and suggest pedagogic ways and means of overcoming them. One of the major tasks identified is prevention of the social systemically built-in strategies of de-politicisation of knowledge. Socially integrated and issue-based, facilitating convergence of sciences, social sciences and humanities in teaching and research, are shown capable of re-politicising higher education.

Keywords: quality, politics of knowledge, interdisciplinary teaching, convergence research, de-politicisation

Introduction

In most Universities in the country teaching and research supervision are too official and mechanical to be of any academic quality. Teaching and learning, even research are alienating and debilitating to students, in which the overall institutional supervisory neglect has a major role that ultimately turns the whole enterprise a farce. Students learn under extra academic compulsions and their approach is largely examination centred, with the result that effective learning hardly takes place. Researchers produce theses without any theses in them, which in their turn surprisingly get admitted to the award of Ph.D. Research students owe their poor knowledge base, absence of genuine topics of interest, lack of aptitude, and methodological illiteracy to a great extent to the indifference of research supervisors and lack of institutional insistence upon quality assurance. It is lack of knowledgeable supervision that accounts for the researchers' slapdash and stale methodological initiation. No nation committed to people's welfare can afford to let this shameful plight to continue for long, since it adversely affects the democratic pressure for combining equity with national economic growth, which can be sustained

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and promoted only through socialisation of the critical dimension of deeper knowledge.

Context

Many teachers and student-researchers in most Universities are too obsolete in their knowledge base to have the faculty to effectively participate in the production and transmission of new knowledge, the cardinal institutional function of the University. Curricular reforms have always been mechanical. It is a fact, that educational change has never been necessarily linear, uniform, measured and determined anywhere in the world (W.E. Doll, 1993). Universities' existence as a seat of hackneyed disciplinary knowledge of divergence, conventional, tacit and linear, facilitating teaching and research along beaten tracts, is the context of a self-critical re-thinking of quality for all of us. At the outset, we have to take a collective effort to create an inspiring academic culture in the institution, essential for teachers and researchers to access deeper knowledge and participate in its expansion and transmission. It is also to re-articulate the almost lost or forgotten fact that production and transmission of Quality Knowledge, essential for the development of students in particular and society in general, are the primary functions of any University.

What is Quality?

We know quality is to be inextricable to teaching and research, and we take it for granted that all of us know what quality means. I think it extremely necessary to re-visit the implications of the word, which relate to various objects, even to the mutually antagonistic. 'Quality' in knowledge production and transmission according to the criteria of the reigning global economy, is centred on the professional nurturing of competencies necessary for techno-capitalist development. That is not what quality means according to the national development policy emphasising economic growth with equity. What the people conscious of social and environmental justice mean by quality is altogether different. In short 'quality' is subjective in terms of meanings, measures, parameters and objectives. It is a fact that the middle class youth would intend to acquire techno-economic professional competencies that the global industrial system demands. What should be the priority of a University and how do we teachers reach a consensus about quality teaching and research.

It may not be possible for a University to sustain a partisan position in the matter but no University can ignore its responsibility in mending the youth as good citizens. Therefore, I would argue that high ethical postulates should govern us in determining what 'quality' should mean in higher education, which accordingly would insist upon the social utility and environmental sustainability

central to the production and transmission of new knowledge. Whether or not all of you agree with it, for any University 'quality' in teaching means rendering deeper knowledge plausible in the lecture or practical or any other learning experience whatsoever. It is a systematic cognitive advancement from the factual, through conceptual and procedural to meta-learning (B.S. Bloom, et.al., 1956 and Anderson et.al, 2001). We call it serious learning that is systematic and self-conscious unlearning, i.e., being conscious about the prior notions replaced by learning.

Serious learning enables the learner to know the coming into being of the knowledge in the discipline concerned, i.e., technically the ontology of knowledge. It is awareness about the deep, theoretical, and scientific dimension of knowledge in the discipline concerned, i.e., technically the epistemology of the knowledge concerned. Such learning nurtures four general competencies: a) higher cognitive ability, sharper analytical faculty, better language power with thoroughness about the fundamentals of the discipline concerned, and, d) creativity or innovativeness. We recognise it quality learning. In short, quality in teaching and learning is what ensures the development of the above four competencies. Serious learning in any discipline is invariably subversive because it exposes the surface information shallow and shoddy as entirely different from the profoundly buried deeper truth. This is the beginning point of critical consciousness, the hallmark of an accomplished learner, who cannot but be a responsible citizen with concern for social and environmental justice.

Quality Teaching

Learning sciences, social sciences and humanities has become an alienating and deskilling exercise in the country, for the learner gets lost in the descriptive literature on one aspect or the other of the discipline of choice. Sources of knowledge and modes of knowing remain compartmentalized, stereotypical and rigid allowing the learner little or no flexibility in acquiring knowledge holistically i.e., without its being segregated into independent facets. This is all the more true of science and technology education, for its being almost entirely subsumed by technicality divesting the learner of the faculty to relate the knowledge/skill to human affairs and social processes. It is a set up tired of teaching and learning along beaten tracts lacking flexibility and choice, and distancing the youth from objective social reality, which curbs their creative intelligence.

Science and technology curricula require a total revamp incorporating critical insights of science studies involving philosophical understanding of the structure of scientific knowledge, the political economy of the rise of European science and technology, the social construction of the authority of science,

the hegemony of scientific knowledge over other forms of knowledge including the social wisdom etc. I believe that we need an alternative pedagogic strategy of holistic perspective to overcome the present day stalemate. We can call it Integrated Critical Pedagogy (ICP) with which I mean a new instruction culture inspired by non-conventional modes of knowledge transmission. Traits of this new pedagogy are: a) techniques of issue based and interactive learning, the learner centred curriculum design with flexibility and choice ensuring creative freedom, b) participatory knowledge production enabling the learner to be innovative. Moreover, disciplinary transcendence or convergence in learning, democratization of science, creation of participatory space for learning, and strengthening of critical self-reflexivity are other features of ICP. It provides creative space for issue based interactive learning among science and non-science learners through disciplinary convergence.[1] Harping on themes of convergence as objects of learning, i.e., themes upon which multiple disciplines and sub-disciplines stake their scholarly claim, ICP empowers disciplinary transcendence. For example, integrator topics like air, energy, water, climate, waste etc., can be chosen for issue based effective interactive learning, for any of these topics would necessitate convergence of multiple sciences and social sciences.

Quality Supervision of Research

Our Universities have no clear vision about the nature of doctoral-level education, and this has its impact on supervision. They have not even identified as yet the types of competencies needed for research students, supposed to be bound by the responsibility of producing new knowledge. Doctoral competencies are different from general undergraduate/postgraduate-level competencies. Doctoral research is more flexible, almost entirely dependent on personal skills and attributes. Nevertheless, there should be certain broad universal normative by way of doctoral competencies institutionally ordained by every University, within which the researchers' skills and attributes become full blown.

Let us not forget the fact that problem driven research enabling innovativeness or creativity is the challenge of our times. Keeping that in mind we have to draw doctoral attributes and adopt it through the democratic bodies of the University. Based on them, it is urgent to do a serious re-articulation of the features and dynamic of our doctoral education and academic functions and responsibilities of research supervisors. Researchers should be told about them and they must be aware of the competencies that they are mandated to develop. Universities should evolve new institutionalised ways and means of imposing the mandates on the researcher as part of quality assurance. This is not to mean that Universities should view this as a problem

of management, which may end up with the promulgation of bureaucratic stipulations for monitoring the progress of research. There is no point in bureaucratising the roles and responsibilities of supervisors, candidates and institutions from managerial point of view. Nevertheless, Universities have to somehow reposition themselves with a strong determination in emphasising the foundational and critical role of supervision of research as part of assurance.

Today, in most Universities students are not able to learn much from their supervisors who discharge official responsibilities like signing periodic progress report, scholarship claim forms, extension requests, and finally the thesis. Baring a few exceptions, many of us are not able to develop in our research students' critical self-reflexivity or faculty to critically re-visit ways and means of research that the researcher pursues. Some of us are not able to do it because we have stopped acquiring new knowledge and pursuing our own research. A grossly neglected but very significant factor is the indispensability of periodic refresher workshops and seminars for research supervisors. One of the most crucial purposes of refreshing research supervisors is to update them in the science of production of knowledge, which alone can enable them to provide their students with core competencies. Although the UGC has nationally mandated course-work for Ph.D, the obsolescence and indifference of research supervisors have made it ineffective and susceptible to be easily contained by the old system. Unless frequent discussion of the researchers' learning experience and instructional support whereby they and their supervisors incessantly interact and learn from each other, supervision cannot help quality assurance.

Quality Research

Quality research is an extension of effective learning in which the ultimate thrust is inevitably on meta-cognition at the instance of disciplinary convergence. Nevertheless, before heading for convergence learning, researchers should be well grounded in their own disciplines or sub-disciplines. At the outset, it necessitates sound knowledge base and involved familiarity of issues and debates in the knowledge area of the researcher's specialisation. It means close familiarity with the state of art or cutting edge research in the area of knowledge concerned. Moreover, a researcher should be extremely fascinated by an intimate object of analysis or a problem of inquiry making sustained intellectual engagement effortless. For any researcher to be up-to-date in the discipline concerned, the primary requirement is a good grip over the empirically given knowledge. Discipline based empirical learning launches researchers into the domain of deeper knowledge, which is a major transition from the factual understanding through conceptual and procedural to meta-

cognition or theorisation. Research supervisors have a very crucial role to play in this transition, in the absence of which the researchers get retarded amidst shallow empiricism, precluding production of new knowledge.

On top of all, a researcher should be initiated in the universally accepted methodological fundamentals well enough to practise them as the basics of the science of knowledge production. This hardly happens in most Universities where students graduating in sciences are not initiated in the philosophy of science and students graduating in social sciences as well as humanities are not initiated in social theory. Many researchers do not have even a tenuous understanding of how *a-priori* reasoning is different from *a-posteriori* reasoning or how deduction is related and differentiated from induction. Many do not know what a hypothesis is and not to talk about the meanings of heuristics, hermeneutics, ontology and epistemology. Research students and their supervisors have to re-position themselves with a strong determination to understand and practise methodology as science of knowledge production, which refers to a comprehensive understanding of fundamentals about what knowledge means, how it gets produced authentic and why it undergoes revision or rejection. Every researcher should know the universally accepted minimum procedures for ensuring logical link between premises and conclusions. Science of knowledge production is foundational knowledge about knowledge itself. It is philosophy of knowledge or what is known as epistemology that enables the producer of knowledge to be wary of fallacies at the level of causal reasoning and theoretical generalisation. It is extremely important that researchers are initiated in the craft of acquiring knowledge in the process of its coming into being, for that alone will enable them to participate in the production of knowledge. A researcher should feel the intellectual need for re-searching that emanates only out of cognitive encounters with the process of knowledge production.

a) Empirical Grip

Every researcher has to acquire sufficient empirical grip at the outset. It is necessary to explore everything quantifiable about the empirical data. Quantification gives a feeling of thoroughness. Statistical quantification is very useful. However, checking averages and frequencies or even coefficients alone will not do for the production of deeper knowledge. Researchers have to come to terms with the fact that many aspects of society are abstract and metaphorical, hardly amenable to quantification. Moreover, quantification hardly exhausts alternative derivation possibilities of the same data. The exercise makes no sense if research questions are not inspired by critical social reality. Higher level quantification through sophisticated techniques is fine for achieving precision in answers, but often statisticians ignorant of social

theory waste their time answering precisely the wrongly framed questions.

b) Primacy of Theory

Most of our researchers think quantification a substitute for theorization and that it makes their study scientific. Heuristics or the study of data and hermeneutics or the study of interpretation, are the two eyes of research methodology. Both are theoretical. Theory is essential not only for interpretation but also for recognising the data. For analysing and sorting out indicators, correlating them, deriving inferences and constituting the evidence, the researcher has to be theoretically knowledgeable. The evidence is not out there for anybody to go and pick, for it is conceptually identified and theoretically constituted. There are theories about classifying the data and determining their veracity, just as there are theories providing frameworks of comprehension and interpretation. One should know the basis of scaling and sampling besides the limitations of questionnaire based data generation. However, most of our researchers, particularly those in social sciences and humanities, have been distancing themselves from theorisation. They get lost in descriptive literature on one aspect or the other of the society in time and space. Key books and guides remain authentic for most of the college students and teachers of social sciences, in spite of the availability of a commendable body of authentic works. This accounts for the researchers' poor knowledge base and shallow output.

Social sciences represent a form of knowledge noted for its hermeneutic strength, in the pedagogy of which conceptual clarity is of utmost importance. It is essential to emphasise interconnectedness of social aspects in a holistic perspective, a process precluded in the absence of theorisation. There is a general distaste for theory, explicit in Ph.D dissertations of most Universities, which suffer from oversimplification. Consequent on the distancing of theory from research, the conventional method of conceiving the social, economic, political, cultural, religious etc., as independent facets, continues to haunt. Researchers in Social Sciences and Humanities cannot make a choice between the empirical and theoretical. In fact, such a choice does not exist, for their subject matter is inaccessible without a theory, a distinct fact that no researcher can afford to ignore. Social theory is an ever-growing domain that helps us unravel processes and interconnections below the surface reality of social life. It is the wisdom accrued through sustained attempts at exploring the deeper meanings of explicit features and practices of the society. By resorting to various analytical strategies it helps us understand the link between the surface reality of social practices and their submerged referential. Theory makes the unseen visible and the inaudible heard. It is true that societal studies in general cannot end up formulating all inclusive theorisation in the form of

equations and formulas. This does not preclude the possibility of constituting explanations based on deeper causation.

Lack of theoretical perspective is a defect common to researches in all faculties. Even science and technology research is in a similar state too, despite its inherently radical feature as the universally dominant form of knowledge. Science happens to be learnt without imbibing the scientific temper and taught without insights about science policy, for in both the processes noted for alienating institutional practices of teaching and evaluation, the radical aspect of the knowledge form gets contained and its authenticity and authority cultivated. Technology is imparted as a mere skill. Students of science and technology seldom learn the history and philosophy of their knowledge domain. With the result, they fail to understand the relation of their knowledge to politics. In the modernist tradition of philosophy of education, politics of knowledge is discussed against the mutuality between the form of state power and character of epistemology (Gordon, *etal*., 2002; E. Rada, 2012).[2] It is no wonder that India has the largest number of irrational and apolitical scientists and technologists. In short, the overall pedagogic strategy, learning mode and evaluation method followed in institutions of higher education prove to be most effective means of de-politicisation. It is high time we re-articulated the higher education curricula on the basis of a thorough revamping with the rigour of a movement, the basic principles and strategies of which have been eminently conceived long ago (W. Turner, 1949) and insightfully updated in the recent years (A.V. Kelly, 1986; 2008). Although these pertain to school curriculum, the fundamentals largely remain the same in the case of college/University level curricula. This is what even some of the recent specialised studies in higher education curricula would have us believe (W.E. Doll, 1993; B.R, Beatty, 2009).

Cutting Edge Research

Cutting edge research is interdisciplinary today. Over the past few decades several non-conventional areas of knowledge cutting across physical, natural and social sciences have come out as a result of researches beyond disciplinary boundaries, letting disciplines draw closer to one another. This convergence is neither to confront disciplines nor to bring them together. As rightly observed by Roland Barthes, 'Interdisciplinary work, so much discussed these days, is not about confronting already constituted disciplines none of which, in fact, is willing itself to let itself go. To do something interdisciplinary it is not enough to choose a subject (a theme) and gather around it two or three sciences. Interdisciplinary consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one' (R. Barthes, 1977, pp. 155-164). Interdisciplinary research and teaching is inherently inclined to extension of

knowledge for social development. It is a fact that interdisciplinary knowledge production is path-breaking, far reaching and non-linear in its effects compared to what its counterpart does within the confines of the discipline. Knowledge generated beyond disciplines and across their interfaces is strikingly fresh, regenerative and converging. Convergence, however fast the process may be, is yet to articulate at sufficient extent its sources of infrastructural growth, institutions of transaction, and channels of communication appropriate to meet the needs of the academia. Many scholars are producing eminently non-conventional knowledge in the interface of conventional disciplines, which is seldom promoted in departments of disciplinary identity for obvious reasons. Convergence cuts across not only disciplinary barriers but also faculty differentiation between the natural and social sciences. A research supervisor has to be knowledgeable about the convergence research practices of emerging importance and ready to inspire the students to take on in their studies in the perspective of integration.

However, our University System, structured by Departments of disciplinary identity and insularity bereft of flexibility and choice, is tired of teaching and researching along beaten tracts, often distanced from reality about human affairs and social processes, and hence largely non-productive. Disciplinary curricula and academic programmes of Universities impede problem oriented research and they lack innovative dynamic. It is necessary to facilitate convergence of sciences to carry forward problem solving researches. An institution of teaching and research that can address the problems of high pressure on natural resources, demand for ecological services, questions of sustainable land use etc., by extending institutional support for sustainable development, i.e., an institution that can get scientific results translated into socially useful and ecologically justified products and patents, is the need of the hour.[3] Convergence research can play a very vital role in the production of new knowledge meeting the contemporary needs. It can dissolve the hiatus between specialised knowledge and people's needs.

Convergence research is at once a methodological alternative too, for it represents a new methodology inspired by an unprecedented urge to experiment with non-conventional modes of knowledge production. Characteristic traits of the new methodology are techniques of social interaction, people's participation and collective setting of the research agenda, which urge scientists to break the stalemate in knowledge production and enable the people to receive the benefit of innovations. It is facilitating interaction among scientists and non-science researchers, to establish effective learning communities through trans-disciplinary methodology. It addresses the need for using deeper knowledge for resolving social developmental problems through democratisation of sciences enabling adherence to such

values as people centeredness, empowerment orientation, inclusiveness, and sustainability. It is seeking to facilitate: a) production of scientific knowledge of convergence, b) its technological application for better productivity and resource sustainability, and c) social extension for the benefit of ultimate users.

Universities are under unprecedented pressure to turn research students into quality knowledge producers. Now research requires tightening the programme of imparting training in the latest procedures and techniques of investigation to make sure that it invariably takes the researchers to produce new knowledge and integrate it with the previous knowledge through a corrective exercise. Research students learn how to practise them only by undergoing a rigorous methodological training under their supervisors. Supervisors have to systematically monitor and evaluate their students' learning outcome, knowledge base improvement, analytical competency development, communicative efficiency growth, and rise in the level of theoretical comprehension. It has become necessary to monitor the researcher's competency development in the production of new knowledge.

Epistemological Positioning

There exists no option for any researcher today to decide as to whether or not s/he should involve in the modern/postmodern debate. Every student has to acquire at least a tenuous understanding of the meaning and implications of the modern and the postmodern. It is almost indispensable for her/him to gain some competency in epistemological positioning of oneself, which means positioning of oneself in the context of the science of knowledge as debated between the modern and the postmodern. Let me very briefly discuss the issue here. Modern is synonymous with Science and Science with Physics, and Physics with Newton's *Principia*. Newton's *Principia* represents fundamental knowledge about the knowable in the universe, and fundamental knowledge as knowledge about the underlying principles or laws behind the natural phenomena. Knowledge of fundamental principles/foundational laws is the ultimate knowledge and science. Science thus became logo-centric knowledge of authority, authenticity, openness, transparency, finality, certainty and universal credibility. Fundamental knowledge is teleological, all encompassing, unified and hence grand-theoretical. It is this accomplished knowledge of Renaissance versatility that the Modern embodies.

Limitations of modernity are the same as what post-Einsteinian science has identified and put forward as the limitations of Newtonian – Einsteinian science, as explicit in the epistemological shift of Science to New Science, which began with Max Plank, whose Quantum physics shattered certainty and predictability of science by proving that both 'position' and 'velocity' cannot be measured at the same time with same accuracy. Heisenberg's

Principle of Uncertainty turning scientific knowledge into 'no theory of certainty' exposed a major limitation of scientific knowledge and thereby deprived the knowledge in 'Modernity' of its foundation. Bohr's 'Principle of Complementarities' and Godel's thesis of 'Undecidability' turning scientific knowledge further uncertain and tentative, have made the stability claim of the knowledge under 'Modernity' a myth. Feynman acknowledging imprecision as an inevitable aspect of scientific communication disproved the belief of societies in 'Modernity' that language can be rational and transparent representing a firm and objective connection between the objects of perception and language of communication. With Heisenberg, Bohr, Godel and Feynman showing scientific knowledge has limitations such as 'uncertainty,' 'imprecision' and 'unknowability', the claim of knowledge in societies of 'Modernity' to be free of limitations has become false.

Heisenberg confirming that the action of measuring affects the accuracy of the measurement and Schrodinger concluding that object-subject split a figment of imagination, made the objectivity claim of knowledge in 'Modernity' unfounded. In short, Post-Einsteinian science depriving scientific knowledge of its finality, certainty, precision, linearity, objectivity and stability made claims of knowledge in 'Modernity' hollow. Obviously under the intellectual influence of New Science and epistemological insights of constructivism, production of knowledge beyond modernism encountered limitations of grand theorisation, totalisation, logo-centrism, linearity, finality, certainty, objectivity and stability based on context-free laws of universality. This awareness of limitations turning to an intellectual predicament in knowledge production is called post-modern condition. Postmodernism is, therefore, the critique of grand narratives, totalisation, logo-centrism, linearity, finality, certainty, objectivity and stability. It is the awareness that grand narratives serve to mask the contradictions and instabilities that are inherent in scientific knowledge production based on context-free laws of universality. Postmodernism, in rejecting grand narratives, favours "mini-narratives" that explain small practices, context-specific particulars, or local events, rather than large-scale universal or global concepts. Post-modern 'mini-narratives' are always situational, provisional, contingent, and temporary, making no claim to universality, truth, reason, or stability. In Postmodernism, there are only signifiers without the signified, surfaces without depth and copies without the original. What one experiences is the disappearance of the idea of the stable or permanent reality. Knowledge is tentative and incomplete. It is functional, produced not just to know, but to use. Language is a game and communication a trial.

Postmodernism is concerned about questions of the organization of knowledge rather than about its finality or completeness. In Postmodern

societies Knowledge is produced, arranged, stored, distributed and consumed with a revolutionary difference in technologies and modes. In Postmodern societies, knowledge, not recognizable and storable by a computer i.e., not suitable to be digitalised ceases to be knowledge. Postmodernism's core is a reflexive particular self that is aware of the tentativeness, the slipperiness, the ambiguity and the complex interrelations of texts and meanings. Postmodernism is marked by a rejection of totalizing, essentialist, foundationalist concepts. Postmodernism sees 'reality' as being much more fragmented, diverse, tenuous and culture-specific. Postmodernism pays greater attention to specific histories, to the details and local contextualisation of concrete instances. Postmodernism puts greater emphasis on the body, the actual insertion of the human into the texture of time and history. Postmodernism pays greater attention to the specifics of cultural working, to the arenas of discourse and cultural practice. Postmodernism pays greater attention to the role of language and textuality in our construction of reality and identity, i.e., knowledge production

Lyotard in his *Postmodern Condition* (1984) says that the important question for postmodern societies is, who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided. Such decisions about knowledge does not involve the old modern/humanist qualifications, to assess knowledge as truth (its technical quality), or as goodness or justice (its ethical quality) or as beauty (its aesthetic quality). Lyotard argues, knowledge follows the paradigm of a language game, as laid out by Wittgenstein. By discarding 'grand narratives' (like the liberation of the entire working class) and focusing on specific local goals (such as cleaning up a water-body in your residential area), postmodernist politics offers a way to theorize local situations as fluid and unpredictable, though influenced by global trends. Hence the motto for post-modern politics might well be 'think globally, act locally' and stop worrying about grand schemes or master plans.

Critical Consciousness

Intimate learning is essential for the learner to access deeper levels of knowledge, acquire its subversive potential, be clear about its relation to social/national development and, grow critical. Critical consciousness is an indispensable aspect of faculty that a researcher should develop for enabling serious and involved research leading to the production of new knowledge. Critical thinking enables the learners in reformulating established formulations afresh and for researchers such reformulations make their theses. A supervisor of researcher who knows the politics of his specialization lets his students turn critically conscious about social reality and be committed to social justice. This should be of top priority in University teaching and research, for that

alone can ensure the making of good citizens capable of public policy debates and collective operation seeking social transformation. Critical consciousness triggers rigorous research and production of strikingly new knowledge distinct for intellectual depth.

A researcher should have critical consciousness rooted in ethics. Critical consciousness may vary between the liberal pragmatic and the radical critical theoretical type (M. Horton, 2003, S.D. Brookfield, 2005). Scholars differentiate critical consciousness as psychological, dialectical, scientific, and social theoretical (S.D. Brookfield, 2011, pp.110-16). Value postulates are integral to social researches heading for the production of deeper knowledge that is inherently subversive and critical, for it unveils the hidden contradictions and unethical practices in human affairs and social processes (P. Freire, 2005). A researcher with poor knowledge base is not only shallow but also unethical, though inadvertently. Deeper knowledge produced across disciplines is innately linked to questions of social equity and environmental sustainability, and hence critical of capitalism from the point of view of its recklessly extravagant exploitation of natural and human resources. In fact there is no dearth of knowledge about the urgency of linking up education with ecological needs. Ideas of Marx, Gandhi, Latour (B. Latour and C. Poter, 2004) and many others have warned that in our rush to separate human from nonhuman, interests from nature, and politics from ecology, we might destroy the foundation of democracy. That Nature to them is neither to be conquered nor protected was the idea used for exposing the myth of anthropocentrism.

Scientists, social scientists, linguists, artists, literary critics and creative writers alike articulate protests against the dehumanizing and anti-environmental aspects of capitalism.[4] This is made possible by the politics of knowledge. It is essential for researchers in sciences, social sciences and humanities to know the critique of globalisation process to be insightful in their research. Whatever is their topic of research, they should know, at least tenuously, the critical wisdom on globalisation and its consequences, which they have to learn from the commendable line of intellectuals, ever since the enunciation of Marx's critique of political economy and thesis on capitalism, such as Andre Gunther Frank (1966), Walter Rodney (2011), Samir Amin (1976), Immanuel Wallerstein (1989) and many others.

Challenges of Knowledge Economy

Peter F. Drucker (2011) who popularised the expression 'Knowledge Economy' had not thought about the far reaching implications of it under advanced capitalism. People take it an economy that uses knowledge to produce wealth, especially in terms of computer software and telecommunications. It is IT economy for most of us. Actually it is much more

than that as the economy based on the transaction of New Knowledge both as capital and highly priced commodity, amazingly decisive in the global market. In it economic success is based upon the capacity to command intangible assets such as creativity and innovativeness, which lead to production of new knowledge. It is a system of production and circulation of intellectual capital enabling heavy returns that constitute four-fifth of the global total.

Immediate questions relate quality of education and it is of crucial significance as to be sure whether or not a student has graduated with competencies essential to be a professional in the knowledge economy. Quality in tertiary education has become a catchword in the national development strategy under the obvious constraints of knowledge economy. Expressions such as 'world-class quality' and professional excellence' have become common in the context of higher education. A large number of private Universities have come up claiming 'world-class quality and excellence' as their distinct institutional attribute. It is part of the rhetoric of trade-tricks for these institutions that are engaged in competitive commercialisation of knowledge with little or no resources for quality assurance. They have good infrastructure in most cases, but lack academic resources for quality assurance. All Universities in the country, irrespective of the sector difference between the public and private, are under pressure to render quality higher education apposite to cater to the professional requirements of the knowledge economy.

Critical consciousness engendered by quality higher education is necessary to understand the implications of knowledge economy that is triggered by the capitalist globalisation. Michael Perelman has given an analytical account of how corporate houses confiscate creativity by trading in intellectual property rights (M. Perelman, 2004). The issue has been extensively discussed by Louis Suarez-Villa, who has subsequently expanded the features and dynamic of techno-capitalism in the context of exploitation of innovativeness or creativity (L. Suarez-villa, 2000). He goes into the political economy of techno-capitalism in a subsequent book. Due to a heavy dependence on creativity or innovativeness in technology and science as both commodity and capital, it is known as techno-capitalism today, spawning new forms of corporate power and organization of major implications for the twenty-first century. Corporate Houses have erected a system of intellectual property rights to confiscate creativity, with profound impacts on the economy, science, technology and culture (L. Suarez-villa, 2009). Nobody can exaggerate the decisive role of research in the economy that counts GDP today in terms of gross technology product (GTP) or gross science product (GSP). It has opened up an era of intellectual assets or intangible assets. Critical faculty helps us understand that the growing global importance of intangibles like new knowledge and technological innovativeness is widening

the inequalities between nations at the vanguard of techno-capitalism and those that are not. It is aggravating brain-drain between nations. Replacing the old military-industrial complex techno-military-corporate complex is growing dominant (L. Suarez-villa, 2012). A new corporatism becoming ever more intrusive and rapacious through its control over technology and innovation, anticipating several major social, economic and political consequences in a Country like India. It is pushing Universities into a major predicament with their poor quality higher education. They cannot get away from the national urgency about ensuring the production of new knowledge for enhancing intangible assets to make gains out of the techno-capitalist global knowledge economy. At the same time they cannot choose to refrain from generating critical knowledge providing insights into the grave social and environmental consequences of the economy. Either way, quality and excellence in the production and transmission of knowledge become their top-most priority.

Alarming National Truth

World Bank says that India has many of the key ingredients such as: A mass of skilled, English-speaking knowledge-workers, especially in sciences. It has a well-functioning democracy. Its domestic market is one of the largest in the world (World Bank Report, 2001). It has a large and impressive Diaspora, creating valuable knowledge linkages and networks. The list goes on by adding other features like macroeconomic stability, a dynamic private sector, institutions of a free market economy, a well-developed financial sector, and a broad and diversified science and technology infrastructure, a developed ICT sector, prospering IT, status of a global provider of software services etc. World Bank informs that building on these strengths, India can harness the benefits of the knowledge revolution to improve its economic performance and boost the welfare of its people. All this is about certain misleading surface features with which the neoliberal economic policy fabricates its rhetoric. But truth below the surface is extremely alarming.

India, a multilingual country with English as the official medium of instruction at the tertiary level, has a poor GER of 14.4%, about 70% of the rural undergraduate students unable to understand English, about 40% of the postgraduate students unable to use English for higher cognition, about 60% of the youth between 22 and 35 with innovative faculty and creativity belong to the villages where education is imparted in the Indian language. Knowledge base of the Indian languages with respect to advanced sciences and areas of emerging importance is abysmally poor. About 80 % of the total population do not have any participation in the production of Knowledge because of historically and culturally contingent limitations such as class, gender and caste discrimination. On top of all, the higher education system in the country is far

away from the track toward quality and excellence, with all the state Universities enmeshed by party-political intrigues and central Universities nowhere near the world standard.

Politicians and bureaucrats in India think higher education, a sector of expenditure rather than investment. The nation is not able to set apart for higher education even 3% of the GDP for dearth of money. At the same time several actors in the Government go recklessly extravagant and there is no financial discipline in the working of the Government. Naturally, production of new knowledge, which is highly sophisticated and enormously expensive, is extremely rare in any of the fields of modern sciences. Even traditional Indian knowledge systems are new meadows only for foreigners who take patents in them. Indians, uninitiated in traditional knowledge language of their country, draw blank about its scientific dimensions. Corporate Houses are seeking to enhance monopolistic control through Patents and IPR over the country's traditional knowledge as a major source of production of new knowledge.

India is long way off from the emerging sciences and technologies of the 21st century. Advanced software and molecular processors in computing and communications are among various new technologies that are going to be symbolic of the 21st century, in much the same way as aviation and mass production were of the 20th century. Suarez-Villa points out nanotechnology, biotechnology and its various related fields such as synthetic bioengineering, bioinformatics, biopharmocology, biomedicine, genetic engineering, agro-biotechnology, and branches of biomimetics like robotics are emerging areas of importance. The III world in general and Indian in particular, far behind in the discovery and invention sciences concerned, can only subsidise Techno-capitalism through the purchase of high-tech electronic goods, hard and soft, rather than gaining profit by selling new knowledge, creativity and innovativeness .

Now transnational exploitation of intellectual assets under Techno-capitalism is far more extensive than what it had been about raw materials under industrial Capitalism. Governments in the III world are mere agencies for diverting national revenue for supporting the aggressive expansion of Techno-capitalism under the guise of development. The ultimate political consequence shall be re-appearance of an imperial state but masked by democracy.

Built-in Strategy of Containment

Social theory informs us that education is an instrument of the socio-economic system. It is an instrument controlled by the techno-capitalist global knowledge economy and naturally its primary function would be

democratisation of conformity, rather than critical thought. Advancement of deeper knowledge, of course, would enhance critical consciousness and enable collective action for social emancipation, but the critical edge would be lost in the process of higher education under the inescapable influence of the socio-economic system. Educational process would involve a series of de-politicisation practices that would disallow dissemination of the critical dimension of knowledge. Poor quality higher education with alienated teaching, learning and research rampant in the country is not altogether accidental, since they are indispensable for the reproduction of the contradictory socio-economic system. That education is a catalyst of social change is, therefore, a myth.

Mechanical ways, means, relations and strategies of teaching and evaluation in colleges and Universities continue to deprive knowledge of its politics, i.e., its socio-critical dimension. Higher educational institutions imbued with built-in mechanisms for depoliticizing the transmission of deeper knowledge have the consequence of turning the youth into apathetic beings. In fact, there is nothing weird about this depoliticizing aspect since education, one of the most powerful social institutions normally ensures conformity rather than critical thought, for reasons of political economy. It is technically known as *autopoiesis* or the process of the socio-economic reproduction by turning even antithetical elements into self-referential components (L. Luhmann, 1990; I. Livingston, 2006). Every educational institution is a formally constituted space for the reproduction of the relations of techno-capitalism. In short, theoretically it is truth that educational institutions shall service primarily what the socio-economic system requires (P. Bourdieu and J.C. Passeron, 2000). Nevertheless, there is no need for being pessimistic about all this, because what we find theoretically unlikely is found politically feasible. Let the enlightened in the higher education institutions join hands to empower the ordinary people with the knowledge they need, for they alone can ensure quality in teaching, learning and research through collective operation.

NOTES

[1] The conceptual meanings and implications of the terms 'continuity', 'sequence', and 'integration', have been discussed in detail by Ralph W. Tylor. Though done in the context of school syllabus, Tylor's enunciation of fundamentals is equally or more relevant to higher education too.

[2] In the modernist tradition of philosophy of education, politics of knowledge is discussed against the mutuality between the form of state power and character of epistemology. P. Gorden et.al discuss the continuous development of educational thought over three millennia. A.V. Kelly does

it more analytically. Long before, there appeared an altogether different theorization of knowledge by M. Foucault. Following this alternative perception, in the postmodern context, who decides what knowledge to be taught is the question fundamental to politics of knowledge because the production and distribution of knowledge have a crucial role in the maintenance of the social power relations. This question is addressed significantly by W.E. Doll and E. Rata. Nevertheless, it is the bearing of contradictory social power relations on knowledge and the inherently subversive critical potential of deeper knowledge that I have taken fundamental about the politics of knowledge.

[3] Studies in the limits to the capitalist paradigm of growth and development are quite well known. *Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and William W. Behrens III have published warnings against the non-sustainability of development way back in 1972, which have been revised and updated in 1992. J.M. Diamond has subsequently discussed the issue in a slightly different way.*

[4] Studies in human geography by Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey constitute classic examples. They provide a theoretical analysis of urbanisation and the techno-capitalist spatialisation.

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MUSLIM RESPONSES TO MODERN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper contextualizesthe Darul Ulum (as Deoband was known) established in 1867 and the Madrasatul Ulum (as the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College, later the Aligarh Muslim University, was initially known) established in 1877.These educational ventures were also counterpointed by the Darul Ulum Nadwatul Ulama founded in 1898 and the Jamia Millia Islamia which came into existence in 1920.
Keywords: Islam, Modernity, Education, Syed Ahmad Khan, Gandhi, Ambedkar, Alam Khundmiri.

I

In the wake of the 1857 rebellion and the severe and systematic colonial repression that targeted all potentially subversive communities in the north of the Indian sub-continent, a 52-year-old "royalist" traveled to London to find out what was wrong with the world. Syed Ahmad Khan belonged to a well-to-do aristocratic family and might have thought of himself as belonging to an international fraternity that shared progressive ideas of government. But the colonial intervention had already substituted Urdu for Persian in 1835, a move touted as having rendered a nation of "Muslims" illiterate. The flip side of this would be that it must have made another nation, in all the senses, literate. New centers of power—along diverse ideas of a nascent-nationalism that happily married at convenience and lived a turbulent life, working with such imponderables as the secular, the communal, the feudal, the capitalistic, the social, the cultural, the political, the public, the private and the like, adopting strategies of antagonism and collaboration as and when required—were springing up. The London visit gave Syed Ahmad Khan a rude shock and a new calling.

Syed Ahmad Khan left the Indian subcontinent in 1869 with the hope that he would be able to "prepare a refutation of British attacks on the history of Islam by using the wide range of sources available to his adversaries" (Lelyveld, 1996:3). He was not planning to come back. But going over *The People of India*, a publication of the India Office (see, Watson) and reading the English descriptions through his sons' translations, Syed Ahmad Khan was shocked to find "photographs of nearly naked men or people in unfamiliar dress" (Lelyveld, 1996:6) featured as representative of Indians, Hindus,

Muslims, etc. The third volume describes an Aligarh District landholder as having "features [that] are peculiarly Mahomedan, of the centralasian type; and while they vouch for the purity of his descent, exemplify in a strong manner the obstinacy, sensuality, ignorance, and bigotry of his class. It is hardly possible, perhaps, to conceive features more essentially repulsive" (cited by Lelyveld, 1996:6). Syed Ahmad Khan's exposure to the other's representation had a telling effect: he decided to come back and live among the "natives." He started various English-medium schools, much to the chagrin of ardent and hardened nationalists, whether of religious or secular credentials. He also established the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh in 1875, which in 1920 became the Aligarh Muslim University.

If what shocked Syed Ahmad Khan was that he could be represented, enumerated, as belonging to peoples with whom he had nothing in common by the same people with whom he thought he had many things in common, the Sachar Committee Report[1] has recently provided us with another kind of shock. I only draw attention to findings related to education: less than 4 percent Muslims graduate from school; contrary to right-wing propaganda, only 4 percent go to Madrasas, principally because in most areas of high Muslim concentration even primary state schools do not exist for miles; where they do exist, Muslims invariably prefer to send their wards to them, even when the dropout rate of Muslim children is much higher compared to other community wards due to "poverty" as these children are pressed into work by their indigent parents.

II

Whereas caste was the main node of a possible alliance among various Hindu communities, the Muslim elite, in the wake of the revolt of 1857 and the first all-India census in 1881 that tabulated 19.7 percent of the Muslim population as participating in Hindu religious festivals and ceremonies,[2] concentrated on the common denominator of Islam in order to construct a "corporate identity."[3] If Indian nationalism gave birth to national communalism as well as Hindu or Muslim communal nationalism, the common denominator of community made it even more impossible for "Nationalist Muslims"[4] to work within the secular modern nationalist frame. This is all the more significant if we take into account the fact that Muslims, by virtue of their pre- or post -national spill over, could be read as an always-already community, whereas the issue of caste was constantly a problem within the Hindu notion of a community. This presumed always-already-ness of the Muslim peoples has given strength to the notion that Muslim academies (Maulanas and Allamas) were a decisive factor in reinforcing communalism, if not fanaticism, among

Muslims. However, as against the common practice of analyzing them as hotbeds of Islamic separatism of varying degrees, my attempt is to re-frame these academies so that their troubled history—an integral part of the pan-Indian anti-colonial social mobilization and of various reform initiatives that were taking place all over the Indian subcontinent—would become accessible for critical analyses.

Recent studies draw attention to the presence, at least by late 1880s, of an already awakened modern consciousness among the peoples of various regions within the subcontinent. These studies have initiated a re-assessment of Gandhi's role in the nationalist movement as one directed towards harnessing and appropriating the masses for a nationalist struggle against colonialism even as the people struggled against various oppressive practices locally. Whereas the peoples' moves were characterized by the urgent agenda of social reform as imperative for political emancipation, Gandhi worked with the ideal of political liberation (loaded with religious symbols and rhetoric) as a means for the establishment of a community free of all modern evils.[5] Contrasting it with the following succinctly brings out the different pull of the Gandhian notion of politics:

As early as 1889 when the Prince of Wales visited Poona, JotibaPhule had one message to convey to the Queen—the need for education of the lower castes. He made the first generation school children of the Mahar and Mali castes recite: "Tell Grandma we are a happy nation, but 19 crores are without education. Before the turn of the century, Sri Narayana Guru advised his followers: Educate that you may be free and organize that you may be strong." A couple of decades later, Dr. Ambedkar thundered: "Educate, Organize and Agitate." (Aloysius, 1998:197)

The Gandhian strategy is best exemplified by the massive movement he triggered off in 1919 combining such disparate issues as cow protection, Khilafat, Non-cooperation and untouchability on a single platform. With a single stroke Gandhi tried to offer cow protection to the elite caste/class, support for an Islamic symbol that was at worst confusing and at best threatened a post-national spillover and removal of untouchability as well as capture of the leadership of Congress at Nagpur in 1920. In contrast, Jinnah became the "sole spokesman" of Muslims much later. Countering the tendency of traditional nationalist historiography that trace the source and spread of Islamic separatism to colonial policies and elite Muslim manipulations, Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal argue that it was primarily Gandhi's support of the Khilafat that weaned power away from the Muslim League and possibly set off a two-nation policy. After the fall of Khilafat, the Muslims did not have any significant platform and some Muslim politicians from minority provinces

turned to Jinnah. Deploring Gandhi's mix of religion and politics, Jinnah had already left Congress. After being shouted down at the Nagpur Congress session in 1920, he seemingly bid farewell to politics, significantly on account of his disenchantment with the Congress position on the Nehru Report of 1928. It is in this context that we find Jinnah, by 1934, at the helm of the Muslim League (Bose and Jalal, 1999:171).

Against the grain of the standard practice of reducing Islam in India to pan-Islamic separatism, and then tracing the beginnings of a teleological narrative of this mode, I argue that pan-Islamic interests can be read in terms other than that of separatism. Even after the collapse of the Khilafat agitation,[6] which lost wind when the Turkish National Assembly at Ankara announced on 21 November 1922 that the Khilafat and the Sultanate were two different offices not necessarily vested in one person, there was hardly any serious thought of a different nation. An examination of the relationship between Islam and modernity in the Indian subcontinent as exemplified by the initiatives of two of the four main centres of Islamic thought and culture, the DarulUlumDeoband and the Aligarh Muslim University, would substantiate such an argument[7] as these institutions were also driven by a felt need for socio-cultural reforms. However, for such an argument to emerge, it is necessary to set up a framework in which these institutions can be situated in frames other than those of Islamic separatism. Given the complex of Hindu and Muslim political negotiations, deadlocks and resolutions, the idea of a separate nation can perhaps be understood as evolving across, rather than because, of these educational institutions. However, these educational and reform initiatives have consistently been placed within a narrative of separatism, inherent or accidentally incurred, that had such disastrous consequences for the subcontinent. Whether it is Peter Hardy, Rafiuddin Ahmed, Bipan Chandra, MushirulHasan (1991), Francis Robinson (1993), B.R. Nanda or Bimal Prasad, to cite a few examples, we find religion framed as pre-modern impinging on and finally overwhelming modern politics of nationalism. In keeping with the logic of readiness to chart a continuous pre-historic past, except for the Islamic rupture, the pre-1947 Islamic past is also being systematically cast as part and parcel of Muslim separatism in India and thereby a part of the history of Pakistan, and not of the Indian subcontinent.

However, most of these historians also agree that the period between 1833 and 1864 marked the trough of economic depression among the Muslim communities, though Indian historiography has not been much bothered by statements that can be culled out from various sources to establish the existence of harmony or of discord between Hindu and Muslim communities. For example, Alberuni who had accompanied the invading Mahmud of Ghazni,

invoking a rhetoric of "us" and "them," notes that "they [Hindus] differ from us [Muslims] in everything which other nations have in common," be it language, religion, manners or usage so much that they "frighten their children with us, with our dress, and our ways and customs, and as to declare us to be devil's breed, and our doings as the very opposite of all that is good and proper."[8] In the context of the rapid decline of the Mughal dynasty after the death of Aurangzeb (in 1707), Shah Waliullah (1703-1762) spearheaded a movement among Muslims—much before the somewhat parallel initiative of Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833)—a partly revivalist initiative directed towards resurrecting and energizing the Muslims of India (see, Rizvi:1980). He sought to do so by making them aware of the message of Islam and by trying to purge Islam from all its accidental accretions in the Indian subcontinent. However, he also sought for himself an Arabic lineage and "wrote to one Muslim ruler or nobleman after another imploring them to muster courage and start a *jihad* for the restoration of Muslim rule in India" (Prasad, 1999:74). Shah Waliullah's attitude towards people of other faiths, one of absolute scorn (Prasad, 1999:75), should be read in the context of the rising Maratha power and the economic degeneration of the Muslim community. After the battle of Plassey (in 1757), whereby the British took over from the Mughal dynasty, Muslims were systematically kept out of the revenue, judicial and military departments of the new state apparatus. Motivated by a desire to stop the economic as well as intellectual degradation of Muslims, Shah Waliullah established a *madrasah* and translated the Quran into Persian, the language of the state apparatus then, going against the precept that it has to be read in Arabic alone, so that Muslims in India could read and understand it for themselves. After his death, his son, Shah Abdul Aziz (1746-1824), vigorously upheld Shah Waliullah's ideals. Angered at the institutional neglect of Muslims, in 1803 Abdul Aziz declared India "the country of the enemy" (*DarulHarb*), thereby giving legal/religious sanction to Muslims to either migrate or fight the British. In the fatwa, Abdul Aziz outlines the reasons:

In this city (Delhi) the *Imam-ul-Muslimin* wields no authority. The real power rests with Christian officers. There is no check on them; and the promulgation of the Commands of *Kufr* means that in administration and justice, in matter of law and order, in the domain of trade, finance and collection of revenue—everywhere the *Kuffar* (infidels) are in power. Yes, there are certain Islamic rituals, e.g. Friday and Id prayers, *adhan* and cow slaughter, with which they brook no interference; but the very root of these rituals is of no value to them. They demolish mosques without the least hesitation and no Muslim or any *dhimmi* can enter into the city or its suburbs but with their permission. It is in their own interests if they do not object to the travelers and

traders to visit the city. On the other hand, distinguished persons like Shuja-ul-Mulk and Vilayati Begum cannot dare visit the city without their permission. From here (Delhi) to Calcutta the Christians are in complete control. There is no doubt that in principalities like Hyderabad, Rampur, Lucknow etc. they have left the administration in the hands of the local authorities, but it is because they have accepted their lordship and have submitted to their authority.[9]

One of his disciples, Shah Ahmed Barelvi (1786-1831) led the Wahhabi movement, a religious reform initiative with socio-political implications. This movement fed into the 1857 rebellion in which both the Hindu and Muslim communities participated.[10] The suppression of the revolt only led to an even more drastic repression of Muslims. Following Bourdieu,[11] it is not difficult to see what a Muslim leader's agenda would have been in the post-1857 period: an acute realization of the increasing contradictions in the Muslim social world whereby what was held as social capital became untranslatable or convertible to economic capital and whereby the Muslim cultural capital lost its value in terms of exchange, called for institutionalized ventures to recharge and re-circulate the various forms of capital in the Muslim socius. Two prominent Muslims of this time, Maulana Qasim Nanautavi (1832-1880) and Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), both disciples of Maulana Mamluk Ali of the Waliullahi school of thought, reacted differently during and after the 1857 rebellion, thereby starting, respectively, the *DarulUlum* (as Deoband was known) in 1867 and the *Madrasatul Ulum* (as the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College, later the Aligarh Muslim University, was initially known) in 1877.[12]

Darul Ulum of Deoband "emphasized the diffusion of scripturalist practices and the cultivation of an inner spiritual life" (Metcalf, 1990: 278).Barbara Metcalf[13] notes that, when confronted with social changes with far reaching implications, the leaders of this movement adopted "a strategy of turning within, eschewing for the time all concern with the organization of state and relations with other communities . . . [in order to] preserve the religious heritage . . . and to disseminate instruction in authentic religious practice and belief" (1982:11). Their turn away from politics was to foster the "dominant activities [of] education and propaganda" (1982:352), but, warns Barbara Metcalf, "this overriding meaning given to the movement is crucial if one is not to be misled into seeing 'modernity' where the participants would see Islam" (1982:360). However, her concession that some of the "unique characteristics of Islamic movements," in that they are shaped "by new means of communication, Western domination and resulting forms of economic change, and by mass participation in political activities" (1982:360) may reduce some of the seeming differences between her and my framing of

these Islamic movements. The basic similarity in our positions is also brought out when she writes: "Yet the Islamic quality of the movements is central, not only because it gives them meaning, but because it has a life of its own, apart from any abstract model of 'modernity' that regards such symbols as only veneer" (1982: 360). In a frame that looks at religion, especially Islam, not as antithetical to modernity and acknowledges modernity as having other trajectories, Islamic initiatives, even the strictly religious Deoband movement, can be seen as engaging with modernity without foregoing the religious aspect.

The Aligarh movement and the Deoband school of thought embodied two different, and even antagonistic, alternatives available for Muslims vis-à-vis nationalist politics. The Aligarh movement, which was instrumental in shaping Mohamed Ali, was formatted by the religious and reformist zeal of Syed Ahmad Khan, the loyalist-turned-nationalist. David Lelyveld writes of a shocked Syed Ahmad Khan who came back from London determined to refashion the Indian Muslim.(Lelyveld, 1996:3-6). It would help us to remember here that the opposition to Syed Ahmad Khan "came neither from opponents of modern education nor from people discontented with British rule . . . [but from] people who had come to terms with British rule without the kind of modifications of religious belief that Sayyid Ahmad proposed"(Metcalf,1982: 324-25). The Aligarh movement held on to a position that Dalits have articulated more forcefully later; it was interested in educational initiatives and institutionalization of a modern subjectivity, even if it meant allying with the British, before political emancipation could be thought of. On the other hand, the Deoband movement, comprising the poor strata of society and guided by more orthodox religious leaders, followed the Congress initiative for a full-fledged anti-colonial move. Blind to the fact that "religion was inextricably mixed up with politics" (Hasan, 1999: 51), and especially so in Gandhi's Congress, it is Syed Ahmad Khan and the Aligarh movement which is severely chastised by nationalists for introducing western ideals and the seeds of separatism. The urgency felt by Syed Ahmad Khan for socio-cultural reforms is exemplified by the following statement:

Now, suppose that the British are not in India and that one of the nations of India has conquered the other, whether the Hindus the Muhammedans or the Muhammedans the Hindus. At once some other nation of Europe, such as the French, the Germans, the Portugese or the Russians, will attack India. . . .

Everyone will agree that their governments are far worse . . . than the British Government. It is, therefore, necessary that for the peace of India and for the progress of everything in India the English Government should remain for many years—in fact forever. (196-197)

He should also be seen in the light of his, at times idealistic, conception of a secular, free India where Hindus and Muslims share representative power in the government. He also felt that Muslims were not ready for such a power-sharing, and hence, opposed the Congress thrust for immediate political freedom and supported an Anglo-Islamic alliance, in order to safeguard the Muslims of the subcontinent. Later, he was to talk of his life's work as a bitter failure; Lelyveld notes: "The fathers of Aligarh's first generation sought change and acted to bring it about, but the changes they got were different from what they had in mind" (103). Nonetheless, Aligarh was to become a political symbol because of the social and cultural changes taking place around it and also because of it.

B.R. Nanda, guided by his desire to absolve the Congress by blaming the British, reads Syed Ahmad Khan's ideas as coinciding with W.W. Hunter's recommendations to neutralize discontent leading to resistance by Muslims. Hunter had "suggested that the Government should do, through English education, to the Muslims what it had done to the Hindus, and bring the Muslims also into the 'present state of easy tolerance,' which was characteristic of the majority community" (Nanda, 145). Hunter envisaged a new breed of Muslims, "no longer learned in their own narrow learning, nor imbued wholly with the bitter doctrines of their Mediaeval Law, but tinctured with the sober and genial knowledge of the West," with "sufficient acquaintance with their religious code to command the respect of their own community," who could be English-trained so that they could "secure an entry into the lucrative walks of life" (Hunter, 1871:182). In his eagerness to trace the seeds of separatism in the Anglo-Islamic alliance, Nanda turns a blind eye to the major thrust of Hunter's statement that the Muslims were economically as well as socially backward when compared to Hindus. What should be stressed is that Syed Ahmad Khan had a different agenda, that of regenerating a community by enabling it to mediate modernity. This is brought out by the fact that his pamphlet *Strictures on the Present State of Education in India* stresses the inadequacy of the education offered by the British to Indians. It must be remembered that JotiraoPhule (1827-1890), who was conferred the title "Mahatma" in 1888, had made a representation to Hunter's Commission stating that the majority of "Hindus" and "Muslims" have been categorically kept out of education (Joshi, 1996:34-41).Syed Ahmad Khan notes: "The sum total of all that has been effected by the English Colleges, has been to qualify an insignificant number, as letter-writers, copyists, signal-men, and railway ticket collectors" (cited, Lelyveld, 1996:107). Moreover, as Lelyveld points out, there is a significant area in which he differs from Hunter's position; he did not think that Muslims were bound by their religion

to oppose the British (Lelyveld, 1996:112). This was a crucial part of Syed Ahmad Khan's programme, since a perception that Muslims were bound to fight by their religion would have been detrimental to his programme of educational initiatives.

In this context, it is of interest that Syed Alam Khundmiri articulates a different critique of Islam and of the initiative of Syed Ahmad Khan. According to him, the problem for Islam, especially in India, is to enable itself to move towards an understanding of the need to fill the gap between absolute reason and historical reason. Given the plethora of legal and juridical codifications of the proper Islamic way of life, which draw on a ten percent of verses in the Quran, he argues that various Islamic communities are called upon to supplement the absolute reason, as embodied in the Quran, with their own particular historical reason. He sees the situation of Muslims in India as challenging in that they have to play the role of a minority in a state that calls itself secular, whereby politics have been separated from religion. Hence, in an aporetic move, he argues against his own understanding of "the intimate relation of politics and religion in early Islam" (46) and advocates a "[s]eparation of politics and religion and minimalization of religion in public life [as] the only sensible solutions for a multi-religious society like India" (104).[14] I would place such contradictions, as was the case with Mohamed Ali, as inherent in the critical-subject position articulating a critique on different levels. Nonetheless, Khundmiri also points to the sad fact that in India, secularism is yet to be the mode of life that informs all its institutions (225) and "[d]esacralization becomes one of the inevitable consequences of the march of modernity or secularization" (230). Hence, Syed Ahmad Khan's ideals cannot be read as motivated by his vested class interests, as M.Mujeeb seems to do when he bemoans that a "selfish and parasitical" North Indian Muslim community became the "residuary legatees of all cultural values" for Indian Muslims.[15] Considering these facts, the majority of Indians, Hindus and Muslims alike, were hardly made part of the elite domain of Indian nationalist thought, and thus Syed Ahmad Khan may be seen as embodying an earlier form of the Indian secular nation-hood, as imagined later by Jinnah and Nehru. But it was the DarulUlum of Deoband that interested the Congress. The phenomenon of Gandhi presents a picture where the secular elite nationalists (Hindu and Muslim alike) were caught on the wrong foot by the mass mobilization unleashed by Gandhi. Gandhi's initiative transformed the scene of nationalist politics once and forever. However, it is not scrutinized for pan-Indian or pan-Hinduistic trends as against, say, the pan-Islamic separatism of a Syed Ahmad Khan or a Mohamed Ali (1878-1931). Khundmiri comments:

It is a significant fact, which is often ignored, that—though the Muslim intellectuals, led by Syed Ahmed Khan, did not agree with their Hindu counterparts so far as politics was concerned—there was complete theoretical agreement between them so far as the dominant ideas of rationalism and a scientific criticism of the past were concerned. . . .

The situation, however, changed with the coming over of the nationalists on the Indian scene. The Hindu liberals were replaced by extremists like Tilak, B.P. Pal, and Aurobindo, and the Muslim liberals by the young obscurantist Abul Kalam Azad. Rationalism was replaced by religious authority, and the "present" was reduced into the past. (233)

We must remember here that Ambedkar (1891-1956) had to give up, for the sake of national unity and to save the life of a fasting Mahatma, his thrust for separate electorates for the scheduled castes and other underprivileged in the historic Poona pact. Writing out his thoughts of Pakistan in 1941, we find Ambedkar being almost pensive about the "common destiny" (54) of Muslims in India and remarks: "So obvious is this destiny that it is somewhat surprising that the Muslims should have taken so long to own it up . . . [though] some of them knew this to be the ultimate destiny of the Muslims as early as 1923" (50). Reading the idea of Pakistan as a "pre-appointed destiny" (56) which was working within the Muslims unknown to them, Ambedkar notes that the dominion status and the adult franchise scheme of the Nehru report which touted "the principle of one-man-one-vote and one-vote-one-value and that, however much the benefit is curtailed by weightage of Muslims, the result cannot fail to be a government of the Hindus, by the Hindus and therefore for the Hindus" (56). Any attempt to force a unity will only lead to a complete frustration of India's destiny, he writes, wondering whether "integral India is an ideal worth fighting for" (57). Noting that the Muslims should have talked of a nation from the very beginning, though the "distinction between a community and a nation is rather thin," instead of "mistakenly calling itself a community even when it has in it the elements of a nation" because they were not "possessed of a national consciousness although in every sense of the term they are a nation" (53). Recalling Mohamed Ali's 1923 Presidential address where he had noted that "[u]nless some new force other than the misleading unity of opposition unites this vast continent of India, it will remain a geographical misnomer" (59), Ambedkar argues that the Hindus and Muslims have met but never merged:

Only during the Khilafat agitation did the waters of the two channels leave their appointed course and flow as one stream in one channel. It was believed that nothing would separate the waters which God was pleased to join. But that hope was belied. It was found that there was something in the composition of the two waters which would compel

their separation. Within a few years of their confluence but as soon as the substance of the Khilafat cause vanished—the water from the one stream reacted violently to the presence of the other, as one does to a foreign substance entering one's body. Each began to show a tendency to throw out and separate the other. The result was that when the waters did separate they did with such impatient velocity and determined violence—if one can use such language in speaking of water—against each other that thereafter they began flowing in channels far deeper and far distant from each other than those existing before. (55)

Ambedkar is severe in his criticism of the mass mobilization programme launched by Gandhi and the Congress, for it "was intended to produce political unity between Hindu and Muslim masses by ignoring or circumventing the leaders of the Muslims," essentially similar to "the plan of the British conservative Party to buy Labour with 'Tory Gold'" (59). Though it may produce unity, such unity would be suppressing an opposition by unfair and despicable means, like false propaganda, by misrepresentation and would only end up by disarming the community. Ruminating on the common destiny of the Muslims, Ambedkar, wistfully, compares them to the Dalits:

A people who, notwithstanding their differences, accept a common destiny for themselves as well as their opponents, are a community. A people who are not only different from the rest but who refuse to accept for themselves the same destiny which others do, are a nation. It is this difference in the acceptance and non-acceptance of a common destiny which alone can explain why the Untouchables, the Christians and the Parsis are in relation to the Hindus only communities and why the Muslims are a nation. (54)

Hastily pointing out that there "cannot be any radical difference between a minor nation and a minor community, where both are prepared to live under one single constitution" (54), Ambedkar notes that if the differences are not addressed, but only suppressed, then "India will be an anaemic and sickly state, ineffective, a living corpse, dead though not buried" (57). In hindsight, we can point out that India did not die, it successfully united itself by constructing the Muslim as "something other than the other," that holds the nation together and haunts it at the same time. This haunting it to hold it together inevitably points to the unfinished nature of the nation-formation so that we are required to blatantly chant our patriotism so as to deflect attention from its own "spectral truth" in the face of the other's "material truth" (Derrida, 1998:87).

We are again and again brought to face the possibility that "spectrality" of Islam is constructed in order to blunt Dalit critique of Brahminical Hinduism. Ambedkar's statement that "[a] caste has no feeling that is affiliated to other castes except when there is a Hindu-Muslim riot" (52) makes one wonder

about the bogey of the Muslim, a bogus Indian, serving the nation by haunting it. Hence, from the minoritarian/Dalit angles force one to rethink Gandhi's opposition to separate electorates for the "lower" castes. Beverley Nichols notes:

    Gandhi fiercely opposed this scheme. "Give the untouchables separate electorates," he cried, "and you only perpetuate their status for all time." It was a queer argument, and those who were not bemused by the Mahatma's charm considered it a phoney one. They suspected that Gandhi was a little afraid that 60 million untouchables might join up with the 100 million Muslims—(as they nearly did)—and challenge the dictatorship of the 180 million orthodox Hindus. (39)

    In marked contrast to the valourization of a pan-Hindu identity, pan-Islamism of the Aligarh or the Deoband variety is labeled separatist in a very easy manner. The success and failure of Gandhi's ad-venture is absolutely tied to his vision of an Indian modern nation, a *Hind-swaraj*. Gandhi's intrusion or intervention into the nationalist scene sparked off more problems than solutions: an upper-caste and western educated Gandhi "returning" to the people with a South African exposure to racism and abjuring his clothes in order to serve the "people of India" with strategic alliances with Muslims captures the complexity of the issue. He thought of Muslims as another community and easily walked into alliances with the Ali brothers who duplicated Gandhi's initiative among the Muslim communities. Hence, pan-Islamism must be seen as parallel to the pan-Hindu initiative of Gandhi and the Congress, and both are culpable, if that is the right word, for the creation of two nation-states. In this context, it is actually the Darul Ulum Nadwatul Ulama that embodied a post-national pan-Islamic position. Combining the Deoband's religious initiative and the Aligarh's modernizing trends, they advocated a return to Arabic and critiqued the Arab nation-states for their adherence to the nationalist ideology of the West. They intended to re-charge the world of Islam by writing the Indian experience into it (Zaman, 1998:59-81). Unlike the Deoband, the Aligarh and the Jamia Millia ventures, the Darul Ulum Nadwatul Ulama's stress is more on the Arab-Islamic heritage than on the Indian experience of Islam.

    In Khundmiri's perspective, Syed Ahmad Khan set out to enable Muslims of India to engage with modernity, even if it required a "depoliticiz[ation of] the Indian Muslims" (267). What is also relevant is that he understood the danger of falling into the trap of a mentality that looked backwards to a golden age of Mughal power. As Khundmiri remarks: "The conflict between the two outlooks of two Indian communities is, really speaking, a conflict between two past-oriented outlooks. It is a fact that most sensitive minds among Hindus and Muslims adopt an apologetic attitude

towards their respective traditions" (279). This happened among Muslims, in Khundmiri's words, because

> a community whose existence is being questioned by a powerful section of the majority can hardly be expected to take a bold jump into the unknown future. The suspicions of this articulate section of the majority are not merely based on ignorance; there are reasonable grounds to believe that a totalitarian-fascist trend is the source of an antipathy towards Indian Muslims. To think in terms of cultural revival is itself irrational and unscientific, but when the majority talks about it, it becomes a greater threat to the growth of democratic institutions. (281)

As a corollary of this threat, Islam in the modern context became dominated by elitist, conservative, anti-democratic and authoritarian thought (271) which tried to shake itself off lived historical accretions, like folk-religious practices (50), which was also the mark of its history in India. According to Khundmiri, instead of advocating a pan-Islamic exclusivity or separatism, Syed Ahmad Khan in his "passion to bring science and religion closer landed him[self] in a deistic position [whereby] in the ultimate analysis God was almost banished from his religious consciousness" (78). Khundmiri goes on to identify the cause for this in Syed Ahmad Khan's perception of myth as contrary to contemporary science. This could have been an extreme reaction to the philosophical stagnation in contemporary Islamic thought, which started imitating its own past. What is required is for Islam to move "forward in time and . . . forc[e] a re-entry on the stage of history" (101). Khundmiri is able to identify the problem with Syed Ahmad Khan's initiative as a negation of historically developed religious practices. However, written in the heyday of the Nehruvian promise, Khundmiri is not able to grant such historically developed practices a political edge. In Mohamed Ali's words,

> Syed Ahmad Khan had no less aversion to the schools and colleges of a religiously neutral government and he attributed the backwardness of his co-religionists in Western education to their sound instinct and the cherished traditions of their past which could not tolerate such a thing as a complete divorce between secular and religious education. (Hasan, 1999: 62)

Also, when Khundmiri talks about Syed Ahmad Khan's depoliticization of Muslims, he is reading politics in a limited manner. That is the reason he cannot look at Syed Ahmad Khan's move towards a depoliticization of Indian Muslims as being political. Reading the existentialist movement as the consequence of a clash between the theocentric and the anthropocentric attitudes, Khundmiri notes: "The 'dead God' still haunts the imagination of the secularized humanity of the twentieth century and in a certain sense this idea seems to determine the quality of human existence" (288). Hence, we

can see that Khundmiri's position is that religion and politics have to be read as always-already connected, given the Christian ethos of the western modern. The cry for their separation is usually raised against minoritarian communities in a majoritarian world. Arguing against the easy equation arrived at between the majoritarian and minoritarian "communalism," Jalal comments that "such an overarching and loaded term as communalism ends up essentializing the very religiously informed identities, politics and conflicts it purportedly aims at explaining and combating" (78). She warns against an "academic communalism" in that our debates acknowledge communalism as at best the pejorative other of nationalism or at worst a borrowing from the colonialist project of essentializing Indian society and history. Stressing the need for charting out a new typology that sidesteps the facile and rigid distinctions between liberals and traditionalists or between modernists and anti-modernists or between communalists or secular nationalists, she points out that a "decidedly elitist discourse," especially that of the exponents of the Muslim-minority provinces, has been usually taken "as not only reflective of Indian Muslims but also their 'communal consciousness'" (80). And the elision of religious difference, she argues, with an essentialized homogeneous Muslim community is explained, as in the work of FarzanaShaikh,in terms of "the legitimizing ideals of Islamic solidarity and the necessary subordination of the individual will to the *ijma* or consensus of the community" (Jalal, 80). Jalal notes how Altaf Hussain Hali or his mentor, Syed Ahmad Khan or Muhamed Ali had no conception of their Muslimness as being at odds with their Indianness. She shows how the Deoband orthodoxy, which she describes as more culturally exclusive and "harbouring anti-colonial and Islamic universalist sentiments, immersed themselves in religious strictures at traditional educational institutions" (82) and, later on, the more religiously inclined young Abul Kalam Azad ended up siding with an inclusionary and "secular" Indian nationalism. Such a move, in Khundmiri's words, was premised on "a mystification of the past rather than a preparation for building a new future" and the "seeds of the glorification of the past were contained in the movement for independence itself" (277). According to Jalal, in the face of increasing Hindu revivalist ventures, especially on cow slaughter and a Hindi with a Devanagari script, "the interests of the 'majority' religious community could be subsumed under the umbrella of the emerging Indian 'nation,' those of the largest religious 'minority' remained marooned in the idea of the 'community'" (85). Jalal comments that almost all analyses of the Montford reforms underplay "the extent to which the provincial dynamic in electoral and representative activities countered the process of 'communalizing' Muslim politics at the all-India level. . . . The convergence of Muslim and Punjabi or

Muslim and Bengali did not mean exchanging provincial interest for a common religious identity" (89). She adds that the dismal performance of the League in the 1937 elections substantiates the view that there was not any primary cohesion among Muslims of India at the national level; it was rather "the perceived threat from the singular and uncompromising 'nationalism' of the Congress to provincial autonomy and class interests which gave the discourse and politics of the Indian Muslims as a subcontinental category a fresh lease of life" (90). Moreover, the demand for Bangladesh in the Islamic nation-state of Pakistan has to be read as disproving claims of a pan-Islamic cohesion at the subcontinental level. Also, as Jalal notes: "More successful in deluding itself than large segments of society comfortably positioned to simultaneously live out multiple layers of identity, the inefficacy of the Pakistani state's Islamic card is a powerful indictment of the argument that the religious factor in 'Muslim consciousness' outweighs all other considerations" (99).

III

These days there seem to be a fair level of consensus on the problematic. Let me try to put it in a simple form. There is an agreement that modernity and secularism are historical projects that originated in Europe. These cannot be readily adopted by other nations. In fact, the given nation form itself can be seen as being underwritten by a secular-modern ethos. Secularism in its western form was more of a negotiated understanding between the Church and the State in Europe. These nations did undergo a modernization at the political, civil-social and cultural dimensions. The history of secularism in India is largely different in that it was the nation-state that adopted secularism (it can said that in the case of Europe, it was the Church that adopted secularism in that it agreed that life need not be always governed by religious norms). Secularism in India was not a separation between the public and the private, but was rather a watchdog who was supposed to ensure equal respect for all religions. Hence, public and private are not water-tight compartments or neat categories for us nor do Indian lives acknowledge a separation between the secular and the sacred. There is considerable spill over or cross over between them. If we understand that we need to start rethinking our situation, the first step is to develop adequate tools that are context-specific. That is to say, we start from the perspective that there are no given universals and that even the categories, like "religion," needs to be urgently re-examined. This can only happen over a period of time and the first area to focus would be education. With regard to Islam, education is understood in two different ways. The first focuses on developing Islamic disciplines with regard to modern requirements. The second would focus on imparting education in classical Islamic thought, rather than in traditional

Islam. The idea then would be to promote independent and individual thinking, *ijtihaad*, among Muslims, visualizing education not as knowledge but as critical thinking.

NOTES

[1] A seven-member "Prime Ministers' High Level Committee" headed by RajinderSachar (see, Sachar), a retired chief justice of the Delhi high court, set up by the government of India, on 9 March 2005, to inquire into the socio-economic and educational status of Muslims in India, who make for roughly 14% of India's population of 1.1 billion, submitted its report on 30 November 2006. Though the Committee and the Report has been criticized, the issues raised by the report itself are chilling. Some important findings: less than 4% Muslims graduate from school; contrary to right-wing propaganda, only 4% go to Madrasas, principally because in most areas of high Muslim concentration even primary state schools do not exist for miles; where they do exist, Muslims invariably prefer to send their wards to them, even when the dropout rate of Muslim children is much higher compared to other community wards due to "poverty" as these children are pressed into work by their indigent parents; the Muslim share in government employment is 4.9% (against a population of 14%); in a state like West Bengal ruled by the Left Front, their representation in state Public Sector Undertakings is exactly zero percent!; among India's Security Agencies (viz., CRPF, CISF, BSF, SSB &c.) Muslim representation is 3.2%; just 2.7% are in place among District Judges; in towns that range in population between 50,000 and 2 lakhs, Muslim per capita expenditure is less than that of India's Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes! This is also the case in areas across West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh; not more than 3% Muslims are able to get subsidized loans, and only 1.9% benefit from the Antyodaya Anna Yojana Scheme (programme to prevent starvation among the extremely poor); only 2.1% Muslim farmers own tractors, and just 1% own hand pumps for irrigation; there is a "substantial demand from the community for fertility regulation and for modern contraceptives"; over 20 million couples already use contraceptives; "Muslim population growth has slowed down as fertility has declined substantially"; if Muslims do outnumber majority Hindus in any statistics, it is predictably as a proportion of the prison population. In Maharashtra, for instance, Muslims make up 10.6% of the population but 32.4% of them are either convicted or facing trial; wherever Muslims are spoken to they complain of suffering the twin calumnies of being dubbed "anti-national" and of being "appeased"; both accusations never allow them to feel equal citizens of India. The Report also puts on record the little-recognized reality of caste hierarchies that have always existed among subcontinental Muslims. Thus, the Ashrafs, Ajlafs, Arzals, respectively correspond to the Hindu Swarns, Other Backward Castes, and Schedule

Castes respectively. Although, untouchability of the kind that afflicts the Hindu social order does not exist among Muslims, and although there is no bar to collective prayer in mosques, the reluctance to inter-dine and inter-marry is often only a concealed reality. The website also draws our attention to "three of the many path-breaking recommendations that the Sachar Report makes": the report recommends that 15% of all government funds be allocated to Muslim welfare and development under all Central government schemes; it recommends the constitution of an "Equal Opportunities Commission" to look into the grievances of deprived groups and for the elimination of anomalies with respect to reserved constituencies under the delimitation scheme; and, though it does not recommend "reservations" for the Muslim community per se, it suggests that those among them who approximate in terms of social and occupational status the scheduled and backward classes among Hindus be classified as Most Backward Castes and proffered the same benefits that relevant articles of the Constitution make available to counterparts among Hindus.

[2] Some people gave their religion as Mussulman Hindus or Hindu Mussulmans, and others could not "name" the language they spoke; for the role of Muslims in the official colonial analysis of Indian society (see, Lelyveld, 1996:9-34). However, Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal point out that the "powerful revisionist school of South Asian historiography" goes overboard in their suggestion that Indian social tradition was largely a nineteenth century British colonial invention. The Muslims were not "an artifact of British colonial imagination," rather "Muslim social identities in different parts of the subcontinent were being formed by patterns of social and economic relations linked to the fact of British colonial rule without being wholly shaped by it" (Bose and Jalal, 1999:167).

[3] MushirulHasan, perceiving nation as pre-given, rather than a result of actual processes, argues that such a move "backfired—in so far as it aided the cause of 'Muslim nationalism,'" (Hasan, 1995: 2997).

[4] Nehru's following statement in his *Autobiography* brings out the contradictory pulls of such a position: "The collapse and elimination of Nationalist Muslims as a group—as individuals they are, of course, still important leaders of the Congress—forms a pitiful story. It took many years, and the last chapter has only been written this year (1934). In 1923 and subsequent years they were a strong group, and they took up an aggressive attitude against the Muslim communalists. Indeed, on several occasions, Gandhiji was prepared to agree to some of the latter's demands, much as he disliked them, but his own colleagues, the Muslim Nationalist leaders, prevented this and were bitter in their opposition" (139).

[5] Taking a fresh look at his often contradictory roles of saint and politician, G. Aloysius writes: "Gandhi himself seems to carry [the] seed of contradiction within his person: his seeming poverty was built on Birla's plenty, his life of Brahmacharya was based on obsessive sex experiments. His project of

the recovery of the human body from medical tyranny was conducted while he was under continuous care of allopathic physicians; his posture of humility was coupled with the claim for exclusive access to truth; he preached a politics of powerlessness and non-possession that did not brook rivals in leadership. His sensitivity to the spiritual equality of all men was coupled with an insistence on Varnashrama Dharma as the social ideal," (Aloysius, 1998:176). Aloysius cites Sarojini Naidu's comment: "If only Bapu knew how much it cost, to keep him simple" (Spear, 302).

[6] It must be remembered that it was the mass mobilization campaign of this time that pulled the masses in an unprecedented manner towards redefining themselves within the Hindu and Muslim Indian frame.

[7] For an interesting study on the debates between these two educational institutions, the DarulUlumNadwatulUlama and the Ahl-e SunnatJamaat, see, UshaSanyal (1996). Though there were plenty of smaller organizations, like the MajlisMuidul Islam that was constituted in 1921, I will only report on the DarulUlumNadwatulUlama and the JamiaMilliaIslamia. The DarulUlumNadwatulUlama founded in 1898 articulated a middle position, defining itself against the radical Aligarh spouting western ideas and the more conservative Deoband. For details of this institution, see, Malik (221-238). The JamiaMilliaIslamia came into existence in 1920 and was a breakaway group of the Aligarh University caused by the decision of some of the Muslim political leaders during the Non-cooperation movement not to receive any government aid. As Mohamed Ali, a founder-member, remarked: "I never conceived of the Jamia's growth and permanence at all. . . . Our real objective is Aligarh which some day we shall conquer" (cited by Hasan, 1999, fn. 84, 31, from Noorani, 25).

[8] Cited by Prasad, 79, from Sachua, 19-20.

[9] Cited by Hashmi, 20-21, from Aziz, 17.

[10] Peter Hardy notes that "the mutineers at Meerut, Muslim and Hindu alike, rode to Delhi, as if by instinct, to restore Bahadur Shah to the empire of India," in *The Muslims of British India* (34). Such a joint anti-imperialist move was to happen once again, during the Khilafat movement.

[11] Pierre Bourdieu has classified the "three fundamental guises" of capital in the social world: of economic capital—which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; of cultural capital—which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and of social capital—made up of social obligations ("connections"), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility (47). Of these, the cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state—"in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body"; in the objectified state—"in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.) which are the trace or realization of theories

or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc."; and in the institutionalized state—"a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as . . . in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee" (47), see, Bourdieu, 46-58.

[12] The school that became the college was started in 1875.

[13] Barbara Metcalf places the Deoband movement within other Islamic intiatives which defy our piegeonholes. Her attempt is to consider such movements in their own terms and to identify some of the patterns such as a real belief in Islam. Among the features, she identifies one as that the participants who are "troubled by the world they live in and seeking explanations for their situation, invariably interpret problems as religious, for Islam is a religion that takes all life in its purview" (5). She attri butes this to the suddenness of a political vacuum, like the disappearance of the Mughal empire and the weakening of the Ottoman empire (Metcalf, 1982: 3-7).

[14] Elsewhere, he remarks that the "neat division of human life into the religious and the secular involves a contradiction" (297).

[15] Cited by Nanda, 73, from Mujeeb, 507.

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MENTALITIES OF DEVELOPMENT
THE CASE OF TRAVANCORE, SOUTH-WEST INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the south-west Indian princely state of Travancore where the development question was inextricably linked with the issue of social equity. It argues that the local communities, rather than being passive subjects of a monolithic developmentalism propagated by the West, sought to negotiate and make development their own.
Keywords: Modernity, Development, Mentality, Agency, Civic rights

Introduction

Contemporary scholarship adheres to a critical stance on modernity and views development as false consciousness. The colonisers exhort the colonised people to take to the development path as they themselves wisely and successfully did; the colonial subjects enchanted by the idea miss the exploitative aspect of the development project and pursue it. The latter are thus viewed as passive subjects of the universalising, Western ideology of development.[1] Distancing itself from this view, this paper unravels how the colonised people negotiate with the super imposed project of development seeking to make it anew and their own.

The paper focuses on the development processes in the princely state of Travancore, south-west India, during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It argues that in the caste-divided society of Travancore the development question was inextricably linked with the issue of social equity and civic rights, including access to public roads, conveyances, government offices, courts of law, educational and healthcare institutions for the lowest social groups. The paper is structured as follows. Following this introductory note, the paper traces the material processes of development in Travancore and the welfare implications thereof. The paper then proceeds to explore how development was imagined by different social groups and how each of these negotiated with the idea. It is argued that such negotiation was shaped by the given social and economic conditions of each group and the perceived possibilities in the new development scenario. Drawing on these, the concluding section re-affirms the hypothesis of colonial subjects negotiating development even while legitimising it.

Of Production and Exchange

Some of the pet hypotheses of economic historians of nationalist and Marxist persuasion on economic change in India under colonial conditions – like de-industrialisation, agricultural stagnation and policy-induced famines – fail to fit the Travancore case. While some of the cottage industries like weaving of coarse towels and making of iron implements met with decline, nineteenth and early twentieth century Travancore presents itself as a buoyant economy. At once, however, the economic change occurring in Travancore was more nuanced than what the Cambridge economic historians – with their 'sustenance, if not improvement' hypothesis – would have us believe with regard to India. Travancore economy indeed grew but the benefits thereof did not trickle down to the people upon whose toil and misery the growth was attained.

While the world-market had forged systemic links with the Malabar hinterland of production beginning from the Portuguese imperialist expansion of the early sixteenth century, the post-1850s is especially remarkable. On a world-scale, the period was characterised by the rapid collapse of barriers to trade and transport and the unprecedented expansion of imperial capital. World-trade expanded by around ten-fold between 1850 and 1910. The replacement of sailing ships with steam vessels reduced cost and time of shipping: tramp shipping freight fell by half; shipping time was reduced to one-fifth. More goods could be carried and over longer distances with the aid of steam technology. Consequently, freight carrying capacity at the global level expanded five-fold. The Suez Canal, "a high road to the Indian Empire" as Disraeli described it, effected a saving of 40 per cent in the shipping distance between London and Bombay. Transit time between the two centres was five to eight months in the eighteenth century. With the opening of the Suez Canal, this was brought down to one month by 1870. The advent of steam ship brought it further down to two weeks by 1914. In the early nineteenth century, a traveller from England would have taken a year to reach south-west India; by the latter part of the century, he/she would take just about a month, and by the early twentieth century, even less.

Within India, railways played a major role in condensing time and space. By 1870, three major trunk routes – between Calcutta and Delhi, Bombay and Allahabad, and Bombay and Madras — were laid. In 1902 Travancore was linked by rail to Madras and thus to the rest of India. For Travancore, the improvements in land and inland-water transport too were crucial. Besides the already existing trunk routes of trade with the Tamil country — through Nanchilnadu and Shencottai – the south-north land route within was extended

and expanded in 1877-78 and re-christened as the Main-Central road. It followed a course along the hills and gave ready access to the various routes leading to the Highlands. By 1880s, with the Varkala cliffs tunnelled through, the state attained an uninterrupted inland water-transport route connecting north and south. Telegraph brought places further close. In 1854, Bombay and Calcutta were connected; within a year the line was extended to Madras. During the same decade, telegraph reached in Travancore. By 1870 India was linked to Britain through submarine cable. This marked an amazing change from the earlier decades when it took five to eight months for a letter from India to reach Britain and the writer could not expect a reply in less than a year and a half from the date of his/her letter.

Between 1850 and 1914, while world-trade expanded by about 10-fold, the external trade of Travancore grew over 20 times. Value of exports from Travancore rose from British Rupees [hereafter, Bh. Rs.] 17.5 lacs in 1857-58 to over Bh. Rs. 421 lacs in 1913-14 (at current prices). Imports which stood at Bh. Rs. 10 lacs at the beginning of the period rose 27-fold to Bh. Rs. 283 lacs by 1913-14. The expansion in trade surplus was about 20-fold. This was remarkable considering that the population of Travancore had increased only by about three times during this period.[2]

Two components of the colonial policy regime were critical to Travancore's trade expansion. Neither was to the liking of the princely government but it had to give in under the weight of the paramount order. The first critical component was the trade and tariff reforms. Beginning from the 1850s, pressure was exerted on Travancoreto lift the state monopoly of trade. Eventually, in 1865, the princely government was forced to sign a customs agreement – the Inter-portal Trade Convention — that entirely dispossessed it of the monopoly of external trade and the right to frame the schedule of tariff. The second component of the colonial policy regime was monetary reforms. In line with the uniform customs area created through the Inter-portal Trade Convention, the British sought to create a uniform currency area for increasing the trade within the subcontinent and with the outside. Travancore was allowed to retain its currency but denied the right of issuing coins of the value Re. One. The notional Travancore Re. was pegged at a lower level than the Bh. Re; while 28 *chukram* would make a Travancore Re., the British Re. cost 28.5 *chukram*.

During the post-1850 period, besides a substantive increase in the volume of external trade — both exports and imports — a definitive change occurred in the commodity structure of trade. Traditional agricultural produce and spices formed the major item of export at the beginning of the nineteenth century. While the absolute volume of its exports continued to rise during the

course of the century and its position as the most important commodity group of export was never challengedbut the relative significance declined. This was in the context of the rise of new agricultural commodities – plantation produce – and new industrial goods — especially coir mats and coconut oil – in the export basket. The value share of the traditional agricultural produce in total exports declined from 83 per cent in 1857-58 to 56 per cent in 1913-14. The decline especially owed to the rising share of plantation produce which increased from less than one per cent to 22 per cent. The rest 22 per cent of the value of exports accrued from industrial goods. Travancore's import basket at the beginning of the nineteenth century comprised opium, tobacco, arms and ammunition, cotton goods and yarn. The most significant change that occurred was the growing value share of paddy and rice in the import basket. Together, these formed a quarter of the import basket in 1870-71; by 1913-14 the share had risen to nearly one-half. The rising value share owed to increased quantities imported rather than increased prices. With better connectivity to the rice-growing regions of Bengal and Burma and creation of new paddy fields through reclamation of backwaters, the price of paddy and rice in fact declined during the period.

Considering that there was no unprecedented demographic expansion what explains the steep rise in import of paddy and rice? Foremost, this was consequent to the shift of labour from the production of food crops to cash crops and to manufacturing. A good part of labour in the highland plantations was drawn from the Tamil country but it imposed a new demand on paddy and rice in Travancore. On the coast, the emergence of coir weaving factories and innumerable spinning units implied the withdrawal of labour from agriculture, especially from food-crop cultivation. Such re-location placed an incremental demand too on paddy and rice because in their earlier location in the countryside, their diet was not rice-centric but comprised alongside, a large variety of tubers. Further, the assignment of highlands for plantations and the associated ban on hill-cultivation of rice – restrictions began in 1870 and bringing in new lands under cultivation banned in 1911 – cut into internal supply. Besides importing paddy and rice and augmenting internal production by encouraging reclamation cultivation, the government sought to propagate the cultivation of a new food crop, cassava. By 1921 half the food needs of Travancore was met by cassava.

The fact that the export volume of Travancore expanded by over 10 times and its trade surplus grew by over 10-fold between 1850s and 1910s should not lead to hasty macroeconomic conclusions. While the stated growth broadly indicates a buoyant economy, there are other facts worthy of consideration. First is the question of balance of payments, although this is

not easy to calculate. The annual tribute (subsidy) to the Crown was a pressing charge in the initial period but the burden lessened over time in the context of growing revenue from land and trade. At once, however, there were new, 'home charges'. The profits drained out by the plantation companies and coir weaving mills and exporters constituted a severe drain on the economy. Plantation companies paid out dividend on equity at about 30 per cent on the average. The net out-flow of annual profit after posting reserve was over 70 per cent in the case of major plantation companies. Over 60 per cent of the value generated in coir accrued to sterling capital. As succinctly put by the author of *The Travancore State Manual*:

> The salaries of the European servants of the State as well as their pensions, interest and profit on the foreign capital invested in the Quilon Railway and the plantations on the hills, the cotton and oil mills, the coir manufacture and other industries due to foreign enterprise may all be taken to form a tribute which this country pays to British India or the United Kingdom (Aiya 3, 1984: 193).

Such drain was occasioned by the near total dominance of foreign capital in the new, globally interlocked economy of Travancore. Until the first decade of the twentieth century when rubber began to be cultivated, the plantations were entirely monopolised by sterling capital. Even in the case of rubber, the local peasants established a clear presence only by the 1930s. Their holdings were, however, relatively small. In 1911, eleven of the 12 major tea plantations, and nine of the 10 major rubber plantations wereownedby sterling capital. Even those plantations not held by colonial capital were controlled by European managing agency houses. Again, six of the eight coir weaving factories, all four mining companies, the three cotton weaving mills, and the lone cotton spinning mill were owned by foreign capital. The only domain of significant presence of local capital in the factory sector was in coconut oil-milling. It was only after the First World War that local entrepreneurship emerged from the pores of coir yarn manufacture and trade and small-time banking, and expanded, albeit slowly, and moved into the factory sector. Yet, by and large, local capital continued to prefer investment in plantations and internal trade. They occupied only the third tier of the capitalist class, next to sterling capital and the Western Indian immigrant capital who held the reins of sub-continental trade.

By the time of the First World War, Travancore had been turned into a production machine for the world-market. Within Travancore no site was left untouched: the highlands, the port-towns, the backwaters and the backwater-side villages all came to be linked with the world-market. An overwhelming share of the labouring population was drawn from lower and out castes,

especially women. Women of depressed castes formed the majority of workforce in tea plantations and reclaimed rice-fields. Their share in the factory work-force was as high as 30 per cent in 1897-98. This figure excludes women employed in tea-factories which if included would perhaps post the share even higher. Child labour was high in the Travancore factories: about 40 per cent in 1897-98. Women workers in factories were paid only half the wages paid to men, and children were paid only one-third. While coir weaving mills were worked mostly by male labour, the entire spinning sector comprised female labour. Both male and female labourers in coir were mostly Ezhavas, a low caste, while the pre-spinning activities were a preserve of out caste Pulayas. Toddy-tapping again was exclusively undertaken by Ezhavas. All major operations involved in reclaiming the backwater for growing rice were performed by Pulaya and Pariah labourers. The global production machine of Travancore thus owed its working to the cheap labour of lower and out castes, especially women.

Imagining Development

The first seeds of the idea of progress in Travancore were sown by the Anglican Protestant missionaries during the early nineteenth century. They established the first schools patterned on the English mode and introduced Western kind of healthcare among the lower-castes who had opted for the Christian path. This inspired the government to set up schools and healthcare facilities patterned on these. The state acting through the British Resident ever-insistent on social and economic reforms, the 'enlightened princes' trained in sciences and political economy, and gentlemen officials who appreciated 'the modern views of Englishmen' cast the development net even wide. The avowed aim of a Travancore dewan was to "provide for every subject within a couple of hours' journey, the advantages of a Doctor, a Schoolmaster, a Judge, a Magistrate, a Registering Officer and a Postmaster"(Aiya, 1984: 564).While eventually these offices were established across the state, it was only with the powerful articulation by lower-caste social movements that these became accessible to "every subject".

Providing development infrastructure crucially depended on national wealth. The state identified hard work and industry as the way to increasewealth — of the nation and of the individual. "The hand of the industrious heapeth wealth", so began the first prince's lecture 'Our Industrial Status' at the podium of the Trivandrum Debating Society on September 26, 1874. He noted that "the happiness, prosperity, power and glory of a society or a nation may always be measured by its well-directed, well-conserved

and progressive industry." Travancore combined "within so narrow [geographical] limits... so many, so varied and so precious natural blessings", but the contentment that sprang from it had "stunted the spirit of progressive enterprise and industry". While acknowledging that "it may be long before we could see Travancore converted into an industrial bee-hive of manufactures like Bengal and Bombay" he consoled that the people "need not despair". There was a great potential for commercial cultivation and export of edible roots, plantains, indigo and jute besides the expansion of coir and coconut oil milling industries already in place. He exhorted the moneyed-classes to spearhead industrialisation.

> What a vast quantity of coconut fibre is wasted or burnt as fuel in spite of all our coir exports and the very enterprising American firms at Alleppey! Why should not coir manufactories arise at Trivandrum and Quilon?..A large quantity of coconut and other oils is exported. Why should not soap and candles be locally manufactured?(Tirunal 1874:8-9).

The prince emphasised the potential for individual self-advancement through industry and labour. He sought to illustrate this by advancing a real-life example. PD Devasahayam of southern Travancore was born into a poor, lower caste Nadar family. He turned to Protestant faith and attended the London Missionary Society's Boarding School. Subsequently, he worked as a catechist, went to Ceylon and served as a supervisor in a coffee plantation for many years before returning to Travancore. Back home, Devasahayam bought a large expanse of rice fields and soon emerged as a leading coffee planter. Clearly, the princely portrayal of the individual life of a 'self-made man' marked a definitive break with the traditional Hindu notion of human life as entirely determined by caste-position and destiny.

The various caste-based social movements that emerged from the late nineteenth century articulated specific development demands. The central concern of each caste — whether high or low — was how best it could adapt to the challenges and possibilities of the new economy and society. The emphases in the development agenda of different castes varied. Yet broadly, these were influenced by two factors: first, the position of the caste in the prevailing social order and the specific set of needs arising thereof, and second, the organisational features specific to the caste and the extent to which these conformed to the attributes of development.

For Pulayas and other depressed castes – mostly wetland agricultural workers — gaining access to roads, schools, hospitals, courts, government offices and markets was the foremost need. The government had notified in 1865 that public roads shall be accessible for wheeled carriage by people of all castes. It was as if neither the government nor the social elite accepted "all

castes" to include Pulayas and others who were regarded as 'out-castes'. The half-heartedness of the government and the resistance from the caste elite combined to ensure non-implementation of social legislation, often introduced under the paramount pressure. In an open challenge to the upper-caste elite and the state, Ayyankali — who subsequently emerged as the most important leader of the community —heroically rode a decorated cart along the village road; he formed a militant band to resist the attack from the upper-caste elite; the band marchedto the market-place, asserting the legitimate claim to public space that was denied to themembers of their community. In 1904 Ayyankali opened a primary school for Pulaya children but the upper-caste elite burned it down. In an attempt to force the government to offer school admission for Pulayas, the members of the community, most of whom were agricultural workers of the upper-caste landlords, struck work for nearly a year in 1907. The strike was called off only when the government agreed to issue a notification throwing school admission open to Pulayas. As the resistance of the upper-castes persisted the government had to re-issue the notification in 1910 and 1914.

During the second decade of the twentieth century the movement took a developmentalist turn. The earlier militant band had given way to a formal organisation in 1907. As the community gained representation in the legislature through nomination by the government, the demands were articulated more on the legislative floor and much less outside. Education was recognised as a key resource to the modern. Ayyankali pronounced that his life-ambition was to see a member of his community graduating. He saw the possibility of linking up the skill-background of his community with modern manufacture and sciences. Speaking at the Popular Assembly on February 28, 1916, he pointed out that along with general education Pulaya children shall be trained in some kind of work or manufacture. He requested the government to set up special technical schools for Pulayas and to award scholarships to trainees; to release special grants for weaving schools run by the community; and to impart training in science, agriculture and industry to teachers from the community. Further, given their traditional association with agriculture, he perceived the socio-economic gains to be had by command over the new agricultural science and requested the government to include agronomy in the curriculum of Pulaya students.

The Ezhavas – a step higher in the social order but reckoned as low — were engaged in a range of occupations: agricultural work, coir spinning and weaving, tapping and sale of toddy, and petty trade; there were teachers and traditional doctors too. While they had access to education including university education, most of them lacked resources to invest in higher education; for

the few who could afford, the fact that government employment was closed to them was major disincentive. In 1903, the Ezhavas established the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (the Yogam, for short) which aimed at "the progress of spiritual and worldly education and industrial habits". The Yogam perceived development as a means of overcoming the 'backwardness' imposed on the community by the traditional social order. The Yogam activists were expected to lecture on austerity and the best methods of developing agriculture, trade and manufacture, to convince men and women that living upon laziness is against the interests of the community, and thus to excite them to action, and to set up industrial units wherever necessary, to encourage people to make a scientific study of industries and propagate ideas thereof. A vocational training centre was integral to most of the Yogam establishment. The central monastery had a weaving centre attached to it. At its Sanskrit School, 'mechanism' and 'agricultural science' were part of the curriculum.

Spiritual progress and material development were perceived as mutually complementary. When the Yogam established a nunnery, Narayana Guru, the spiritual leader of the movement insisted that it should aim at imparting training in sewing and other handicrafts, nursing and child welfare. Again, as the members in Cochin approached him for consecrating a temple, he suggested that in its stead, a weaving centre and an industrial school may be set up. Even as he consecrated temples – in a militant defiance of the Hindu scriptures that disallowed lower castes doing so — the occasion was often used to deliver the message of materialism. For instance, on consecrating a temple in Cochin in 1912, the Guru observed:

> The economic condition of our community is sickly. Economic progress cannot be secured other than through industry. This demands special attention of the rich. They alone are better equipped to introduce various kinds of machines and conduct manufacturing activities. If a single person is unable to undertake this, a group of people should come together to float joint-stock companies and act courageously in such matters. While paths of progress lie straight ahead, unfortunately, our people are weary of treading on these (Vaidyar, 1972: 154).

The inaugural address delivered by Dr P Palpu, a leading activist of the Yogam, at its first annual meeting held in 1904 is reflective of the development concerns of the community:

> We should display more love and interest in buying and using things produced by our community and our country. An ordinary English citizen buys with pride the goods produced in England and by the English, even if these are priced slightly higher. Japanese and Americans act likewise. We should try to emulate this as far as possible. If our goods are not quite up to the mark, we should not dismiss them with contempt. Our

attempt should be to improve them. Members of our community should enthusiastically engage themselves in different kinds of business ventures (Madhavan, 1986: 199-202).

Following the example set by the Crystal Palace exhibition 1851, and various exhibitions in India, often organised out of a nationalist fervour, the Yogam held an exhibition in 1905. About 3000 Ezhavas from across the Malabar Coast attended the exhibition. The king and the dewan of Travancore made a financial contribution for its conduct. Interestingly here, alongside products of traditional crafts persons, modern industrial products were also displayed. (Ibid, 144-54) The exhibition seems to have left a deep impact on young minds as the childhood memoirs of C Kesavan, the chief minister of the united state of Travancore-Cochin, suggests:

I saw Dr Palpu's younger brother, Mr Tanuvan, using a typewriter. The ceaseless play of a single finger on this machine was quite amazing. It left everyone there wonderstruck. It was only recently that the machine had come into use in Travancore. Ezhavas of Kottar and Balaramapuram had displayed fine woven cotton goods of the first grade. A loom with warp frames was also on display. A saucer made of candy-sugar by an Ezhava from the Tirunelveli district attracted much attention. Another interesting item on display was an engraved vessel with a lid, made out of a large sized coconut shell. These were some things that aroused one's curiosity and are still vivid in my memory; as also the presence of Kumaran Asan displaying his phonetic skill in English, which he had just learned to speak (Kesavan, 1968: 410).

Besides organising industrial exhibitions to propagate the message of industry and labour, Yogam activists themselves invested in trade and industry. In 1906, Palpu and a few wealthy Ezhavas jointly floated the Travancore Weaving and Trading Company with a capital of Re. One Lac. The Yogam directly initiated a cooperative, the Weaving and Trading Association, in 1909. In 1914, it floated the Malabar Economic Union with a capital of Re. One Lac. The company, formed specifically to generate employment opportunities for the members of the community, had Narayana Guru as one of the directors. Asan was not merely a great poet and a leading activist of the Yogam; he was a successful industrialist who owned and operated a roofing-tile factory. It was not that the Guru and the Yogam were supportive of all economic activities. While the consumption of toddy was spread across social groups, the upper-castes often chose to denigrate the Ezhavas for being its producers and purveyors. Guru pronounced alcohol as 'poison' and commanded: Neither produce nor supply it.

The Nayars were privileged by their higher social status and control over land. They had access to university education. While the higher levels of

employment in government were a designated niche for Brahmins from Maratha and Tamil country, the middle and lower levels were open to Nayars. They sought to capitalise on education with a view to attain a larger share of the government jobs. The Malayali Sabha, a pioneering organisation of the community, offered financial assistance to Nayar students at Madras, patronised Malayalam schools in the state, and established an English School at Trivandrum. The educational efforts of the Sabha were ably continued by its successor organisation, the Nair Service Society founded in 1914.

Not that the Nayars were unaware of the gains to be had from trade and manufacture, but their traditional family property structure and lack of experience were a hindrance to mobilisation of capital. The Malayali Sabha therefore sought to promote community-industrial collectives. On its own, the Sabha formed a trading company, which was a successful one considering that the company had an annual earning of Rs. 5000 in 1887 (Jeffrey, 1994:158-9). The Sabha also established an industrial school for giving training to the members of the community. Besides the steps initiated by the Sabha, there were localised attempts at trade and industry by the members of the community. A news report of October 14, 1905 indicated the efforts of Nayars in central Travancore to mobilise a capital of Rs.10000 through individual subscriptions of Rs.20 each from 500 people to conduct various trading activities on a large scale (*Manorama*, 14 Oct. 1905).

Yet, except in the cashew nut processing industry, Nayars could not rise to economic prominence. M.L.Janardanan Pillai, perhaps the lone Nayar industrialist of any significance at Alleppey, lamented in the 1930s:

The various high-rise monuments, trading and industrial establishments that dot the skyline of Alleppey belong to other communities. Nayars are said to be heroes, but ironically they show no heroism in this matter [trade and industry]. Agriculture is not profitable. It is not easy to get employment ... .We [Nayars] are not used to saving money ... If we start anything [business] we quarrel and split our ways. The expenditure of Nayars is on the increase. But we do not care to increase income. We have no bank of our own...(*Deepika,*May 1, 1939).

At the apex of Travancore's social hierarchy was Nambudiris or Malayala Brahmins. Forming less than one per cent of the population, they were predominantly non-cultivating land owners. Their education was of the traditional kind, in Sanskrit and the Vedas, and aimed to equip them to undertake priestly tasks. Constrained as they were by the conventions of distance pollution and the exacting requirements of everyday worship, their mobility and therefore access to schooling were restricted. The author of the *Travancore State Manual* writing in the early twentieth century noted that "a Nambudiri is at his best in his quiet and secluded retreat, remote from

towns and cities which he instinctly dreads. He would be entirely out of his element in a large town where one can easily detect him by his queer looks and awkward manner" (Aiya, 2: 251-2).

Even this long insulated community could not escape the influence of the sweeping changes in the economy and society. As the twentieth century wore on and other caste groups made advances along the path of modernity, the community found that it had been almost entirely left out. This prompted self-reflection by the community:

Look at other communities. Agriculture, trade, employment, positions of honour — all these are in their hands. We merely receive rent and are quite content to have our meals thus. The goodies offered by servants and tenants we take, without ourselves doing any labour. Basking in ancient glory, we have no idea of what happens outside Kerala. We have not cared to study the dynamics of science. We practically offer nothing to the nation (Bhattatiripad, 1983: 66).

Consistent with this self-critical stance, was the attitude of a section of the Nambudiris who began to feel ashamed of charities bestowed on them by the State. It was also felt that such incentives impaired the community's efforts to encounter the new challenges. This is revealed in Mathur Vasudevan Nambudiripad's appeal to the Travancore Raja in 1911:

Well-versed as he is in the Science of Economics, His Highness does not need to be advised that the resources used in extravagant expenditure for Murajapam and other ceremonies of this kind [in which Brahmins were bestowed with charity] could be more fruitfully utilised for the education of the Nambudiris. Economic theory informs us that a nation's wealth should, to the extent possible be channelised into paths of progress. To aid the leisurely, stifles their incentive for industry. It would be useful if the money now spent on satisfying the voracious needs of idle Nambudiris is used instead, to set up a school that would be a thing of permanence. It should go without saying that the main curriculum of the [proposed] school should consist of English and sciences taught in vernacular (*MalayalaManorama*, April 8, 1911).

In 1944, EMS Nambudiripad, an early activist of the Nambudiri reform movement and subsequently a leading communist, addressed the community thus:

These days there are many Nambudiris who have secured their share of family property and are living separately. Many of them are capable of starting industries, at least on a small-scale. But most of them continue to depend on the tenants' rent; very few take up trade and agriculture even in a small way. Not one factory of significance, or an estate where cultivation is carried out on scientific lines, initiated by Nambudiris have come to my notice ... If we are to survive in the changing

economies of the world, India and Kerala, instead of spending our time exacting rent in the capacity of landlords, we should try to increase our wealth and the wealth of the people by entering the spheres of trade and industry. Unless we do this, all those social reform activities undertaken so far would prove to be infructuous. (Priyadarsan, 1982: xxxi-ii).

What was the economic status of the non-Hindu communities in Travancore? How did they respond to the new economy? The most prominent among the non-Hindus were the local, Syrian Christians. The Syrian Christians were largely a monolithic church connected with the oriental churches till the Portuguese arrived and inducted them into the papal fold; but they retained many oriental rites. The Syrian Christians were engaged in wetland cultivation of rice, cash crop cultivation in the garden land, agro processing and trade. Many of them were royal tenants and enabled by the 1865 land reforms became absolute owners of land. They further rose in prosperity with the expansion in rice-fields through the reclamation of backwaters. Even those who were not owner-cultivators attained economic rise by acting as farm-managers with a share in the produce. Many moved to the midland and established cash crop gardens, invested in trade and money-lending or set up agro processing units – coir and coconut oil milling ventures – in the port-towns. With the spread of rubber cultivation, especially in the post-First World War days, some of them established small and medium-sized plantations and acquired further wealth.

The case of P John is illustrative of the relatively richer capitalist – though in no way comparable to the sterling capitalists – among the local, Syrian Christians. His first venture was a coconut-oil mill in Alleppey in partnership with his brothers. John got involved in rubber planting soon after the crop was introduced in Travancore, becoming a partner in a rubber syndicate managed by the British in 1903. Subsequently, along with his brothers and a sterling partner, he floated a new firm; land was bought specifically for planting rubber; but it was a non-starter and the land was sold to a sterling company. From 700 acres in 1910, the operated area rose to just less than 2000 acres by 1917, but the economic depression, the increasing use of synthetic rubber, and the Second World War proved trying and by 1961 the acreage was a little more than 2000.

The Syrian Christians had access to village schools; some of them were teachers too. From the late nineteenth century many schools were opened in the church premises or at the initiative of the church. With access to university education and backed by economic power to invest therein, many of them could join the ranks of the small but growing class of professionals. The

combination of higher education and economic surplus also facilitated their rise as 'print capitalists'. Both the major newspapers *Nazrani Deepika* and *Malayala Manorama* in Travancore were captained by Syrian Christians. Enlightened in the matters of modern polity and economy by virtue of university education and enthused by their rising stake as investors in the new economy, the Syrian Christian proprietor-editors fashioned the press as a platform for articulating a range of development themes. The themes included, foremost, accumulation of wealth, reforms in agriculture, drain of economic surplus, promotion of cash crops, value-addition in industry, scarcity of capital, state intervention, and technical education.

On July 16, 1888 the *Nazrani Deepika* gave a clarion call: "Oh, Malayali, the most important thing for human beings in this world [as distinct from the other world] is wealth and the principal means of acquiring it is through trade. These being so, at least from now on, strive to achieve this goal". A two-part editorial, "Nammude Aalochanakkuravu" (Our lack of reflection), which appeared in September 19, 1900 issue noted thus:

> In trade and manufacture, we [people of Travancore] have not attained eminence. This country which is so richly endowed with a variety of cereals, plants, fruits and tubers, ought to have outshone other countries in trade and manufacture. The present situation appears to be the outcome of a certain lack of capacity to reflect and to invest commensurate efforts. The prosperity that accrues to a country from trade and manufacture would indeed be great. Countries [sic] like Europe and America have, by employing this principle, grown richer than us ... It is now our turn to pursue routes of progress.

The second joint-stock company floated in Travancore was the *Malayala Manorama*. Its stated aim was, besides publishing a newspaper,"to demonstrate how income could be reaped by forming joint stock companies". In 1910, its promoters launched a rubber planting company that was the first locally-owned planting company in the state. Through editorials such as the one published in the July 7, 1906 issue, the paper made a strong case for the formation of joint stock companies.

> First, there are only very few amongst us who have sufficient capital to run a proper business. Second, the [sole proprietary] business enterprise runs the potential risk of incurring setbacks because of proprietor's follies. Third, in the unfortunate eventuality of any possible misfortune, the proprietary concern may become insolvent. If on the other hand, several individuals come together, subscribe Rs. 100 or 1000 each, float a joint stock company and run the business none of the problems cited above would affect it.

Among the other major non-Hindu communities were the Nadar Christians and Muslims. The former were concentrated in southern Travancore and had chosen Christian faith under the lead of the Anglican missionaries. While education helped many of their members to gain upward mobility the vast majority continued to be agricultural labourers and palmyra-toddy tappers. Muslims were scattered across the state with some settled in the river-side trading towns in the midland and many more on the plains and coastal tract. Some were large traders; a few were involved in cashew-nut processing industry but by and large the economic status of the rural masses was not very different from that of the Nadar Christians and the lower-caste Hindus.

Negotiation and Legitimisation

Admittedly, in its origins, the idea of development is Western but the project of development as it unfolded in Travancore was not a one-way imposition. To assume so would be to miss the agency of the colonised people, who explored the idea, accepted it in parts, and modified it to suit their existing status and needs. The people of lower and out castes especially viewed and represented the idea of development as inseparable from the idea of social equity. Against the terrain of the colony the idea of development thus ceased to be monolithic and assumeda multiplicity of meanings. Yet, in appropriating development in so many different ways, the colonised people also legitimised the idea of development.

NOTES

[1] See, for instance, Ferguson (1990) and Escobar (2011).
[2] Except where specifically attributed to other sources, all figures and quotes are drawn fromRammohan (1996).

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PROBLEMATIZING DALIT HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

This paper tries to address the questions related to the writing of Dalit history in its broad academic context. While it is impossible to write histories of Dalit communities in isolation from other social groups as they interacted at several points of the social node, it is significant to attempt a history of such social groups as it would bring under focus several problems that the 'historians craft' has to face. Therefore the central question of this paper is the challenges that Dalit history offers to academic history writing. It is argued here that the perspective of Dalit history makes possible exploration of new objects of analysis, which much of the nation state centric history fails to articulate. It is in this context that I address various genres of history writing in India.
Keywords: Dalits, history, Pulayas, Parayas, untouchability, caste slavery, experience, Christianity, salvation

In this paper my major concern is to discuss the problems in the writing of history of Dalits although the term Dalits is not used in the source materials pertaining to their history or sociology even now. Some of these questions occurred to me when I took up the project of writing a thesis entitled '*Imagining Equality: Modernity and Social Transformation of Lower Castes in Colonial Kerala*. However, I find that the problems that I had to encounter were common across south India or for that matter we find parallels in the history of the subordinated people in other parts of the world. An important aspect of my study was to analyze the discourses of equality as it developed in Kerala from mid 19th century as initiated by the missionaries and carried forward by the social movements of the lower castes in the 20th century. The lower caste religious congregations and social movements put forward the agenda of social development that was informed by notions of equality. We have a rich literature dealing with the work of various missionary organizations and their interaction with the lower castes and the resultant transformation of such social groups across south India. (Oddie, 1977; Kooiman, 1989; Frykenberg, 1980; Gladstone, 1984). Similarly there are large number of works that deal with particular studies on communities and their transformation. (Oomman, 1997; Daniel, 2000; Deliege, 1997; Mosse,

1994) There are works that deal with long-term changes in the lower caste communities in the mode of the life histories of the individuals that unfold in the rich ethnographic context. (Racine&Racine, 1998) It is through the unfolding of the intense biographical elements that we get a sense of the transformation of the community as well as the individual lives. Such studies show a definite bearing on the lower caste life-world as well as the problem of identity and agency of the people.

I shall discuss here questions related to the writing of Dalit history in this broad academic context. While it is impossible to write histories of Dalit communities in isolation from other social groups as they interact at several points of the social node it is significant to attempt a history of such social groups as it would bring under focus several problems that the historians craft has to face. It will amount to stating the obvious that the lower castes have certain amount of circularity in their social life whereby they come under the influence of other social groups and worldviews. These questions have been taken up by a host of scholars who worked on various parts of South India. In economic history the lower castes were studied more as part of the agrarian structure providing their socially necessary labour power for the production devoid of any particular rights to property and resources other than that was essential for their survival that guaranteed the physical reproduction of their labour power. They were at the receiving end of various regimes of labour control that could be generalized as slavery. I am using here the word slavery aware fully well of the discussions and debates it had generated on the labour control regimes in various parts of India. (Prakash, 1997) One prominent question here is to rethink the pre-colonial forms of slavery and labour control regime that existed in various parts of south India and the transformations that such systems underwent under colonialism. In the last few decades scholars have tried to understand the significance of slavery as a labour control regime in agricultural production in different parts of south India. The debates largely centered on the importance of slave labour in the pre-colonial/pre-capitalist production and its eventual abolition as marking the coming of capitalist production based on free wage labor. Another group of scholars were concerned with the causative factors behind the abolition of slavery such as humanitarian concern of the abolitionists including missionaries, and their efforts to speed up the march towards freedom and humanism and transform the slave castes eventually full members of humanity. There has been a rich historiographical debate on the problem of slavery in south India that bring together interesting material for a critical understanding of the experiential dimension of slavery. (Saradamoni, 1980; Kusaman, 1973; Yusudas, 1975; Vijaya, Jayasree, Kumar, 1965; Hegele, 1967; Ravi Raman,

2002; Kurup, 1984; Kooiman, 1989; Manickam, 1977; Baak, 1999) It may not be out of place here to suggest, following the debates that I have referred to, the three different views related to the abolition of slavery that hinges on the humanitarian ideology of missionary (Hegele, 1967; Saradamoni, 1980; Manickam, 1977; Kusuman, 1973; Jeffrey, 1976), free wage labour for capitalist economic production (Kurup,1984; Kooiman, 1989; Baak, 1999) and finally the argument that the synergy between abolition and capitalist economic production was far fetched and that the plantations did not offer the much projected freedom to the plantation slaves (Ravi Raman, 2002). At the same time it is important to note that there is hardly any inevitable connection between capitalist development and free wage labour.

While these studies are important and the information they have generated on the lower castes were decisive, there was a substantial lack of the experiential dimension of slavery in such writings. It may not be an impossibility to write a different history of slavery that could be conceptualized through a reverse ethnographic practice reading the sources that were used in the histories of slavery that are in circulation. The significant point is to see in the narratives available in the sources, the emergence of the slaves with body, soul, names, feelings and emotions, relationships, past, present and future. Most studies on the problem of slavery and its abolition were restricted by the historiographical positions that we have referred to and as a result of that they could not engage with the *experiential aspects of slavery.*

It is in this context that we consider the experiential dimension of slavery to transcend the prevailing debates on the history or sociology of lower castes. The slave experience is important, as it would be difficult to understand the lower caste life world without a proper understanding of various forms of slavery. The lower caste experience of modernity can't be studied without seriously engaging with the experiential aspect of slavery. In fact there are source materials that speak of the experiential aspects of slavery that unfold through the narratives of slaves that privilege their experiences as human beings with emotions. In their narratives, the slaves provide testimonies of the oppression and sufferings as well as their resolve to understand their situation in relation to their structural position in the society. They recollect their experience drawing from the social their memory. This memory of slavery and its narrative should be considered as the material on the basis of which one could rethink some of the issues related to slavery. This is undertaken not merely to lament the past sufferings as they were dominated but on the other hand it is intended as a strategy that allows a critical revisit of the past. (Hartman: 2003) It is for this purpose that the experiential aspect of slavery is traced through the narrative construction of memory. The dependence on

slave memory can raise questions related to the construction of social memory itself.

In contemporary social theory and historiography there is a significant emphasis on the question of social memory. In the researches on the lower caste social groups social memory could be used as an extremely important source. Recollection of memory is a valuable method when it gives account of traumatic experiences of the past such as genocide/ethnic cleansing or the social sufferings that one particular social group might have experienced in the past. In the case of the lower castes it is the memory of *social suffering* and *oppression* that is prominent when they recollect their past. While memory is constitutive of history it is not history as such or some times it can have a surplus of meanings and allusions over and above history. Memory is not replicable by any other source. Memory is the material with which the historian has to work and it is referred to as secondary memory as it is recorded for a different purpose some time in future. Memory will always have meanings above the requirement of the historians and it is his/her decision to reflect on the past making use of memory that decides its use. The peculiar nature of memory and the continuous constructions of it in the course of its recollection makes it non replicable by other sources.

Following the arguments of Dominick La Capra it may be observed that memory—along with its lapses and tricks—poses questions to history in that it points to problems that are still alive or invested with emotions and value. He further observes that ideally, history critically tests memory and prepares for a more extensive attempt *to work through a past that has not passed away*. At the same time it is necessary that historians working on the material of memory are able to understand "false memory syndrome" which according to La Capra is one of the more socially consequential forms that the tricks of memory may take[1]. (La Capra: 1998) This caution is significant, as most often historians work with secondary memory. It is possible to create and sustain memories through discursive practices that privilege, for example, the experience of sufferings. I consider that the task of the historian is to work through a past that has not passed away. It is in this broad context that I think one could analyze slavery and its various manifestations in different parts of south India. It will be difficult to retrieve slave memory if we do not find active rememoration of slavery. But it does not preclude our search for secondary memory that could be used in the analysis of the lifeworld of lower castes following the arguments of the memory and history. I considered this problem as significant when I had to analyse the rememoration of slavery as practiced by certain social movements in contemporary Kerala[2].

There are some recent works that explore the experiences of slavery as represented in the Malayalam literary works to unpack strategies of textual representation as well as the social context of slavery. (Menon: 2004) The literary representation of slavery has been studied from a critical Dalit/feminist perspective that tries to focus on the social dimension of desire in the discussion on the text 'Duravastha' (Yesudasan: 1999; 2000)

In fact the above discussion on the experience of slavery leads to the question of religion of the lower castes. There is a definite reason why the discussion on slavery immediately switches over to a discussion on religion. The missionary intervention in mobilizing support for the abolition of slavery happens in the context of their interaction with the lower castes in various regions of south India who had been living in the status of slaves. Subsequently the missionaries realized how slavery was embedded in the power structures of the various regions and their relationship with the caste formation which was organically linked to Hindu religion. The realization dawned on them that only if the lower castes were able to sever themselves from the dominant Hindu religion that the lower castes would ever be able to become independent. Although the historiography of this particular aspect of south Indian history is really complex it is possible to pursue the question without going into the problem of the motives behind joining a new and different religion whether it is Christianity, Islam, Buddhism or any other religion. There are two fundamental questions that are related to the problem discussed here that is decisive in writing a history of Dalit communities. The first and foremost is the relationship that different Dalit communities had with Hindu religion as it was practiced in different regions. The contemporary debates on this question show the complexity of the phenomenon.

It may be argued that the castes such as Pulayas and Parayas (similar other castes in different parts of south India) that form majority of the lower caste Christians today in Kerala historically had weak links with the dominant Hindu religion although they were very much part of the hierarchical structure of production as slave labourers. It is equally important to see that such hierarchies were never out side the Hindu religion whether in its textual or practical aspects. One of the historians of Dalit movements in Kerala had observed that the lower castes such as Pulayas and Parayas never had any religion. (Chentharasseri: 1979) It does not mean that they did not have rituals and related worldviews. The religion of the lower castes remained as an elusive thing and much of the colonial ethnography would treat them as a residual category. The segmented nature of the caste society that allowed the lower castes to have their own "*inferior gods and rituals*" is the major factor to be considered here. The literature on this question shows that although the

lower castes were part of the villager society, they were definitely external to the ritual world of the dominant castes. In other words perhaps until categories such as religion were enumerated for purposes of governmentality there is no reason to believe that the lower castes were part of the exclusive world of the upper caste dominant religion even for definitional purposes. There are some fundamental questions that one has to encounter when these issues are posed in the context of writing Dalit histories. The religiosity of the lower castes needs to be considered as authentic in order to explore their lifeworld. This is essential for understanding the symbolic world that they had developed in different regions of south India historically. The reformist agenda of the 20th century turned out to be detrimental to many religious practices of the lower castes as they were interpreted to be inferior. But there is interesting data in the ethnographic writings as well as in the still living practices of the lower castes which could be used to study their symbolic world in a diachronic manner using the devices of the ethnographic history. I would like to include here black magic and other forms of rituals that had prevailed among various lower castes that would give us an entry in to their mentality. It is in this context that we consider the religiosity of the lower castes as authentic.

The second aspect of the problem is related to what is generally referred to as 'conversion'. The lower castes were hardly part of the Hindu religion although they were spaced within the larger agrarian society not necessarily by taking part in their symbolic world. But with the coming of the missionary Christianity (Catholic as well as Protestant in various parts of south India) they became components of the organized religion and began to share the new worldview. But at the same time they were open to negotiations as the contemporary analysis of popular Christianity in various part of South India shows. In other words some of the recent writings, following the Social Anthropology tradition suggests the liminality of such practices (Raj:2002). This, in my opinion is an area that needs to be studied.

There should be a historiographical critique of the debate that is completely overpowered by the 'motives' of 'conversion' as if motives are bad and if it is economic, worse!! The proposition that comes out of this historiography is that since lower castes 'conversions' were motivated by economic considerations, their religion was something less than proper religion!! In his book on conversion and social equality Kooiman (1989) made an interesting observation that the lower castes were more eager…. 'to better their *worldly conditions*, to *emancipate* themselves from their *social misery* to be *freed from the tyranny* of the higher castes' than much more privileged greater ideal of the salvation of the soul. One recent scholar

Olga Nieuwenhuys repeats this when she writes on the funerals and politics among south Indian Ezhavas. She is explicit when she says that. '…rather than by conviction of sin or a strong desire to be saved, Christian converts were inspired by a desire ….to better their worldly conditions….' In his book on the Paraiyars of Tamil Nadu Robert Deliege addresses the same question and goes to the absurd extent of saying that Paraiyars pray 'to obtain some thing from the gods'. (as if all upper castes are praying to obtain some thing to be given to God!!!) Without venturing for further examples I would like to discuss the problems that are evident in such historical and sociological constructions. Let us begin with what Kooiman says. In his observations one could hear the echo of some of the missionaries who felt disgusted with their mass movement Christians. Or even before the mass movements we find similar observations made by missionaries from various parts of south India. Does it show any thing meaningful about the lives of the lower castes in Kerala or anywhere else in south India that is significant for us today? Consider the tropes used by Kooiman that will be seen repeated in other scholarly writings as well as some other sources that I have mentioned here. He refers to the desire of the lower castes to be liberated from their worldly *conditions*, to *emancipate* themselves from their *social misery* and to be freed *from the tyranny of the upper castes.*

If we reconsider it in the context of the Biblical knowledge, we should ask if it show some similarity with the situation that made Jehovah to send Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt?[3] What are the meanings of concepts such as emancipation, social misery, and the desire to be free from tyranny in such contexts? (here the tyranny of upper castes). The archive of CMS, LMS and similar missionary organizations are very eloquent on this particular issue and there are a number of occasions when the Travancore lower caste slaves compared their situation with that of the Israelites under the Egyptian captivity when they refer to their conditions under the domination of Nairs and Syrian Christians and the liberation that they felt when the CMS missionaries worked among them. The so-called 'worldly conditions' were very much part of the spiritual conditions. More over there are narratives that speak of the experience of emancipation that the lower castes felt along with their reflections on their accumulated social misery and sufferings. It may be reiterated here that the conditions to which Kooiman refers to were dehumanizing the lower caste slaves. The contemporary researches on slavery actually show in a very engaging manner the dehumanizing effects of it. What the conventional historiography failed to understand here was the multiple meanings of the concept of emancipation as well as the nature of the social sufferings of the lower castes under the tyranny of the upper castes. In other

words there needs a deeper understanding of the experiential aspect of slavery. The next related question is to see if it is really bad to desire food or other worldly goods. In fact if we reconsider the narratives in the subsequent studies on the lower caste Christians, we would see that in many mass movement areas of south India their economic conditions have not improved in any substantial manner and large majority of them continued under various forms of servitude that exercised extra economic coercion. I would have agreed with the above scholars if the rest of the communities in south India or for that matter Kerala were renouncing their food and other requirements and indulging in self-mortification for the sake of the salvation of their souls!! We are yet to get empirical data on that.

Nieuwenhuys did field research in a south Kerala village to write the paper "Mourning Amma: funerals as politics among south Indian Ezhavas" (Nieuwenhuys:2004) But the instrumental rationality that influenced her perception of lower caste religiosity prevented her from undertaking further research on this questions and she gives her opinion as a substitute for research. It is in this context that I would like to consider the concepts of sin, repentance and salvation. I would argue that these concepts and the worldviews that derive from them were extremely significant for the lower castes. I do not think that the choice was between theses concepts and the so-called material comforts that food and clothes offered. Now let us see what is the nature of the information available on the question of sin, repentance and the desire to be saved which these scholars argue were not the concern of the lower castes. If we follow the journals of missionaries who worked among the lower castes we would come across substantial information on the way the lower caste people understood the notion of sin. Contrary to the arguments of Kooiman and a host other scholars, these sources show how deeply the notion of sin had gone into the minds of the lower caste people that were powerful enough to 'discipline' them. More over in the contemporary social science there is an explicit recognition of the significance of the notion of sin among the indigenous people who joined the missions across the world (Robbins: 2004). In fact one of the main themes of the missionary speeches was the necessity of escaping from the sin and the impending punishment in the hell that was waiting for the sinners. Similarly those who joined the mission congregations were made to understand the differences between various theological classifications of sins, such as original, mortal sin, minor sin to mention a few.

I would argue on the basis of the sources both ethnographic and archival that those who listened to these sermons and catechism began to evaluate their lives and actions in a new light. The numerous occasions of people confessing to the missionaries as well as their decisions to keep away

from situations leading to sin including drinking, should be considered in a new light. People were instructed of rightful conduct such as righteous words and deeds and ordered life that is guaranteed by the attendance in the Church service and catechism. Missionary letters and other documents speak of the effectiveness of their gaze in reforming the people. The non-attendance of Sabbath and work on Sabbath day was considered as big sins. The people were instructed to keep away from situations that could be construed as invitation to further sins. Observance of prayer time was extremely important and missionaries observe how the lower caste Christians who would have spend their time in various other activities including quarrels at night were serious in their evening prayers and reading of scriptures. One of the missionaries in Travancore observed that *'among this people not only drunkenness, adultery, thieving and other vices, formerly very common were almost banished but also evil spirits were obliged to run away from the place, there being scarcely any instance of demonical propitiation, real or imaginary'*. Rev. Koshi Koshi, another missionary gives the observation of a Syrian Christian informant that *in the stillness of the night he could daily hear in his home, the united voices of men, women and children from their different huts, praying and praising God in the most fervent manner*.

The upper castes of the neighborhood takes note of the changes in the habits of their lower caste slave/semi—slave workers who they thought previously were an unruly stock but have changed dramatically owing to the teachings of the missionaries. What does it mean? My argument is that it refers to a possible change in the attitudes of the people and their conduct that underwent a process of disciplining. There is definitely a need for revisiting these issues if we have to write a critical history of the experiences of various Dalit communities that underwent this process. It is interesting to note that from another region of south India—Dornakal in Andhra Pradesh—we come across examples of lower caste, Mala and Madiga Christians reforming their practices following the missionary disciplining that was evident in the introduction of new marriage practices. (Susan Billington Harpe: 2002)

Another area of research that needs to be emphasized in understanding the lower caste mentality in the context of their interaction with missionary Christianity is to study the prayers that were in use and the language in which they became popular. I am not taking up the question of whether the Paraiyars' prayer to which Deliege refers to is just for the worldly goods as even the Lords Prayer would have a sentences that includes "give us this day our daily bread" which is followed by request of forgiveness of the sins committed. My point is a different one, to see the language in which these

prayers were available to lower castes that had the potential to create a different culture of language use. (Burke: 1987, Burke and Porter: 1986). The missionary communication and language had a decisive impact on lower caste people who followed them. It is in this context that one can think of the stories, sermons and speeches that must have been improvised to make effective communication possible. These oral performances had a decisive impact on the lower caste people as evidenced by the life histories of people who were very well versed in prayers and their performative rendering. It is necessary to consider the varieties of speech, the main codes and registers of the missionary linguistic practices. The notion of 'Code' here stands for a variety of given language while the 'register' is a variety spoken in a particular situation (Quoted in Burke: Ibid: 83)

Closely following this we need to reconsider the question of literacy and new tastes that have developed among the lower castes and its significance in writing about the cultural personality of such social groups. In fact we need to have more engaging researches on the questions such as the relationship between lower caste/Dalit literacy and institutions such as state, church, family etc.

Sociologists have done extensive work on the lower castes' religion in south India. There has been an active engagement with questions of 'idioms of subordination and styles of protest, in the writings of scholars such as David Mosse that trey to look at lower caste interaction with Christianity as a significant social experience that should have been viewed as important in its own terms. He explains the lower caste experience of dominance and subordination by showing how they have manipulated the very institutions and symbols that define their subordination, to forge new social relations based on the principles of honour, respect and autonomy (Mosse: 1994) It deviates from the interpretations earlier scholars such as Moffat who speak of the reproduction of hierarchy among the lower castes as well as contemporary scholars like Deliege who suspects the authenticity of lower caste religiosity. (Moffat: 1979)

The foregoing discussion on the various aspects of the social experiences of different lower caste communities in south India would demand a close look at the question of religion in the context of modernity and emancipatory politics. It is necessary to accept the fact that lower castes as political agents or for that matter Dalits as a political category assumes significance only under conditions of modernity. The use of the term emancipatory politics can also appear a bit out place now. But there is room for emancipatory politics as long as one does not totalize the subjectivities. The most important point here is to see how the resources of the lower caste

communities have been reinterpreted to provide a critical understanding of their historical experiences. In some of the studies on Dalit cultural and social practices we find the explicit of use of the Dalit worldview and symbols to re-imagine an emancipatory politics.

The religious traditions of Dalits such as Yellamma/Pochamma cult has been reinterpreted by Kancha Iliah as a resource for egalitarian mobilization and the need for reconstituting society on a different paradigm that is expressively egalitarian and the process of which he refers to Dalitisation. Similarly in the context of Tamil Nadu Clarke explores the symbolic world of the Paraiyars as a theological source to conceive of an emancipatory theology that he develops from the primeval symbol of drum which has a decisive role in their lived experience. Here the Drum is elevated to a symbolic realm where it communicates through a different language to the people and it assumes a different ontology. The identification with the Buddhist theological and religious practices by the Dalits in Tamil Nadu is the main concern of Aloysius. All these are major efforts at exploring the Dalit cultural resources in the context of the discussions on religion and agency of the oppressed people. (Clarke: 1999; Aloysius: 2000) This brief discussion actually raises questions related to the religious experiences of lower castes under conditions of modernity that was essential for critically engaging with the emancipatory praxis that they have developed.

Another source where we find the social imaginary of the lower caste/dailit communities expressed very strongly is in the literary world. My immediate reference is to the works of the colonial period although the contemporary literary expressions are equally important. I would include in the category of literary works folk songs, prayer songs etc of various lower castes Hindus and Christians of various denominations including those that have existed as liminal entities. (Sherinian: 2002; Trawick: 1988) This literary expression that has become famous today, as Dalit literature is an important site to under stand the social imaginaries at work. There are studies on literary figures and their contributions to the social change among Dalit communities. The genre that they have introduced and the literary sensibility and taste that come out of such interventions have been studied and some studies are in progress now.

Another area that needs to be studied is the emergence new family form among different Dalit communities and the context of its emergence. It is possible to study it by following the late 19th and 20th century debates. In Kerala there were debates on such issues in the Sri Mulam Praja Sabha of Travancore that included questions of family, property and inheritance among

the lower castes in general. This discussion takes place in the larger background of social movements that have been demanding the recasting of the social structure. Family was considered as an important site by the lower caste movements in general that required active intervention to appear as modern.

NOTES

[1] Dominick La Capra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, Cornell University Press, London, 1998, pp.8-9

[2] I am here referring to the movement named Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha of untouchable castes such as Pulayas, Parayas and Kuravas who are referred to many of the documents presented in this paper as Slave castes and in contemporary Indian (Kerala) society as Lower castes. The movement was started in Kerala in the first decade of 20th century. It was started by Poikayil Yohannan whose followers attributed divinity to him posthumously and is currently worshipped as God, referring him as Kumara Grudevan. I have traced the career of Yohannan and his transformation in my thesis.

[3] The limitations of the comparison are obvious.

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SOME REFLECTIONS ON CASTE
EVOLUTION AND CONTINUANCE

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ABSTRACT

Caste has formed an integral part of the South Asian identity, sometimes even superseding religious affiliations and ideologies. The pervasive and ubiquitous nature of caste and its persistence has stimulated theoretical debates and speculations about its origin and its role in Indian society. This paper reflects on some of theories, historical and anthropological about the origins of caste and its role as an organizing principle of society in this region. It tries to highlight some of the key aspects of caste, the nature of Varna and Jati and the contribution of these to building up of community and social life.
Keywords: Caste, Varna, Jati, Religion, Race, Endogamy

Introduction

The institution of caste has remained an enigmatic aspect of Indian society as many decades of social reform and legislation have not succeeded in eroding the role that caste plays in the Indian society. As the example of the Christians and Muslims in India indicate, even religious conversion has not succeeded in eroding caste values but on the contrary have made them integral aspects of those religions which have no place for them in their doctrines. Even political ideologies like that of communism have not been able to rid the inbuilt caste prejudices from the minds of people as illustrated beautifully by Arundhati Roy in her book, *God of Small Things*. In this paper we examine some theories of the origin of caste in India and its amalgamation with the Indian identity. A point of view can be thus put forward that caste values have been ingrained into the very fabric of society in South Asia from the very inception and some specific historical accidents have gone into the formation of a unique system of codification of identity that sets this region apart from the world. This is not to say that caste as a system of discrimination and inequality does not find parallels with other similar systems, most notably, race (Channa, 2005, 2013) but in terms of ascription of personhood and a total system of bestowing identity and reproduction of social categories, it combines a set of propositions that are its very own. Thus differences are rooted in philosophical speculations about the nature of embodiment, about the phenomenological and the numinous and not merely in concepts of power

and hierarchy. The world of the sacred is not monopolized but distributed among the various segments irrespective of their hierarchy including the very lowest and despicable; like for example the Doms of the cremation ground.

Historical evidences and speculations

Smith (1994:3) attributes the basis of having the four fold typology of Varna, which is the core of the caste system, as stemming from a need for classification that is inherent in all human thought, "it is the very condition of possibility. To know about something is to know how to categorize it." It is often speculated that this form of classification existed in the pre-Vedic societies even before they came to India. A fourfold classification is also not unique to India, in Tibet also it exists as described by Nimri (1978:52) as: *nag-pa*(priest), *ger-pa* (noble), *mi-ser* (commoner) and *ya-wa* (outcaste) and "As endogamous units combined into a system, these seem to approximate the Hindu Varna model of society with its fundamental division into four ranks" (ibid). However while the four fold system is common to both, the elaborate concepts of purity and pollution as found in the Hindu system are absent and so are the *jatis,* the real operational units of the caste system. In general, even in the feudal order, a priestly class, a ruling class, a category of commoners and one of serfs was not uncommon in many parts of the world. The uniqueness of caste lies in the complex set of relationships and norms (of purity and pollution) and different manner of constructing personhood.

In the Hindu cosmology attributed to the Vedas, the word Varna is synonymous with the concept of 'colour' and also 'quality'; and recognizes three kinds of qualities to be co-existent in this world, namely *satvic*, *rajasic* and *tamasic*; associated with the colours white, red/yellow and black. These also refer to different qualities in human and other beings; *satvic* referring to the *suddha* (pure), spiritual and intellectual properties, *rajasic* to valor, strength and warring and *tamasic* to the material, sensual and worldly things. The Purusa myth of the Rgveda, describes the sacrifice of the primal being Purusa (R.V.10, 90; c.f. Bodewitz, 1992: 51) and his dissolution into the four major kinds of beings, Brahmins, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas and Shudra; from his head, arms, thighs and feet respectively. However as pointed out by Ghurye (1969), the term Varna was not used in the Rgveda to refer to these categories, this classification comes later in the Satpatha Brahmana, where according to the sage Patanjali (in 150 B.C) "the Brahmin was fair skinned with tawny hair and the skin colour of the non-Brahmin was black"(ibid,173) . Thus on the basis of evidence that exists from the Rg Veda, actual colour to designate Varna, was never implied till maybe quite a late period.

An eminent scholar of the caste system, Hocart (1950: 27), adds that this four- fold division was incorporated even in the planning of the cities and that Varna was not about colour but symbolic of the four cardinal points. "The four groups are placed at different points of the compass, within the square or circular city- royal to the east, mercantile to the south, servile to the west, priestly to the north. Heretics and outcastes live outside the city near the cremation ground". These placements indicate the ritual superiority of the priests as the North direction has been the superior direction in ancient India and the superior position of the Brahmana who carried out the Vedic sacrifices seems to have begun the process of hierachization in ancient times. In the present day too, the in the lay out of the caste villages a similar plan is followed where the upper castes are placed towards the superior direction, either 'north' or up, and the outcastes are placed outside the main boundaries of the village. For example in a village that I visited near Hrishikesh in Uttarakhand, I found that the Brahmins were on the higher slopes of the inclined village (being a hilly area) and the middle level castes who were the primary cultivators and land owners near the centre of the village and also favourably placed with respect to the sources of water. The untouchables were outside the village across a road that separated their habitation from the main village. In the older orthogenetic cities like Old Delhi, Lucknow and Benaras, similar divisions were made within the city itself with areas demarcated for different castes.

However Hocart was also of the opinion that the Varna system was a flexible system based on actual capabilities of persons rather than their birth, at least in its initial phase of inception. It is interesting to quote Hocart who says that the Puranas tell that, some sons of Manu became Kshatriyas and some Shudras (like Ishvaku), "You will not persuade people that three castes are descended from three brothers, unless it is considered within the bounds of possibility"(ibid, 52). "The term jati, which we have unfortunately rendered 'caste', is very elastic, as we saw, and may mean any sort of common descent". (ibid, 59).

The theory of the four fold Varna divisions has also been incorporated into the racial theory of caste to say that the higher categories of the Brahmanas and Ksatriyas came from a conquering white race, called Aryan, who also composed the verses of the Vedas, and the lower castes were an indigenous and defeated (therefore subordinated) dark race. Many people including the early British administrators supported such a theory and administrators cum anthropologist like Risley (1908) substantiated it through anthropological measurements. Trautmann (2004/1997), among others, completely demolished the Aryan theory to show conclusively that "the Vedic evidence

that has been brought forward has been subjected to a consistent overreading in favor of racialized interpretations, and that the image of the 'dark-skinned' savage is only imposed on the Vedic evidence with a considerable amount of 'text-torturing', both substantive and 'adjectival' in character." (ibid, 208). The originator of this term, Max Muller also distanced himself from the racial connotation, saying that Aryan was only a linguistic category of a people speaking certain kinds of Indo-European languages having nothing to with any biological characters.

Even more incisive are Ambedkar's (1946) reflections on the early origins of the Varna and jati classifications. Like many others he was completely opposed to the theory of a superior and white Aryan race, calling it a fiction to legalize the hierarchy of the caste system. He also believed in the fluidity of the system from ancient times, quoting "Rig Veda x.49.3 (says Indra) 'I have deprived the Dasyus of the title of Aryas'" (ibid, 72) which indicates that these were not mutually exclusive categories based on race but on status and power and war and conquest could move one group, either up or down from one category to another. He is also of the opinion that there were two groups of Aryans- The Rigveda belonged to one group and the Atharva Veda to the other, there are likewise two stories of origin of the Varnas. The Purusha theory which is supernatural and the origin of the Varnas from the various sons of Manu (see also Hocart, 1950: 52), which is a natural theory (Ambedkar, 1946: 76).

Apart from the textual misinterpretations there was material evidence to oppose the 'conquest' theory and this was in view of the superiority of the pre-Aryan civilization that existed in this region, namely the highly developed Harrapan cities and the rather thin possibility of them having been conquered by an invading horde of pastoral nomads. For whoever the people who entered into the Indian subcontinent from the North-West may have been, they were certainly mounted, being able to travel long distances and would have been pastorals rather than agriculturalists as the latter are not known to have been prehistoric travelers. The known civilizations of the world at this time were all settled on river valleys and while long distance trade flourished, they have not been travelling to colonize distant lands, a characteristic predominantly of pastoral nomads only. There is certainly historical evidence of the Harappan civilization having disappeared but the exact cause has not been fully agreed upon although the conquest theory has largely been replaced by an ecological one (flood or famine) like that of the Mesopotamian civilization.

At the same time there is also enough evidence of migration into the Indian subcontinent of people from the North West side to indicate that some

mixing of populations must have taken place. Miller and Miller (1970: 272) confirm that there are archaeological and skeletal evidences of mixing of cultures and people; "two different tool traditions were discovered, the Euro-African tool types of 'paleolithic' varieties and tool types generally considered to be South-East Asian in origin... Skeletal remains suggest a considerably mixed population at a period between 3,000 and 1,500 B.C." Wolpert also points to a migration around 2000 B.C when "the original Indo –European speaking semi-nomadic barbarians, who most probably lived in the region between the Caspian and Black seas, were driven from their land by some natural disaster" (1997:22).

However, the proponents of the Vedas (whosoever they were), for all the richness of their verses had no script and no cities of settlements. In fact Wolpert (ibid, 25) has also raised doubt about the Aryan conquest theory saying that in comparison to the fortified and well developed cities of MohenjaDaro and Harrapa, the Aryans did not have the technological[1] or military capability of storming the cities. Doubts are also cast on the veracity of this term where Aryan seems to have been a linguist rather than a racial category. As Wolpert (ibid) puts it, Arya was a person of high rank and the common category of the Aryans was referred to as Vis, and was probably the ancestor of the later Vaisyas. In other words Aryan is not someone with distinct racial characters but anyone who is culturally and politically superior.This is a reflection similar to that of Ambedkar who also thinks that these divisions were political and flexible. Trautmann too says, "...darkness of skin was not a salient marker of *Dasyu/dasa* identity to the hymn writer (of the Rig Veda), for whom the most important attributes of their enemies had rather to do with language and religion" (1997:208) (see also Ketkar, 1909: 79)[2]. But still some eminent scholars like Habib (2007/1995) are of the opinion that since the Harappan civilization was not simply its cities but also a large peasantry (required to support the cities), the flood or disaster theory is not tenable as it is not possible that the entire agricultural communities were submerged. Therefore he is still supportive of the invasion and conquest theory by some outside people who too were not completely without stratification and some degree of accomplishments. "The success of the Aryans is ascribed to the possession of the horse, and, still more, the horse drawn chariot. Since, compared with all the previous armour and weaponry, the chariot was immensely expensive machine, its possession implied a pre-existing aristocracy; it is therefore difficult to envision an early egalitarian stage within Rigvedic society, as has sometime been suggested" (Habib, 2007/1995: 114). In other words Habib is also suggesting that the invaders came with their own system of hierarchical classification which is also a plausible theory and

some are of the opinion that the four fold division may have occurred as a grafting of two systems, one indigenous and the other incoming. Thus referring to the two distinct kinds of groupings of Varna and jati, Thapar (2002: 63) speculates that they could also have been two distinct systems and the integration of the two could have been a historical process.

In fact the Rg Vedic sources refer more to a fluid society where power struggles were taking place than a system of rigid classifications. It is more of a society in the making than one with everything already in place. While some scholars have supported a theory of amalgamation of the fertility cults and matricentric rituals (as evidenced from the finding of mother goddess figurines) of Harrappan civilization with the patrilineal and male centric gods of the incoming pastoral people, to create the hybrid jati systems; Jaiswal (1998:160) cites basic dissent of the Siva and Sakti worshippers to the caste system[3] to support her contention that the hierarchy of the Varna could not be an outcome of synthesis but is more likely a result of internal evolution of the Rg Vedic society.

Most historians such as Altekar (1958), R.S Sharma (1977) and Jaiswal (1998) are of the considered opinion that while the pastoral people who authored the Vedas were ranked, they did not have a full-fledged class system that later supported the relatively more rigid and institutionalized organization today recognized as caste society. According to Jaiswal, such a society may have emerged only when the class of rulers appeared along with the supportive priestly class and R.S.Sharma puts the dates as the system emerging around AD fifth and reaching its climax in the twelfth century. Altekar (1958:226) writes that "The Satapatha Brahmana (X.4.1.10) describes how some of the sons of Shyaparòa Sayakayana became Brahmanas, Some Ksatriyas and some Vaisyas. Some of the authors of Vedic hymns were Ksatriyas." Similarly Viswamitra who was born a Ksatriya became a Brahmin and a sage. He (ibid) also mentions that Rg Vedic society did not encourage heredity, and although classes were present, the caste system is unlikely to have materialized. As Pandian points out 'in the epic Mahabharata, Krishna states: "*Chaturvarniyammayasrataguna karma vibaghasa* (The four aspects of humanity are manifested in terms of quality and action)' (1995:109); this according to Pandian would mean that the loss or gain of a quality would bring about a change in one's Varna.

As cited by scholars such as Dandekar (1992), the Rig Veda[4] mostly concentrates upon the power struggle between the two highest groups, namely the Brahmins and the Ksatriyas, more so as most of the verses were composed by the Brahmins who also had control over the magical worlds of the *mantras*. Dandekar (ibid) is of the opinion that the Rg Vedic mythologies were not static but were responding to the historical transformations the society of the

composers were undergoing. The various gods were gaining importance and also changing their characters as the society moved and transformed; which included the fusion of two gods into one to prevent break up of communities following these separate gods, example Mitravarunau and what Dandekar considers even more significant, the emergence of Indravarunau; fusion of Indra the war lord with Varuna the god that imposed order. As the proto Aryas moved from Balk towards the land of the seven rivers, they had to adapt to a war like life situation confronting many obstacles and the cosmic cult of AsuraVaruna was replaced by that of Indra, the warrior who became the supreme god in this period of migration and resettlement. "The socio-religious repercussions of the newly evident domineering stance of the cult of militarism against priest craft- of *ksatra* against brahman- are seen to have been reflected in several Vedic passages" (ibid, 69-70)[55]. In their struggle for power with the dominant Ksatriyas, the composers of the Vedic verses had to insist that, "in order to prove efficacious, the military prowess (as symbolised by Indra) had to be supplemented by the magically potent *mantra*." (ibid). Thus Brhaspati, the lord of Brahmins, emerges as a new god, a Brahmin, he is the creator of all *mantras* without whose help no action of the king can be successful. At the same time a string of stringent laws appear to protect the Brahmin and his wife.

Thus it is to be clearly understood that there was dynamism and power struggle between the various categories, especially those at the top, during the early phase of evolution of the Vedic civilization. The adaptive nature of the classificatory system to the historical and environmental conditions (as for example when the pastoral nomads adapted to a sedentary lifestyle and agriculture and the state made its appearance) makes it clear that at least in the early phases of its development, Varna hierarchy was not rigid but a dynamic variable with negotiable power equations.

There have been several ways in which the origin of the hierarchy in early Indian society has been conceptualized; one as already discussed was the racial theory. Thapar (1992: 30) also outlines several other theories in addition to the conquest and political formation theory; the professional or occupational group formation as given by Max Muller and one based on religious sectarianism given by Alfred Lyall, according to which religious sects could also have evolved into castes. She also refers to Senart's view that the laws of commensality point towards the exclusion of the 'outsiders' so that caste could have originated from an extension of the concept of family and internal equality (Ibid). All these theories were not just directed towards explaining the four fold hierarchy but also the formation of numerous jatis

with their different cultures and even rituals and which were in addition endogamous.

Characters and attributes of Varna/Jati

At the level of day to day life the caste system is not just a philosophy in abstraction but comprises codes of action that most importantly is integrated with the kinship organization of Indian society and also dictates more mundane activities like occupation and class. The Varna divisions make a separation between those who are recognized as Twice –Born, among whom the men are given a sacred thread to indicate that they are of high Varna status eligible to be served by the Brahmin and those who are not so privileged. Usually it is the three upper Varna, to the exclusion of the Sudra thus recognized as 'caste Hindus' (a term much used in contemporary social studies). The ones who are deprived of the sacred thread, the Sudra and the untouchables cannot be served ritually by the Brahmin and have to perform their life cycle rituals such as marriage and death rituals without access to sacred Hindu *mantras*.

At the operational level the Varna dissolve into numerous 'jatis'; actual groups of identity that divides all Hindus into territorial and largely intermarrying groups, that are locally ranked and to which the Varna categories only provide a generalized schema of classification. Thus when we are talking of rank, there is a broad four fold division of Varna and then these innumerable local 'jatis' whose ranks are usually only broadly categorized, leaving plenty of scope for movement and contestation; the dynamics of which have stimulated numerous ethnographic and anthropological studies of specific historically situated instances. The term Jati, that is etymologically quite different from Varna is a polysemic word that may mean many things. When one talks of *manusya* (human) jati one is referring to a species, similarly all birds animals etc are jatis, then when one is taking about being a *nari* or *purusa* jati, then one is referring to gender, female or male, then also one may belong to the jati of the white people or the jati of someone of a different social grouping and so on. It is thus a way of identifying as to who is similar to one's self and who is different but it has positive referents in terms of the specific and known characters of different jatis, human or non-human. Jati can also be used as synonymous with Varna so that it is perfectly feasible to say one is of the Brahman jati or Sudrajati.

Thus while in philosophical terms the Varna categorization provides a kind of timeless ideology; the interrelationship of 'jatis' provides a ground level situation that is embedded in political, historical and economic factors and has been one of the most debated and studied dimension of Indian society. As Pandian points out (1995: 68) "We must keep in mind the fact that the

religious principles of endogamy, rank, heredity, and occupation which are identified as the distinguishing characteristics of the caste system do not constitute a coherent model for the users of the system. People use the principles selectively and in multiple combinations. Ranking of groups is always in relation to other groups, and groups move up and down in terms of their economic and political power which is represented in religious or ritual terms". Perhaps it is this potentiality for interpretation and reinterpretation and its flexibility rather than its rigidity that has contributed to the persistence of the caste system.

The occupational diversity of the various 'jatis' and their localized character indicates as believed by Iravati Karve and also pre-historians like D.D. Kosambi that local artisan groups and people of diverse ethnic origins and customs became gradually incorporated into this system as the kings expanded their kingdoms and brought every one under their common rule. Thapar (2002:63-4) speculates that the jatis may have been the original clans that became caste later. The similarities between clan and jati are in terms of membership by birth and conferring of status through ascriptive membership, the separation of identities and regulation of marriages as members of a group, rather than as individuals. The difference lies in that the occupational specialization of jatis is not found in clans.It is likely that some clans took to occupational specialization as the economy evolved to encompass a wider range of occupations. However all these remain speculative theories only. The Manusmriti attributes the proliferation of Varna into jati through mixed unions providing another point of view (Tambiah, 1973a).

Conclusion

What is important to note even at the outset is that Varna and jati comprise one of the most basic and integral aspect of identity and personhood in South Asia even as of today. What contributes to the resilience of the caste system? Why is it still an integral part of the identity of most Indians (even non-Hindus)? The answer probably lies in that it is firstly integrally tied up with some of our most basic perspectives on cosmology and secondly it is a multifaceted system that touches upon some of the most vital aspects of life, like family, marriage, occupation and access to social resources. Rao (2003:5) writes quite significantly "Caste can be understood as a form of embodiment, i.e. as the means through which the body as a form of 'bare life' or mere biological surface is rendered expressive and meaningful"; to the extent that most Indians cannot even imagine thinking about being a person without a 'jati'. In present times when many aspects of jati have lost their significance, these identities still remain meaningful. Even as societies are getting more and

more class based, a jati serves to identify the core of being of a person; more in answer to the question, "Who am I?" Just like gender is one form of such essentialized identity, so is one's jati or 'jaat' from the point of view of most born on the soil of the subcontinent.

Thus the historical analysis points to the caste system as originating and evolving as the society evolved in India under the specific conditions of migration and conquests. Somewhere down the line it enabled the various groups to create an identity for themselves both as positive identities and as relational ones to enable them to negotiate with each other. Certainly there was also an established hierarchy and as a result of which some groups suffered indignities and marginalization. But even for these groups the sense of belongingness and identity that enabled them to form support networks and also a degree of subsistence security was an incentive not to discard the caste identities. My work on the washermen (Dhobis) shows the key role played by the 'biradari'; the endogamous group, a sub-division of the larger category, Dhobi; that is local and closely tied to each other by ties of kinship and marriage. Thus even those at the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy rarely wish to disown their caste name. Thus as Srinivas has also shown, the mobility that is wished for in the caste system, is that of the group and not only of the individual. Processes such as Sanskritization and Hinduization etc, pertain to the entire Jati. This is more so when the people are marginal, and need the support of their jati members. As shown in Channa (1985), there are many ways in which the community based on Jati supports its members. Thus the caste identity is an important resource in many situations and one that may not be given up easily. In fact even under the influence of modernization it is only a few persons usually ones that have security and privilege, that tend to disown their caste identities; while for a majority it remains a way to find their way around the social milieu.

NOTES

[1] The Aryans, " baked no bricks, built no elaborate baths or sewer systems, created no magnificent statues, or even modest figurines, they had no seals or writing, no faience art, no splendid homes" (Wolpert 1997: 25)

[2] "For centuries, till the arrival of the European scholars on Indian soil, the people of India never meant by the term 'Arya', that race of invaders who reduced the native of the soil to servitude" (Ketkar 1909:79)

[3] The myth of Siva, not being an invitee to the Yagna performed by King Daksha, his father-in-law; is one such instance. Also in Bengal and other places wherever there is organized worship of the Mother –Goddess, caste of the devotees is generally disregarded. In Bengal, in order accommodate

people of all jati description the worship of the Goddess Durga is annually carried out in the 'outside' of the house, in a place common to the entire village. It is referred to as *Baroyaripuja* (Community worship).

4   According to Ghurye (1979), the compilation of the Rig Veda took place around 980 B.C and the hymns were composed between latter half of the fourteenth and the first half of the thirteenth century B.C. Ghurye, like R.P. Chanda and Ambedkar supports the two Aryan theory, that is the Aryans having come in two waves.

5   This view of the Rig Vedic verses reflecting the power tussle of a society that was still moving has been supported by the research of other scholars like Kuiper (1960), Heesterman(1957) and Sparrelboom(1985)

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MODERN MATTERS

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that modernity is a historical sense, a sense of the times, a sense of the era. It is a feeling that the times themselves have changed, and the sense of the modern is the sense of the changed character of the whole of the very dispensation in which we live and move and have our being. At its root, it is a millenarian sense, whether for the better or worse, of a world passed or passing away, and a new one with its changed challenges and satisfactions already come or coming into being to claim our attention and efforts. Dominating the modern intellectual environment are the sciences and arts of the Europeans setting the pace for what takes place and the vision of what the future holds.

Modernity, modernism and modernization are simultaneously matters of our voluntary action and altogether beyond our control. Beyond our control because though they may not concern us ourselves, they do concern also others with whom we have to live and who are of intimate concern to us in the conduct of our lives. But for most of us, the modern is a matter of intimate concern and something essential to the choices with which we are faced, to the issues we confront in large matters and in small. The modern, even though it is a thing of the mind, a cast of the imagination, faces us everywhere as a palpable reality with which we must cope, if indeed we are not modernists ourselves and altogether committed to some allegiance or the other of a missionary modernization. The modern is our ownmost ghost in the issues of our attitudes and orientations to ourselves and to each other, and indeed to the world, the universe, the whole of what faces us and indeed constitutes our very own being.

Modernity is a historical sense, a sense of the times, a sense of the era. It is a feeling that the times themselves have changed, well beyond the ways in which every day is a new day, every circumstance demanding judgement altogether unprecedented and not to be encompassed by an already formulated rule, a summary principle which already holds all the answers. The sense of the modern is the sense of the changed character of the whole of the very dispensation in which we live and move and have our being. At its root, it is a millenarian sense, whether

for the better or worse, of a world passed or passing away, and a new one with its changed challenges and satisfactions already come or coming into being to claim our attention and efforts. Such a change as is entailed in the end of a yuga and the beginning of a new one. Such a change as is inaugurated in India with the advent of Buddhism and Jainism, when Ârya dharma turns defensive and first feels the need to engage in missionary effort, to proselytize. Such a change as is marked by the establishment of European rule in India, with its alien thought and wisdom. Such a change as shakes the imagination itself.

In the popular imagination, the word modern has come to be associated with the turn in thinking that is associated with the European advent. Fairly rapidly, our ways of life have been transformed and a new order, incorporating both native and European elements has been well on the way for almost two centuries. There are some for whom the pace of modernization is not rapid enough. There are some for whom modern ways seem unsuited to our circumstances, and who wish for a path of development more amenable to our own discrimination. There are some who using modern techniques wish to carve out an independent future to rival that of European civilization. There are some who seek an independent indigenous ground of thinking in which we can be masters of ourselves and not just a late-comer into the practice of European ways. Dominating the modern intellectual environment are the sciences and arts of the Europeans setting the pace for what takes place and the vision of what the future holds.

European opinion on what the future holds is divided between a popular enthusiastic optimism, and a superior critical pessimism. At the same time, as the Utopian imagination refuses to be fazed by the disastrous unintended consequences of missionary modernizations, the dystopic vision laments the unimprovability of human kind and the unthinking destruction of the very sources of our well-being and humanity. To be sure, everyday life carries on apace, but under the veneer of civility and peace, passions seethe setting one against the other and each against all as the very structure and substance of this everyday. Despite increasing affluence and the multiplication of amenities available to such affluence, life does not seem to be getting easier, rather more difficult, and anxieties and hatred and intolerance increasing rather than decreasing.

Most sophisticated modernists have an ambivalent attitude to modernity itself. Whereas in sum they are committed to programmes of modernization, and tend to see in modernity the promise of the realization

of the age-old hopes of humanity, they are alive to the deleterious effects of the modern, and the unacceptable transformation of the ways of life that it displaces. Whether it is Marx or Weber or Durkheim, the modern comes with its own baggage of the disastrous which has to be somehow contained or transcended. But all commentators tend to see the passage of modernity as inevitable, and indeed the face of the future, whether desirable or undesirable. The valorization of modernity is almost invariably yoked to a metaphysics of history, that sees human and not infrequently cosmic history as unfolding in a grand panoply of progress, and that castigates any wish or attempt at conservative and anti-modern undertakings as a ridiculous and futile effort to turn the clock back, a retrogressive development that needs to be completely extirpated. The turn in thinking that modernity betokens is almost invariably extolled in the rhetoric of the partisan as an Enlightenment, and modernists are ever eager to take up the cudgels against the non-modern as myths and superstition.

The attempt to root out myths and superstition is a characteristic feature of modern European thought. It is the agon that fires the modernist intellectual urge and that has been instituted in the educational systems all over the world, knitting the vocabulary of the various nations into a world-wide lingua franca in which one must necessarily speak in order to be taken seriously and to be considered educated. Myth is understood as the alter of philosophy and the distinction goes back to ancient Greece and Rome. Superstition is understood as the alter of true religion and goes back to medieval Christianity. In keeping with this, modernists tend to see themselves as governed by a rationality, a rationality the like of which has never been seen before. True enough, modernists can also be Romantics, valorizing beauty, emotion and the non-rational elements of human personality, but the ways in which they elaborate these and indeed in the nature of their commitment to such a life, they take care not to overstep the prejudices and boundaries of the European sciences.

The Europeans have instituted a whole discipline called the philosophy of science to explore the distinctive peculiarities of the way of thinking that is entailed in the sciences. It is presumed in this project that science is a distinctive way of thinking different from all others, and the discipline hopes to be able to isolate it and so to set it apart from all other ways of thinking. The exercise is an epistemological one and as the European philosopher Martin Heidegger has pointed out epistemology is transcendental metaphysics in disguise. Under the guise

of an abstract enquiry into the ways through which we know and the attempt to characterize valid ways of knowing, the philosopher advances in sum his or her own prejudices as to the nature of Reality. All that can be definitively advanced about the premises underlying the European sciences is a methodological atheism, a repudiation of the divine and the supernatural in the process of explanation, and a sharp distinction between facts and values. Thus it is that scientists and philosophers and indeed those in the public at large who take the European sciences as their model of thinking, argue an atheism and the extirpation of emotion and passion from our way of thinking. The European philosopher Karl Popper has however argued that scientists themselves are however human beings and so, emotional and passionate creatures and emotion and passion enter into their scientific pursuit, and dispassionateness and objectivity accrue through the mutual criticism and discussion of their work by the community of scientists. Though there is much to be said in favour of a methodological atheism in the inquiry into natural phenomena, a methodological device hardly qualities as an argument in the nature of this reality itself.

For most of the rest of the world the success of the European sciences in producing technological marvels is the most powerful of the arguments advanced in favour of following the West. But, European superiority and the claim to it resides not only in the European sciences and their technological accomplishment but in the culture and cultivation from which these have arisen. And where science is admired and emulated, equally the culture of the West has disseminated all over the world and influenced and influences the course of development of all of the rest of the world. European modernism and modernity provides the model for the changes initiated in the life and practices of the nations of the world at large. And the most powerful modern word is not indeed science, but the motor that drives the emotions and passions of modern aspirations – freedom!

Freedom is understood variously in various cultures and the European and western understanding interprets freedom as primarily political and social. Modern programmes of political and social emancipation are many and varied. Isms proliferate and the ismic mentality itself generates a bind in which the partisan modernizer is trapped. That is not to say that the modern aspiration to the freedom of thought, its expression and action is a hollow claim. But freedom, is not achieved by a one-sided attempt to claim freedom by those who consider themselves bound or enslaved, but the surrender of those in

authority curtailing these to the claims of the person wishing to be free. By far, the most important dimension of freedom is the degree to which parents and adults permit children the privilege in their conduct. Similarly, as adult citizens, people are bound by custom and laws and the degree to which these permit the free exercise of initiatives is a variable feature conditioned by the nature of the authority exercising constraint. However, the aspiration to an unconstrained life and the unchecked enjoyment of whatever it may be that circumstances have to offer is an explosive force in the unfolding of personal and social relations. Unfettered existence is perhaps the most powerful of urges in the logic and realization of desires and wishes. This is not to deny the overwhelming importance of responsibilities and duties, but even within the ambit of blameless behaviour, freedom and the wild passion for its realization functions as a goad urging humanity to unprecedented effort and achievement. This, to my mind is perhaps the most important dimension of European modernity, touching all lives all over the globe.

It could be argued that it is modernity itself that first creates the fetters that it latterly pits itself against. Yet, even so, the urge to freedom is an empowering experience well beyond the circumstances of containment within which it is enclosed and against which it marshals its energies. And freedom never loses its edge, no matter the degree to which emancipation is already achieved. Though it is only in a relative sense that social and political battles are fought and social and political emancipation achieved, the peremptory and encompassing urge to freedom itself is Absolute. Indic thought of course posits the absolute realization of this absolute urge in the transcendence of karma and the release from the cycle of birth and death that it sees as the fundamental human predicament. Marxian and leftist thought, within the ambit of modern European and Europeanized thought tends to inject this absoluteness into its relative pursuits and at its atheistic apogee invokes the Paradisiacal transformation of its earthly predicament.

Usually, in the interpretation of freedom by modernists, considerations of equality are inextricably intertwined. Simmel has pointed out that equality and freedom are often opposed to each other and at contradictory cross purposes to each other. But at the same time as egalitarianism is a characteristically modern value, equality is not infrequently conflated in the usage of modernist thinkers with freedom. Whether it is Rousseau or Marx, the logic of emancipation is identified with egalitarian premises. That is not to say that there are no modernist

thinkers who separate the two. But certainly, in popular and customary academic usage the two go together.

No matter where we go, and from birth to death, hierarchy is the rule. Society is impossible without it and each one of us desires the highest and the best for themselves. Beteille has tried to argue that what we find in nature is only difference, whereas hierarchy is a product of human evaluation. The contention flies in the face of the ordering of nature, and forgets that egalitarianism itself is a valuation. Besides, a human thinking that does not evaluate is perhaps altogether impossible.

Considerations of the inevitability of hierarchy have led to a situation where egalitarians no longer speak of equality but have invented a word to house their egalitarian aspiration within the ambit of necessary and unavoidable hierarchy – equity. Within the ambit of a modernist and modernizing thinking the only salutary form of hierarchy has been advanced as a meritocracy. Radical egalitarians and realists dispute the possibility of such a form of hierarchy, but in the institutional practices of contemporary societies with egalitarian prejudices it is indeed the evaluation by some form of merit that guides the conscious administration of privilege. The customary form of the evaluation of merit is usually an examination by those in positions of authority. The egalitarian urge in society at large takes two opposed directions. The usual is the emulation of the higher by the lower, always accompanied by the attempt of the lower to denigrate the higher and to pull it down to its own level. The second, of course, is loaded with vindictive revolutionary potential, but is incapable by itself of instituting healthy and salutary social practices. This is not to say that there are no senses in which we are equal. But these tend to be transcendental, even though they have implications for the ways in which we conduct ourselves with respect to each other.

Individuals differ in the degree to which they have adopted modernist orientations. At its deepest level modernism is a spirit of all-round change including change in the apperception of the spirit itself. It is a change in spiritual and aesthetic values which affects the ways in which the world and our relationships are perceived. It is potent with a changed aesthetics and changes ethics. And this is the sense in which it is possible to suggest a shift away from modernism to a post-modernity. It is not as if the modernist spirit has passed away but that it is assimilated to a more inclusive point of view than the peremptory radical mission of modernizing.

Modernity and modernism continue to fire the imagination of many and equally the characteristically modern hostility to modernity. Contrasting moral values are pitted against each other, and the intolerance entailed breeds persecution and oppression. Though persecution and oppression are nowhere and at no time admired values, the sense of the defence of values that *are* admired and extolled tends to be used to justify the use of coercion and violence. Though peace is near universal in its appeal, war is an inevitable expedient of the human condition. A morality that rises above both and assimilates the virtues of both war and peace into its own internal dynamic is not only the superior dharma taught by spiritually accomplished persons, no matter when, no matter where, but the need of the hour. There have been many exemplars in the past. It remains to be seen how *we* will face the challenge of cataclysm that is impending, and how humanity will fare in this great trial of itself.

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DE-ROMANTICIZING 'SECULAR' POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF *DAWLA MADANEYYA* IN POST-SPRING ARAB WORLD

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ABSTRACT

The Arab Spring with its wide range imperatives brought a situation in which Islamist groups in West Asia and North Africa (mainly in Egypt and Tunisia) to acknowledge the popular political experience and thereby to reinterpret the state and democracy as the situation demanded. Establishing an absolute 'theocratic' state or a completely 'secular' state, thus, seemed a politically non-viable option. Instead of that, an effort was made to create a civil state (dawla madaneyya) by giving appropriate space for the rights of minorities and other weaker sections. Taking cues from the experience of Morsi State in Egypt (2011-12), this paper examines how did the discourse of 'civil state' profoundly transform the very ground on which secular-nationalist states were envisioned and negotiated in the post-Spring Arab world? This paper also traces out the genealogy of it modern state in the region and examines how secularism becomes an essential structuring condition for it.

Keywords: Modern Arab State, Arab spring, *dawla madaneyya,* Muslim Brotherhood, *Ennahada, Umma*, *Watan*

This paper is an attempt to understand a post-Spring initiative within the contemporary Arab political discourse-*dawla madaneyya* or civil state-envisioned by the Islamists against many of the concepts and practices associated with the secular-liberal understanding of the relationship between religion and politics. In contrast to the secular understanding that has a colonial modern genealogy in the context of modern Arab world, *dawla madaneyya* posits a very different one that goes beyond the 'essential' modern binary opposition of secular versus religious. The role of religion remains very visible and operative in its conceptualization, but, at the same time, despite its avowed antagonism towards secular state, *dawla madaneyya* presupposes many key secular concepts, making the concept far more hybrid in character. In Egypt, in a more delicate act of balancing, Morsi's state endorsed the components of both 'Islam' and 'democratic' tradition and an attempt was made by them to show that Islamist ideology and democratic governance were not poles apart. Civil State in this context challenged many aspects of

'secular religiosity'; key among them was seeing secularism as the essential component for democracy to flourish regardless of the contexts. The demands for democratization of various kinds were attempted to address by the Islamists in Tunisia and Egypt through both religious and secular means and through practices a combination of the two. *Dawla madaneyya* in that sense necessitates a whole series of effective and sensible re-orientations of the way in which democracy gathering sense; from a technique of governing to a means of constituting the body politic. (Agemben, 2011:1)

Though the constitutional debate initiated by Morsi led eventually to overthrow the regime, the debate, in fact, was an open-ended one where a healthy street level public discussion on legalities of state was taken place. Taking cues from the experiences of all Arab Spring states, Sadiki liked to see the whole debate as a part of an inevitable conflict between two competing but interchangeable sets of legitimacy; democratic and revolutionary. (Sadiki, 2013) The latter revolves mainly around a romantic politics in societies where the informal kind of politics was invalidated by fifty years of tyranny. Asad substantiated this point further with his statement that the political imagination should not be limited by the matters of legality but by a different set of criteria to evaluate what we have been witnessing in Egypt. The experiences in Egypt went beyond the procedural democratic legitimacy which often seeks formal structures, procedures and contracts that frame politics. Rationalizing political debates in such cases always fail to understand the dynamics involved in the Arab Spring.

It is no less incorrect to say that the Muslim Brotherhood's conceptualization of civil state made a complete departure from both 'secular' and 'religious' states. This binary has been manifested in an apparent conflict between the colonially created 'modern' state and the local sense of identity that of belonging to *umma* along with the forms of political organization that stem from it such as Islamic *dawla*. The Islamic *dawla* represents a non-sovereign temporary political arrangement that is accountable to and responsible for the whole *umma*, not to a particular territory. The 'secular' state in the Egyptian context referred to a political entity created by colonial powers and supported by neo-colonial powers.

In this context, there seems to be the significance in employing the framework of post-secularism to politically analyze the character of *dawla madaneyya*. This paper is an attempt along that direction. The post-secular state does not entail the total rejection of the ongoing 'secularizing' process and also not a return to the medieval theological predominance. (Habermas, 2006:1-25) Instead, this perspective assumes that there is the continued existence of religious ideals in a continually secularizing environment. Secular

frameworks fail to explain religious determinants of the state; their normative presumption of the superiority of the 'secular' over 'religion' does not allow them to conduct an objective analysis.

Habermas defines the concept as the continued existence of religious communities and movements in a continually secularizing environment. Asad develops the thesis of post-secularism further by analyzing the failure of secularization theories in explaining religion in contemporary life. The post-secular, according to Joas, does not mean a sudden increase in religiosity, after its epochal decrease with the rise of modernity, but rather a change in mindset of those who, previously, felt justified in considering the religious to be moribund. It does not reflect an increase in the meaningfulness of religion or a renewed attention to it, but focuses on a changed attitude by the "secular public domain with respect to the continued existence of religious communities and the impulses that emerge from them", notes Joas. Briefly put, post-secularism offers an alternative way of approaching the role of religion in conceptualizing the state and discusses the failure of secular efforts to analyze religious practices that determines a modern state with a predominance of scientific thought and rationality at the core. It also inculcates the need of reformulating the basic presumptions of religion and secularism in the light of emerging complexities in contemporary times. This paper addresses the need of re-evaluating the basic presumptions of religion and secularism in the light of Muslim Brotherhood's experience in establishing a 'civil state' which reflects both an increase in the meaningfulness of religion and renewed attention to it and a focus on popular 'secular' ideals.

Genealogy of 'Modern-Secular' Arab State

The significance of Morsi's state lies in its role to problematize the binary of the category of 'religion' and its presumed opposite, 'secular.' The experiences of the creation of civil state demonstrated a new complex relationship between religious and secular that cannot really be reduced to a conflict of 'universal democratic' principles against 'sectarian commitments' nor to one of reason versus belief. In terms of outreach, composition and ideology, the body politic envisioned by the Muslim Brotherhood remained incongruent to European concept of nation-state. Drawing up on a pre-colonial Islamic perception of politics, it also rejected the political imaginations generated by Arab nationalism as the underlying ideology.

Historically, it was believed in the modern centres of the Arab world that every society had to pass through certain historical stages and finally enter into a 'secular modern' nation-state. All social and political engineering schemes emerged with modernity in the Arab world insisted that while passing

through these inescapable stages, each society had to undergo a radical restructuring of culture in tandem with the secularization of the society by purging out its retrogressive bits. The indigenous elites acquired the control of the process of secularization of culture by internalizing a native version of the civilizing mission.

The idea of secular modern-state entered most of the Arab societies through the colonial connection. Within a short span of time the concept of modern nation-state which cannot easily be isolated from the nationalist and organizational developments that took place in Europe, marginalized all other concepts of the state in the region. The European experience was internalized further with the development of modern state structure with elaborate bureaucracies, policing strategies and mechanisms of control by which post-colonial Arab states could manage their own population in the 1950s and 60s. During this period, a deep transformation of polity affecting the relation between religion and state was taking place. The evolution of a 'secular' bureaucracy was closely paralleled even in countries like Saudi Arabia, where the *wahabi* inspired nation-building in the 1930s had followed a distinctive tribal mode. (McLachlan, 1986:92-5)

Most of the states in the Arab world, however, failed to develop into viable modern nation-states though they unsuccessfully tried to emulate the path of 'progress.' As what happened in Egypt, the state was increasingly envisioned in a more idealized form-as socialist and secular. But the reality was different as most of the states did not live up to the imaginations of political elites. The opposition to the failed state came mainly from the religious groups who were sidelined during the nation-building process. In order to overcome the situation, elites in the Arab states engaged in eliminating 'problematic' opposition.

Looking at the history, one can say that the Arab states were emerged at a time when the intellectual discourses were mostly pre-occupied either with the *umma* (global Muslim community) defined in terms of Islamic politics or *watan* (national community) defined in terms of Arab nationalism. Because of the long historical preponderance of these two concepts, Arab scholars at the initial stage did not show much of enthusiasm to endorse the concept of the body-politic based on territory, territorial sovereignty as such. (Ayubi, 2006:4, 115) With a few exceptions, the state as a concept and as an institution appeared quite alien to most of the Arab countries. As the modernization and secularization of the state did not occur at the open political domain, the role of Islamic *umma* and Arab *watan* remained operative with greater amount of social as well as religious legitimacy. The lack of social and cultural cohesion furthered the complex relations between the modern,

'secular' state and their 'religiously oriented' people. The prevalent concepts of state that Arabs tended to borrow from the West, therefore, were excessively formalistic at the initial state, though later on became instrumentalist. The newly established states in West Asia and North Africa, in fact, functioned as a colonial tool to make people of the region to fit into a frame of reference familiar and useful to the colonial masters. (Al-Bargouti, 2008:3)

The Egyptian political scientist Hamid Rabi's observations are particularly significant in this context. Rabi' was a staunch critic of basic conceptualization of modern Arab State. He did find futility in interpreting Islamic state in the framework of European enlightenment tradition. Nation-state emerged in the Arab world, according to him, was mainly an emulation of the Catholic model, seemingly with the mission of creating a direct unmediated relationship between the citizen and the state.(Rabi, 1980:15-6) The European model in actuality, forcing the Church to be a mute spectator and thus purging out all religious agents ended up in the hegemony of a particular religion or sect. Modern Arab states with no inspiration from the Islamic model by way of revival of the *turath* or 'cultural heritage' and guided by a distinct 'political function' (*wazifa Siyasiyya*) exemplify this mismatch.

Though not familiar with the vocabularies of 'voting', 'formal institutions' and 'organized opposition', the Islamic model was politically vital with an alternative set of concepts and ideas for political equilibrium. These concepts, Rabi suggested, include moderation, control between the Caliph, the *ulama* and the judges. So, Islamic polity, in that sense, can't translate to the state in European context with well defined territories and sovereignty. It rather connotes to an organized politico-religious community or *umma*. The libertarian aspects of European enlightenment tradition, therefore, seldom overpowered the idea of justice ('*adl*) in Islamic polity. (Hourani, 1970) While the concepts of freedom and liberty were at the centre stage of statist discourse in the West, they carried slightly different connotative meanings in the Islamic political discourse that go transcend the limits of the state and nation.

Looking at the genealogy, one can see the state in traditional form in the Arab/Islamic world as the outcome of two processes; a natural evolution of the Sultanic state and a reform process. Of which the latter was by and large a product of change in material aspects of society reflected mainly in administrative arrangements. The reformist tradition, though not completely, had borrowed substantially from the European experiences. This tradition did find its expression first in *tanzimat* which was introduced by the Turkish Sultan in order to consolidate his own authority internally and externally and later on carried forward by the European colonialists in order to expand their

imperial market and weaken the local leadership. Apart from extending the reach of imperial market, the modern state helped the colonialists to accommodate the then emerging social elites into their political constituency.

However, the modern state as an imported commodity came into being partly under colonial pressure and partly under the influence of imitating the West, failed to capture the popular political imagination and to transform the attitude of Arabs towards it. The Arab political imagination during that period was hinging more around other overarching concepts of cultural unity and political integration than the concept of state. Pan-Islamism with religio-political orientation and Arab Nationalism with linguistic-cultural bond were the two major ideologies that contested each other to gain the edge over the Arab public sphere. The former represented a comprehensive Islamic concept of *umma* while the latter was an embodiment of secular nationalism defined in terms of a more inclusive concept, *watan.* Both had lively spread as the Arabs thought of politics in terms of a non-territorial affair. The 'foreignness' of modern state prevented it from being identified by the people emotionally.

Though there were a lot of ensembles to state in Egyptian history, the history of state in the modern sense with territorial integrity based on sovereignty externally and legal institutions internally traces back to the reign of Muhammad Ali who came to power in 1805. He was the first to introduce the concept of citizenship and modern system of education, to build national army, compact bureaucracy and state-owned industrial networks and to create a class of political elites in Egypt. Muhammad Ali's attempt to build a 'modern state' represents a balance borrowing components from both European experiences and the pattern which was prevalent with Ottoman rule. The state system continued even after his defeat in 1840s under successive regimes, but internal contradictions and threats led to the failure of the state system and eventually to the British occupation of Egypt in 1882.

What happened with the formation of modern state in the postcolonial period was the total abandonment of cultural function of the state in favour of 'purely secular' political functions. The romance of secular modern state continued to capture the imagination of political elites in the region even after the national liberation movements gained a clear hegemony in the political realm. The growth modern nation-state system West Asia and North Africa was directly linked to the 'secularization thesis' developed in the west keeping separation between religion and public space. (Yasmin, 2013) Cultural and religious specificities of each society were conveniently ignored in order to build 'modern' states. Though at ideological front, they tried to undo the ill-effects of colonialism, offering an alternative to the colonial concept of state seemed impossible for national liberation movements. This inability led to a

compromise between the populist ideology of Arab nationalism and the realpolitik of colonially created Arab states with repressive apparatuses. Jamal Abdul Nasser, for instance, looked for legitimacy from both Arab nationalist doctrine and strong colonial 'secular' modern state and contained Islam in order to build a 'modern' Egypt.

Nasserite state was a combination of a modern secular colonially-inspired and Arab socialist state; both of these mutually conflicting ideas existed in one synthesis. Although the socialistic component of it was appealing to many in the third world, the 'secular' 'modern' hangover of Nassarite State made it alien to Egyptian society. Though the state machine and apparatuses of it were very much influential in the daily life of people, the state failed to create an emotional bond with the society. Despite the rhetoric of Arab nationalism, Nasser could not offer an alternative to the modern state modeled on European experiences. His perceptions, therefore, remained surprisingly vague about the issues pertaining to the nature and form of an Arab nationalist state.

Though initially attempted in creating an alternative state with Arab socialistic background, Nasser's statist experiments ended up with an autocratic one taking modern liberal state as its frame of reference. Unable to move far from the hangover of secular modern state, Nasserite state, in effect, maintained a strange balance between the ideology of Arab nationalism and colonially created nation-state. This mismatch between the ideology of Arab nationalism and the secular modern nation state with coercive military, as happened elsewhere in the region, manifested in a brutal suppression of popular political movements. Communists and Muslim Brothers were the two major victims of such suppression.

Although the ideology of state changed from Arab Socialism to neo-liberalism, Sadat's state exemplified how neo-liberalism and secularism are connected in a circuitous fashion, not just conceptually but practically through a mechanism of governance separating religion and state. It also illustrated the unique character of modern 'secular' Arab state in terms of its inherent commitment to the idea of authoritarianism. The neo-liberal state, adhered to the principles of separation of religion and state and control of popular religious groups, engaged in totalitarian exercise of power. The notion of 'secularism' was seen as a bid by the Sadat regime for centralization of power and consolidation of authoritarian state.

Secular state under Mubarak also carried a negative connotation of regime's consolidation of coercive and autocratic state subordination of its policy to that of the United States in exchange for financial and military aid. Military coercion was central to Mubarak's 'secular' governance. (Asad,

2012:279) On his part, Mubarak consolidated the political and economic dependence on the West re-configuring economy further, enforcing secularism and fighting Islam and traditional culture. Secularization remained to be the basic task of the government with which Mubarak sought to transform Egypt an authoritarian state with tight control. Intellectuals from both liberal and left spectrum also sided with the regime tacitly and have long supported a thorough going secularization of Egypt and crystallization of Islamist groups in the name of secularism. Most of the left and liberal critics, according to Asad, simply saw the formal separation of 'politics' from 'religion' as the solution to threat of sectarianism in the Egyptian society. Mubarak found excellent justification in authoritarianism for his attempt to crush Islamist organizations. The 'secular' state functioned as a guarantor of national security especially in the backdrop of American initiated 'war on terror.'

These elements in the ideology of 'secular' state came under criticism because of its justification for state-sponsored violence in the post-Arab Spring period. The idea of state as the chief secularizing agent from Nasser's period met a rejection and religious-based 'non-modern' or 'pre-colonial' concepts of state begun to emerge in response to it. The creation of the civil state by the Brotherhood offered a bid to unpack the heterogeneous elements involved in what we mean by religion and not to focus solely on abstract theological notions. Within the strict framework of 'civil', Morsi tried to offer an opposition to pro-western neo-liberal dictatorial regime. The Muslim Brotherhood, at the same time, did not hide that their goal was a state based on *Sharia* as the frame of reference. The biggest challenge to the creation of a civil state was the remnant forces[1] of 'secular' system that outlived the 25 January revolution and their supporting networks in the army, media, business, civil society and judiciary.

Digging a bit deeper, one would not surprise, why civil society movements which protested vehemently against SCAF's threat to the revolution tacitly allowed the army to sack the first popularly elected president. Even though a variety of important civil society groups emerged or survived, transformed for last six decades, the state either went to some lengths to accommodate many within its 'secular' constituency or to prevent, preempt or destroy others. The 'liberal' middle class content of civil society at times sought patronage of state in some way or the other, though they could easily break the relationship with the Mubarak state, when the revolution happened.

Muslim Brotherhood in power posited a tradition of challenge against the incommensurable divide between strong religious belief and a secular world view. The civil sate they conceptualized, on its part, tried to direct others' attention to how the religious and the secular[2] are not so much immutable essences or opposed ideologies.

Dialogic aspects of *Dawla Madaneyya*

Arab spring, at least for a short while, brought a situation in which people witnessed to the unpopularity of the states in the region created by the colonial powers and supported by the neo-colonial powers. The event also contributed to de-westernize the West Asian and North African politics through the embrace of non-western (mainly Islamic) ideals of democracy. Though Turkey ignited such a move making 'civil religion' more appealing as an alternate to 'secularism', Islamist parties in Tunisia and Egypt made it more popular world over.

The state envisioned in Islam, *dawla* shows the character of a doctrinal or ideological ('aqa'idiyya) state based on a practical merger of ethical principles with pragmatic political ideals and on a non-separation of private and public. Culture remains to be an inextricable part of such a state and through *dawla* Islam presents certain cultural ideals if not a specific political model. The Islamic state also rejects the concept of state autonomy and attempt to confine the state's function to a fixed territory and political domain. Barghouti defines it as a non-sovereign, non-territorial, temporary political arrangement that is accountable to and responsible for the whole *umma* or the whole community of Muslims, not only to a portion of it, regardless of borders and nationalities.

The linguistic origins of the word state in European context and of the word *dawla* in Arab context actually imply two different things. It is the concept of *umma* or the community, especially in its religious sense, is more important in the Islamic political tradition than any concept of the state or political system. The history of Islam characterizes this basic binary-of *dawla* and the *umma*. The question which of the two has responsibility for the enforcement of Islamic law has been perpetuated throughout the history. *Dawla madaneyya*, in its traditional sense, is considered to be a departure from the religious state, as opposed to the reformation of such a state in a new guise, or an understanding of the state as open, secular and flexible. But in wider senses of the term, the idea contemporarily denotes to a response to the challenges posed by both theocracy and secularism.

Dawla madaneyya, in theory, implies a contrast with military state or theocratic state not governed by clergies or generals but by technocrats who comply with a written constitution to protect the civil liberties of both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. (Hassan, 2013) By definition, it must be based on institutions and on consultation and the operative decision-making process should be civil in nature. Such a state rules recognizing the will of people through the categories of democratic or undemocratic, not through those of faith or of its rejection.

Dawala Madaneyya in the Egyptian context offers an alternative to the empire/caliphate and the differences are apparent in their use of *Sharia* or Islamic Law. The implementation of *Sharia* in the former context is done by the people's choice and free will. Unlike caliphate, civil state carries specific associations with democracy, constitutionalism and equality of citizens before the law. The stress here is not on the 'secular' aspects of the 'civil' but 'democratic' with strong sense of popular sovereignty.

The contemporary relevance of this term, civil state, is not just associated with the political discourse induced by the Arab Spring. Though having roots to the pre-colonial debates of the state in West Asia and North Africa, it was Muslim Brotherhood which made the civil state with Islamic background popular in the 1950s. (Hill, 2013) Idea of 'civil state' has always been attracted the wrath of other Islamic organizations mainly, *Salafis* who see 'civil state' as identical to the 'secular state' and both for them are referred to Western, opposed to Islam and therefore, illegal under Islamic legal provisions. But the Brotherhood literature inculcates that the civil state is fully compatible with Islam and Sharia. It is western-modeled secularism that, in fact, is something antithetical to Islamic jurisprudence hence not suitable for the Islamic world.

The 'secular' criticism of *dawla madaneyya* with Islamic reference revolves most importantly around the issue of *sharia* as the source of law and its inherent inability to sanction practices like the decentralization of power, plurality, and freedom of expression and public liberties. The moderate Sunni objection to the concept of *dawla madaneyya* was its alleged attempt to make the idea of rulership a religious mandate. Sunni factions see 'civil state' with Islamic background as a revival of the old shibboleths of the Brotherhood, *Hukumat e-Ilahi* considering the rulership as an organic part of religion. By insisting that rulership is fundamentally part of religion, the political process becomes an end in itself for the Brotherhood rather than a means to democratize Egyptian politics.

By re-interpreting the concept of 'civil', Muslim Brotherhood articulates that *madani* or civil in the Arab Islamic context is something that is not opposed to the role of religion in public life. In that sense 'civil' can not necessarily be often employed as a kind of euphemism for *almani* or 'secular.' The latter in the specific historical and political milieu of West Asia and North Africa shows a tendency to take on a more military anti-religious meaning, whereas, the concept of 'civil' does not dissociate completely from religion and indicates a more neutral and acceptable area of secular. As articulated by the Muslim Brotherhood, there is an apparent difference in meaning between 'secular' and 'civil' here as *dawla madaneyya* is defined not in terms of its non-

religious attributes but as something that stands sharply against the tyrannical rules of any sort. Simultaneous to maintain aspirations for a non-military state, the term 'civil state' envisages an absence of complete hegemony of a single religion in the political affairs. With the use of 'civil' in opposition to military, what the leaders of Muslim Brothers had in mind was to create a united front of both 'religious' and 'secular' forces against the tradition of 'secular' state with repressive apparatuses. The second related connotation of the 'civil state' according to Morsi was that of a 'democratic' or 'constitutional' state. While defining his vision of state, Morsi articulated that the state would be "the Egyptian national, democratic, constitutional, legal and modern state."[3] Such a state, he went on to say that "is ruled by the people through an elected parliament that represents the popular will." (Ibid) In that sense, the state should be discussed in terms of its open and flexible structure that could ensure the political independence, plural religious identity and cultural specificities of the Arab world. (Ramadan, 2012)

The 'civil' in this sense does not insist on the separation of religion from the political sphere, but on accommodation of a multi-religious base for the polity. As Tariq Ramadan argued, the term has been adopted by the Islamist groups in the context of Arab Spring in part to distance from 'secularism' on the one hand and from Iranian-style 'theocracy' and their old call for a pure 'Islamic state' on the other. President Morsi himself has expressed that the 'civil state' dissociates equally from 'secular' and 'theocratic-religious' government in principle and practice. Brotherhood maintains the view that a civil state functions as an alternative to secularism and the hegemonic rule of one religion, both of which they argue, are the products of western political culture. The civil state with Islamic references, in Tariq Ramadan's words comprised threefold response-religious, cultural and political and cultural- to the imposition of western models.

What Brotherhood conceptualized was a civil state based on Islamic references, with three completely independent authorities: the parliament, judiciary and the government. People regardless of religion and class are the paramount source of the power in such a state based not on theocratic concept. Islam, according to Morsi, confirms the independence of these authorities. Although, the Islamic framework to a great extent controls the government and behavior of the state, the notion of Islam cannot be imposed on the people from the top. To quote Morsi: Islam has to be initiated, created and agreed up on by the people. Calling it a civil, democratic state guaranteeing equality and justice, Brotherhood stressed that Egypt is not following an Iranian model and has no intention of implementing, or attempting to implement, a theocratic state modeled on Iran.[4]

The re-conceptualization of the state and democracy in the new context had also echoed in the statements of many scholars who are subscribed to the ideology of *ikhwan* all over the world. Yusuf Al-Qardawi, a prominent Islamist ideologue associated closely with the movement, made it clear that it is incorrect and unjust to say that Brotherhood in Egypt is establishing a theocratic state. "The call of Brotherhood is for an Islamic civil state that by no means will end up in theocratic rule."[5] The same had resonated in the words of the leader of *Ennahada* in Tunisia, Rachid Ghannouchi interpreting religious texts in a way that is compatible with the idea of secularism and civil state. He objected the notion that Islamic principles and civil state are poles apart. Ghannouchi's only objection is to secularism as a philosophy of state. There is nothing essentially wrong with secularism as a 'procedural measure' that helps a nation with cross-cultural base to build a consensus.

The concept *dawla madaneyya* in the Egyptian context involved a convergence of Islamism and secularism around the term civil. The secular/ Islamic binary has already become meaningless with a complex set of reactions to the suppression and tyranny by the secularists. As discussed elsewhere in this paper, the term 'secular' in the Arab context was either quite synonymous with tyrannical rule or did not offer any alternative to the tyranny. In contrary to the general situation, it was actually the religious movements with its victimhood under the 'secular' rules of Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak, had contained space for resistance to the 'secular' politics. The ill-effects of globalization in the pre-Spring period had contributed further to the blurring of religious-left divide. There was a near-total absence of the state in mediating the conflict between ordinary people in the society without purchasing power and the market which made the regimes mute spectator in the neoliberal context. It was again the Islamic organizations which had been very instrumental in the struggle against both tyrannical state and the imposition of American imperialism through neoliberal politics in the Arab states.

In short, *Dawla Madaneyya* in its conceptualization recognized the public relevance of religion and religious ideas in conceiving statist discourse. But their recognition moved beyond the visibility of religion with affirming its symbolic values manifest in public rituals and rhetoric, made increased cultural influences of religion on government. It also represented a democracy that moved away from its general conceptualization as a technique of government. The dialogic aspect of it should be taken as an evidence of using democracy by the Islamists Egypt as a means of constituting the body politic. The Islamic model in this context boasted a political vitality that inspired contemporary politics and offered an alternative way of approaching the role of religion in conceptualizing the state. The entire debate led to exposing the failure of

secular efforts to analyze religious practices that determines a modern state with a predominance of scientific thought and rationality.

Conclusion

Dawla Madaneyya in its conceptualization recognized the public relevance of religion and religious ideas in conceiving statist discourse. But their recognition moved beyond the visibility of religion with affirming its symbolic values manifest in public rituals and rhetoric, made increased cultural influences of religion on government. It also represented a democracy that moved away from its general conceptualization as a technique of government. The dialogic aspect of it should be taken as an evidence of using democracy by the Islamists Egypt as a means of constituting the body politic. The Islamic model in this context boasted a political vitality that inspired contemporary politics and offered an alternative way of approaching the role of religion in conceptualizing the state. The entire debate led to exposing the failure of secular efforts to analyze religious practices that determines a modern state with a predominance of scientific thought and rationality.

The creation of civil state in Egypt and Tunisia, in a sense, marked a transition of Islamist politics from the principles of revealed religion to the experiences and patterns of living traditions. This slice in history also proved that Islam and civil are not opposite to each other, but with shared concerns against tyrannical rule. But from the line of traditional secularist thinking, the establishment of 'civil state' by Muslim Brotherhood was conceived as yet another cycle of events leading to the expansion of Islamist forces. Many left intellectuals from inside and outside the Arab world, focused on explaining what they saw as something anomalous to the 'democratic' rule. This perspective was based on a misconception being held by the liberals and leftists alike that the genuine democratic sense in the Arab world is limited to a narrow set of secular elites. Secular paradigm in its conventional form seemed to be not sufficient enough to make sense of the situation which needs to be understood within a multilayer of contexts. The experiences of Egypt realigned the debate away from the traditional binaries of religious versus secular. The new binaries emerged in its place were democratic versus anti-democratic and freedom versus tyranny.

NOTES

[1] The opposition, according to Asad, consisted a diverse spectrum of elites; the rich businessmen who established themselves during Mubarak's neo-liberal regime; high court judges that maintained close links with the army; ambitions politicians and ex-politicians; left and liberals; army officers and

journalists. The left politicians disliked Brotherhood for its ideology as well as its country-wide grassroots organizational set up. See Asad (2011) the conversation by Talal Asad and Ayca Cubukcu, *Neither Heroes, Nor Villains: A Conversation with Talal Asad on Egypt After Morsi*, www. Jadaliyya.com accessed on 23 July, 2013.

2   Secular in this context is understood not simply as the doctrine of separation of church from state, but the re-articulation of religion in a manner that is commensurate with modern sensibilities and modes of governance. See Mahmood (2013) "Is Critique Secular", *The Immanent Frame*, blogs.ssrc.org accessed on 8th July, 2013.

3   See Interview with Mohamed Morsi; "What to Expect from the Muslim Brotherhood", www.policymic.com/ articles/ 380/exclusive- Interview-with-mohamed-morsi-what-to-expect-from-the-muslim-brotherhood.Morsi, September, 2012.

4   El-Arain: MB wants a civil state; Egypt will not become another Iran, www.ikhwanweb.com/print.php?id=28368.

5   Yusuf Al-Qardawi as quoted in Hassan Hassan, "Muslim Brotherhood Still fails to offer a 'civil state ' solution".

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SERVICING WITH THE BODY HISTORICISING 'PROSTITUTION' IN MEDIEVAL KERALAM

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ABSTRACT

This paper tries to interrogate the question of prostitution in medieval Kerala society. This is done against the backdrop of the presence of three categories of women, viz., the tevadaccis or tevaradiyal, the nangas or koothathis who were temple dancers and the women in Manipravalam literature. The argument is that prostitution arises only within the context of well defined and controlled sexual relations and is an institution that involves wealth exchange in lieu for sexual services. Since they are located around temples, they can be imagined only within a system where temples are based on expanded agricultural production/trade and thereby produce considerable surplus.

Keywords: Prostitution, temples, *tevadiccis, koothathis, manipravalam* women

Introduction

Prostitution, as a system in which women's bodies and sexuality are made available in return for payment, may be a phenomenon that dates back very early into history. Historically, women's bodies are seen to have been objectified as early as the stages of ancient state formations. This, as Gerda Lerner has remarked decades ago, made women the first slaves in history wherein women's labour as well as sexuality were subject to male control. "The Sumerian word for female prostitute, *kar.kid*, occurs in the earliest lists of professions dating back to ca. 2400 B.C. Since it appears right after *nam. lukur*… one can assume its connection with temple services. On the same list we find the following female occupations: lady doctor, scribe, barber, cook. Obviously, prostitution, while it is a very old profession, is not the oldest" (Lerner, 1986). According to Chinese tradition, commercial brothels were started in the seventh century B.C. by the statesman-philosopher Kuang Chung as a means for increasing the state's income. Though there is some doubt as to whether Kuang Chung actually established the principle of licensing prostitutes, prostitution very early was set apart in special areas of the

town (Bullough, 1978). It was the Greeks who first put the brothel on an official footing. The celebrated Athenian lawmaker and lyric poet Solon founded state brothels and taxed prostitutes on their earnings in the 5th century BC. They were staffed by hetaerae (companions) who ranged from slaves and other low class women to those of the upper ranks (Vallely, 2006). An interesting feature in common among all these early societies, where prostitution prevailed, is the prevalence of state formations accompanied by ordered or regulated male female relations or marriages. Therefore, a definition of permissible or prohibited sexual relations was certainly a precondition for sale of sex to develop into a social practice.

Relationship between men and women out of wedlock find reference in the Rg Veda. (Bhattacharji, 2005:198).These relations, however, were not necessarily followed by payment while gifts were sometimes made; such optional gift making indicating an economic system characterized by barter. Prostitution becomes an accepted profession during the later Vedic period. The prostitutes were called *vesya* and with the growth of trade were expected to cater to the traders and merchants who travelled away from their homes. The prostitutes were variously known as *ganika, bandhki, rupjiva, veshya, varangana, kultani, sambhali, pumscali* etc. Simultaneously, sexual mores were in the process of being clearly refined and remodeled. The ideology of patriarchy and, within it, the cults of chastity in marriage, virginal purity and ideal of strict monogamous life for women were being gradually established. As was to be expected, disparity in labour and economic complexity in the society become for the first time manifest in this period (Sinha, 2003).

In the early stages of agricultural expansion and state formation, the patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal family emerged; pushing women steadily out from production and increasingly relegating them to reproductive roles only. This cut off their access to resources which they could now claim only through their relations with men. Thus women, whether unmarried, married or a widow became the ward of some man; she was his property. So any man approaching any woman other than 'his', did so by trespassing another man's right over her. "Pleasure outside the house, therefore, had to be paid for- hence prostitution had to be institutionalized so that there was a steady supply for ready payment" (Bhattacharji, 2005: 198). Prostitution, it can be argued, arises only out of a context that has framed strict rules for marriage and imposed monoandry as the norm while allowing for

polygamous relationships for men. Inherent in such a system was the insistence on chastity and fidelity for the wife which was to be enforced through coercion or consent. There appear the strict lines of demarcation drawn between the chaste wife and the unchaste prostitute. Prostitution presupposes an economic condition in which surplus was produced/earned either from agriculture or trade. Hence most of the early forms of institutionalised prostitution are found mentioned in the Buddhist and Jaina texts corresponding to the stage of agricultural expansion that accompanied the growth of trade and urban centres. That Buddhism gave space for prostitutes like Amrapali to join the monastic order indicates that the ideological realm catered to the material social transformations of the time. The elaborate descriptions and classifications of prostitutes in keeping with their social and economic status reflect the well established nature of such a profession. The *Arthasastra* mentions the taxes that these women had to pay to the state indicating that prostitution was accepted and even promoted as a legitimate profession. (Chandra1973: 48).

Medieval Keralam – Historical Contexts

Evidence of social stratification based on the evolution of an agrarian system is forthcoming by the sixth century in the extreme south of India. By then, structural temples emerged, along with the expansion of agriculture, in most parts of the Kerala region. The process of evolution from primitive agriculture to an advanced system was matched by corresponding structured land relations and social hierarchies, wherein traditional hereditary occupations were systematically incorporated into an ordering of *jati*. The temples were the new institutions that facilitated this change (Gurukkal, 2012: 292).With *jati* as a system of social ordering and Bhakti as an ideology that facilitated submission and contained dissent, the scene was set for non-kin labour and surplus extraction. The temples, with its functionaries ranging from sweepers to musicians, dancers, accountants, priests and many others who were remunerated with *virutti* or *jivitam,* emerged as independent institutions and gradually established themselves as the focal points of production and distribution as well as of social and spiritual life (Gurukkal, 2012: 298).

As regards the caste ensemble, the period from the 5th century A.D. is largely ascribed to the settlement of Namboodiris into the thirty two *gramas* (Veluthat, 1978). There seems to have been no evidence of land grants from Keralam leaving us to understand that the thirty two *gramas* occupied by Namboodiris (all being along fertile tracts of land)

were acquired through migration and occupation. That the earliest migrants into the land were without much influence or force is sometimes used to explain why the Namboodiris of Payyannur became matrilineal. The Kerala Brahmanas are also different from the Brahmanas elsewhere in that they followed the strictures of *Sankarasmriti* and the regulations therein. They arrived at a scene of matriliny in Keralam and tried to accommodate themselves into it and work out their dominance therein. Later they became a force to be reckoned with (Soman, 2001:11). Whatever the argument about the relative strengths and weaknesses of the successive batches of migrants, by the close of the eighth century, the Brahmana settlements became crucial in reorienting the society through placing themselves in superior positions. There was a systematic consolidation of brahmana power after the decline of the Cheras in Mahodayapuram leading to the breakup of political power into a number of feudal principalities and the rise of the temple centered economies.

During the post-Perumal period from the twelfth century onwards, s*warupams* that resembled the structure of extended joint families had emerged as the political power centres in all *natus*, the members of which were subject to a gradation of rights and privileges within a system of *kuruvalch*a with the *mutta kuru* enjoying overall authority and the *ilamkur* succeeding the *mutta kur* (Ganesh,1996:98).While the *Swarupams* were held together on the basis of kinship ties, succession was matrilineal requiring the male members to assume *muppu* on the basis of their relation with the female members of the house whether as brothers, uncles or sons. Thus, lineage that was decided through the relationship with the mother's house was a crucial factor in determining seniority and is indicative of the matrilineal locations of male power.

Failing to obtain political centralization, power centres got deployed horizontally with temples emerging as autonomous institutions independent of the kings. Both the *dewaswom* lands (under temples) and *brahmaswom* lands (grants to brahmanas) came under the direct control of brahmanas. This was accompanied by the emergence of *Sanketams* which consisted of the temples and its lands. In the absence of hierarchical power relations, the *Swarupams* were often bent to submission by the *Sanketams* to prevent political intrusions, through the observance of *pattini* (fasting) or refusal to perform the ritual services.

Land, as *brahmaswom* or *devaswom,* was now virtually controlled by the Namboodiri Brahmins. South Malabar and Kochi were their areas of influence; land in south Travancore being almost seventy five percent owned by the state as *pandaram vaka* land limiting the possibilities for

the Namboodiris to extent their rights as *jenmis* in Venad. The alignment of other castes were in correspondence with the hierarchies in production relations and those lower in the caste ranks were lower in the production hierarchy as well. The ideology of Bhakthi celebrated through the *maparatha pataras,* who retold mythology from the Mahabharatha, or through the enactments of the 'nangas' or *chakiars* ,who were the temple performers, contributed to the ideological reinforcements of the social order. The performances were designed to attract people and wealth into the temples.

Temples, as from the Perumal period, continued to be the centres for ideological legitimacy of the power of the *Swarupams*. Many of the temples emerged as royal temples under the *melkoima* (overlordship) of particular *Swarupams*, the authority of which were legitimised not only through patronage but through rituals and ceremonies in these temples as well. Along with this, the legitimacy of the *Swarupams* was secured through the transformation of their politico juridical authority into 'kingship' sanctioned by the brahmanic –sanskritic ideology (Ganesh, 1996: 104). However, even as *Swarupams* gained political legitimacy, their powers were limited to the small regions under their control and it became virtually impossible to effect a political centralization. K.N.Ganesh (1996: 105) argues that this form of authority, in the absence of political centralization, could not develop a revenue administration or a bureaucratic network. What then obtained in this medieval polity in terms of production relations was the retention of customary practices while dues from land comprised of the *varam* and *pattam* which were customary shares of the produce.

The temple centred economy, as it has been called, evolved a social formation that centred on paddy cultivation. The important temples were all situated in agriculture areas. However, an agricultural expansion that occurred on a large scale was lacking. Hence, compared to many of the temples in South India, the resources of the Kerala temples were extremely limited (Gurukkal, 1992: 33). The Kerala temples were not grand projects of architecture, compared to those in Tamizhakam. The level of agricultural expansion, surplus production and powerful kingship responsible for such structures were largely absent in Keralam. Consequently, the temple organization and expressions of spirituality were also not elaborate. The Kerala temples were not associated with large religious institutions, chariot festivals or *devadasis* as they were in Tamizhakam. The control and exercise of power present in the Brahmin *Ur* were absent too.

It is believed that the Namboodiris and chieftains enjoyed the produce of the land instead of imposing taxes (Soman, 2001:20) though scholars like Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai has opined that the 13th century 'hundred years war' changed the order of life in Keralam, ending also the system of taxation (Pillai, 1959: 44).Since agricultural production did not create much surplus, the kind of urban culture that could otherwise have evolved did not emerge in Keralam. So also was the case with large scale circulation of currency signifying trade relation. At best, paddy was used for exchange. This practice of simple exchange continued well into the modern period with the village potter, barber, milkman, etc. being given paddy in return for services. The temple servants were also remunerated thus.

The absence of circulation of money on a large scale, the minimum surplus created and the non development of an urban culture are points of departure for Keralam from a generalized ethos of South Indian history. Scholars have been inclined to project the state of affairs of south Indian temples, mainly those in the Tamil region, and its attendant institutions onto the social life of Keralam. Such attempts may hold true partly for Travancore where the Tamil influence was felt more strongly and *devadasis* were instituted in the temples (Pillay, 1953: 280).

The *devadasis* of the temples in Karnataka and Tamilnad find mention in the works of travelers like Marco Polo (Thanjavur), Abdur Razzak (Vijayanagar), Bucchanan (Kanchipuram). Missionaries in the 18th century have also mentioned them. The *devadasis* later became castes in themselves, though the need for providing sexual services was no longer imperative. However such mention about *devadasis* in Keralam are virtually absent be it from Sheikh Zainuddin who travelled here in the 16th century or in the writings of missionaries who worked here. Duarte Barbosa, however , comments that the Nair women took pride in the number of their 'husbands' and tried to seduce as many men as was possible. This allusion surely was not to a prostitute.

The *Tevadicci/Devadasi*

Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai has quoted South Indian inscriptions to state that the first known mention of *devadasis* occurs in Kota Ravi's inscription in the Chokkur temple of Malabar .The inscription dated differently to 932 A.D. (Pillai,1970:280) and 898 A.D.(Gurukkal,1992:54) refers to the women as *nanna, tevadicci* and *kutacci*. Other evidence for the presence of such women are the terms *tevadiyal, tevaradiyal, adikal,* etc. mentioned in the inscriptions (Annual

Report of Epigraphy 1901). While referring to Kizhanadikal, daughter of Sthanu Ravi Varma, Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai is not certain whether the term *adikal* referred to being a *tevadicci* in the temple or whether it was a mere sign of respect (Pillai, 1953: 45). Evidence states that the wife of Venad king Vira Kerala Varma was Kandiyur Thevadicci Unnikkalathram (Pillai, 1953: 45). The inscription at Nedumpuram *tali* refers to the remuneration to the *nangaimar* of the temple and the classification accorded to them as *uttama, madhyama* and *adhama*(Gurukkal,1992:55). The basis of such a classification is yet unknown. A record of Bhaskara Ravi refers to a Ciritara nangacci also referred to as thribhuvanadevi, a title commonly held by the consorts of rulers in South India suggesting that she must have been a royal lady. Both Cirraraiyil Nannaiyar in the Chokkkur and Cirithara nannacci of the Nedumpuram inscriptions are referred to as making grants to the temple (Gurukkal,1992: 55). Another record from Nedumpuram dated A.D. 972 refers to Mettalippurathu Cankara Nangacci. The four tevadiccikal of the Thiruvalla temple in the 11th century are recorded to have received special payment for their Onam performance. (Tiruvalla Copper Plates, TAS III: 197). The *tevadiccikal* were considered very trustworthy and one of them named Perumal Rayar was entrusted the safekeeping of the valuables donated by Iravi Varman of Trippappur towards the conduct of the rituals at Sucheendram (Pillai, 1958: 47). Though the status of a *tevadicci* was one that received payment, voluntarily service as *uzhiyam* existed as in the case of Chengodan Poovandi at the Cholapuram temple who made a substantial donation to the temple and so was Komalavalli whose brother Vadukan Kunavan made a grant to the temple for meeting his sister's needs(Pillai,1958:47). Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai cites evidence to claim that the *natakasala* (theatre) and some *mandapas* were built by the *tevadiccikal* there (Pillai,1958: 47). The Thiruvalla inscription mentions the remuneration of '*panthiru nazhi*' paddy granted to four *thevadiccikal* (Pillai, 1958: 50). It is not certain whether this was meant for the dancers or the *ambalavasi* castes who were responsible for the many chores of the temple. The Kilimanur record suggests that the *tevadiccikal* pounded rice and held lamps in the temple (Kilimanur Copper Plates, TAS V .I :63-86). Besides the fact that many of these women belonged to royal households or families of chieftains there is a marked absence of explicit mention of sexual activities. Hence, on the basis of these references alone it is difficult to assume that they had to sexually service those in

power on a regular basis as was the case with the *devadasis* of the Tamil region.

The Temple Dancers

The *nanga* or dancer, was expected to attract the rich to the temple and entertain them. She performed the recreational function of the temple. (Gurukkal, 1992: 55) They were variously known as *koothis, koothasthreekal, koothaccikal, aadum paathrangal, kudikkarikal, thaliccerippondukal*, etc. (Pillai, 1953: 49). *Sivavilasam*, a Sanskrit poem, mentions that the proficient dancer Cherukara Kuttathi was among the most prominent wives of Odanad ruler Iravi Kerala Varma (Pillai,1953:45). The practice of systematic performance is attested by the presence, as well, of male dancers or *Chakkiars* who performed the *Kuttu* which involved acting, dancing and storytelling accompanied by the *Nattuvanars* who played music. In the absence of much inscriptional evidence of temple dancing girls forthcoming, the evidence from panels on temples at Thrikkulasekharapuram of the tenth century and the twelfth century Trivikrama Mangalam temple, depicting dancing girl, are pointers to their presence. The Thrissur Inscriptions refer to dancing girls attached to the temples (TAS III: 194). Inscriptions refer to the *jivitam* lands set apart for maintaining the livelihoods of these performers. This evidence should help understand these women as a category of temple servants. M.G.S. Narayanan attributes continuity in the roles of the temple women as he argues that with the full development of feudalism in Keralam, the *tevadiccis* or servants of the Gods became servants to prostitution (Narayanan, 1973: 48).

Women in *Manipravalam*

Manipravalam works, a collection of poems composed in Keralam between the 13th, 14th and 16th centuries, with an accent on the erotic, portray women as dancers and seductresses luring men of prestige and status to their midst. The women, it seems, were trained in the art of seduction. Men of high rank and status as well as the *chetti* traders are described as flocking to the homes of these women, described as accomplished in the arts and endowed with rare beauty, waiting for their attention. The notable *Unniaccicharitham* composed by Cirikumar celebrates the beauty of Unniacci who is referred to as an accomplished danseuse attached to the Tirumurudur temple in Wayanad. (Pillai, 1953: 48). Her *koyil* or palace is described to be frequented by physicians, astrologers, merchants, warriors and Vedic scholars (Narayanan, 1973:

49). The *Unniyadicharitham* composed by Damodara Chakyar is about Unniyadi, the daughter of the Odanad ruler .The *Unniccirutevicharitham* is about Unniccirutevi, the daughter of the performer Unniyappilla of Chokiram and the Valluvanad Raja Rajasekhara, whose dwelling is the meeting place of merchants, Brahmanas and chieftains(Pillai,1958: 55-56). Besides these, there are the numerous poems like *Ceriyacci, Mallinilavu, Naraninandana, Uttaracandrika, Kaunothara*, as well as *sandesakavyas* like *Unnuneelisandesam* and *Kokasandesam,* belonging to this genre (Narayanan, 1973: 49). The women described here as placed in contexts of wealth, refinement and social status, were ascribed either royal lineage or status of Nair caste and perceived to have assumed titles like Manavimenaka, Maralekha and Maracemandika, etc. The geographical locations of these women extended from Odanad and Kandiyur in South Keralam, Matilakam, Kodungallur, Trichur and Chokiram in Central Keralam and Tirumarudur, Trichambaram, and Pallikkunnu in North Keralam(Pillai,1958:55-56). These locations, incidentally, are the areas over which the Namboodiri brahmanical order held sway.

Vaisikatantram, a work that describes the teaching and learning of the art of the erotic from mother to daughter has been severely condemned as immoral by scholars like Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai and K.K. Raja. The Namboodiris were alleged to have openly publicised this '*para stree*' (prostitute) category in the literature by identifying them with their names and places of habitation (Pillai, 1962:11-12). The literature, it seems, at once reflected the orgiastic season of the Namboodiris as well as exposed the ways in which they reduced women to sexual slavery.

There is an argument that this literature was pure fiction, copying erotic literature from Sanskrit into Manipravalam (Nair, 1971). Perhaps they were inspired by Damodaragupta's *Kuttanimatha*, Kshemendra's *Dasakumaracharitha* or Bhoja's *Sringaramanjari* which were composed on these lines. Poetry, rather than reflecting social reality, could have been employed to earn rewards from men of rank who wanted their beloveds to be aesthetically represented in the details of verse (Nair, 1999: 55).

The *acci* of the Manipravalam works has not been properly located yet. One opinion is that they were all *koothathis (*Nair, 1999: 55) and that they lived in wealth and considerable social status (Nair, 1999: 55) which makes it difficult to believe that they sold their bodies for money. They are not mentioned as members of any low caste. Since

the fish sellers and other lower castes are mentioned in the description of the *angadis,* probably these women belonged to the Nair caste. Some scholars have ascribed the authorship of these verses to Namboodiris or *ambalavasis* in as much as it reflected the social realities of those social groups in those times. Marriage, polygamy, poverty, indebtedness, lack of responsibility of the youngsters are all constant refrain in the verses (Ilayaraja, 1940:84). It has been cited that the canons of beauty and desire, ascribed to these women, reflected the Namboodiri erotic imaginations of their Nair *sambandham* women (Soman, 1995: 77).

A hasty conclusion that this situation was one of prostitution is unwarranted. In a system where women's access to resources and social status were determined by their sexual relationships with those in power, whether through *sambandham* with Namboodiris or through sexual relations with the ruling classes, such seductions and proficiency manifest strategic signification for social living. *Vaisikatantram* acquires meaning in such a context.

Problematizing 'Prostitution'

The material contexts for the rise of prostitution as an institution did not exist in medieval Keralam. In the Mauryan polity, taxes from prostitution had been received into the treasury to support the state machinery. Compared to the Tamil region, surplus production that can sustain such an institution did not emerge in Keralam due to limited agricultural expansion and production. It would be a misstep to generalise for the whole of Keralam from a 'South Indian' experience of temples and temple organisations. There is the need to view Travancore, largely under Tamil influence, as different from Kochi and South Malabar which were regions more or less within the ambit of a Namboodiri (brahmanical) social order. Feudal processes that were characterised by decentralised authority and the presence of autonomous *Sankethams* had prevented systematic and expanded levels of surplus accumulation. More pertinently, the production relations of the region need to be considered seriously before assuming an urban culture and its attendant social institutions for the whole of Keralam. Large scale craft guilds did not develop in this region after *ancuvannam* and *manigramam* receded in importance in the post Chera period. The institution of *nagaram* , a "separately designed area inhabited primarily by men of the trading community and others who earned their living largely by commercial and artisanal activities…and a corporate body of *nagarattar*…constituted only by the merchants of the locality"(Veluthat,2012:219), that was a

feature of Tamil regions, did not obtain in central Kerala. Nor did major markets emerge except for the Muslim, Jew and Syrian Christian *angadis*. The inscriptions of ninth and tenth centuries from Keralam refer only to *dinaram, kasu* and *pazhankasu* which were also in use beyond the region (Varier,1997: 36). From 13th to 15th centuries, references to *acchu, kambi, kasu, taram, tiramam, panam, pakam* and *salaka* are present in literary productions like *Ananthapuravarnana*, *Unniaccicaritam*, *Unnicirutevicaritam*, etc. and were in circulation beyond the immediate localities. References cite the use of such coins for horse trade with Arabia and South India The *Manipravalam* literature describes the merchandise, that were bought and sold in the *angadis*, categorised as food items including fish, vessels, medicines, beauty products, clothes, flowers, etc. (Dileepkumar, 2011: 9-13).The items of trade were everyday objects suggesting the *angadi* to be locales where people shopped for their daily needs. *Manipravalam* poems also attest to the fact that, in addition to employing them for exchange, there was exchange prevalent between the coins too (Varier,1997: 41) suggesting the absence of flourishing internal trade that necessitated intense circulation of coins. Trade, at its best was not inland and the ports and towns like Kodungallur served as exchange and collection centres in foreign overseas trade. Largely, Chinese and Arab trade links were located in Malabar while Central and Southern Kerala regions did not fare much in the post Chera period except for the Jewish trade(Varier,2014: 103-19). Interestingly, the poems have allusions to different *paradesi* people- Pandi thattanmar, Ariyar, Kannadar, Malavar, Vangar, Tulingar, Goudar and sometimes even Chinese who mostly were the carriers of merchandise from other places (Dileepkumar, 2011: 9-13). However, they do not find mention as 'clients' of the women in the literature.

The caste ensemble and the rules of untouchability were factors of primary concern that determined both production and social life. Patriarchal and patrilineal family structures accompanied by endogamous caste hierarchies that sustained the state formations, evident in the Gangetic plain in ancient India, did not evolve in Keralam. Kerala society had extensive traditions of matriliny before the arrival of the Namboodiris. The Namboodiris worked themselves in, both assimilating and accommodating themselves into the order, to work out a form of dominance. The legend of Parasurama prescribing that the women of Keralam need obey no rule of chastity is perhaps a case in point. An understanding that the sexuality of women (excluding the Namboodiri) was available to men of higher castes is vital in locating the sexual

mores of the time. Unlike in the Gangetic plain, in Keralam, except for the Namboodiri women, women of all other *jatis* including the *antarala jatis* of temple servants viz., the Poduval, Varier etc., were rendered accessible to the Namboodiri males at will. The rules of sexual relationships did not strictly demand monogamous fidelity from women other than the Namboodiri. Duarte Barbosa, alluding to the practice of *sambandham* among Nair women, is shocked to note that they had no qualms in taking many husbands and in seducing them to ensure their own livelihoods.

Prostitution as an institution can survive only within a context where women's sexuality is available only for payment. In Keralam, the strictures on endogamy within the caste ideology were subverted to suit the needs of the specific social contexts .While Manu prescribes severe punishments for Brahmin men having sexual relationships with women of lower castes and is acutely concerned about the crisis of '*varnasankara*', in Keralam it became a common practice for Namboodiri men to seek out women from other castes; the rule of primogeniture among the Namboodiris making this practice necessary. Since there were no Kshatriya or Vaisya castes in the caste ordering in Keralam, the next one down the order, the Sudras were subjected to such sexual arrangements. Castes lower down were insignificant in terms of production relations to demand such arrangements though these women's bodies were nonetheless approachable to the men of superior caste and class. Therefore, more than an impersonal payment of money, the ideology of caste in Keralam ensured that women's bodies were available for men in power.

By what parameters were the *tevadiccis*, who were often women from royal households or chieftains' families, pictured as *koothathis* or temple performers is not known.. The *koothathis*, placed by historians in a linear continuity, have been equated with the women in the *Manipravalam* literature. This is despite the fact that some of the *Manipravalam* women, like the heroine of *Kaunottara Kavya* , have been identified as Kshatriya ladies (Pillai,1970: 281). Though the *devadasis*, as part of an elaborate institution, did not exist in Kerala temples except at Suchindram, the sexuality of the performers would gradually have been available to the priesthood as well as to the ruling class, provided they no longer hailed from aristocratic backgrounds. That the word *koothathi* has evolved into *koothacci,* a standard contemporary slander on the 'unchaste' women, is not a matter of coincidence. However, in those times, the women from the aristocracy

cannot be imagined to be placed at the mercy of the temple lords and be subjected to sexual services at their will. Moreover, this offers no exception from the general rule, within the caste ordering, that already rendered all women's bodies (except the Namboodiri) thus accessible.

Understandings on the sexual past of medieval Keralam turns out to be expressions of contemporary concerns regarding sexuality. Elamkulam P.N.Kunjan Pillai writes within the backdrop of heightened annoyance and resentment at the 'degenerate' ways of the Namboodiris who reigned as 'stud bulls' in that society. That the Nair women were accused of luring Namboodiri men into *sambandhams* invoked his ire. His interventions, within the reform discourse, with Kanippayyur Sankaran Namboodiripad on this issue is well known. The Malabar Marriage Commission Report (MMCR) states the problem of not finding a term to denote the man-woman relationship involved in the *Sambandham* practice (MMCR: 12). There is an apparent display of shame whereby the customary cohabitation of the sexes was increasingly looked down upon as indecent and unnatural. 'An institution (*Sambandham*) which by debauching the women of one class, condemns the women of another to life long and enforced celibacy is not one which justice need hesitate to condemn' (MMCR : 9). In the debates on Nair marriage reform in the Madras Legislative assembly Sir. C. Sankaran Nair defends the morality of the Nair women asserting that these women too had practiced 'chastity'(Judicial Branch ,Simla Records).The pressure to make Nair unions, considered as concubinages, respectable is evinced in the marriage reform debates(Arunima, 2003: 128-56).

It is of consequence to note that most historical explorations of the *Kuttacchi*, *tevadicci* or the women in *Manipravalam* have been undertaken within the colonial standpoint of social reform where a sudden shame is evinced regarding an 'immoral' past. Furthermore, by the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the discourses of modernity and colonial morality had established prostitution as an institution that required to be engaged with. The newspapers reporting on the now historic *smarthavicaram* trial of Kuriyedath Tatri had termed her as "worse than a prostitute" (Malayala Manorama, 31 May 1905).

It is necessary to identify the three categories of women in this picture - viz., the *thevadiyal* or *tevadiccis* who were associated with certain functions of the temple, the *koothathis* or *nangas* who were the performers and the *Manipravalam* women. Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai who pioneered the studies in Kerala's History creates a monolithic equation of *tevadaccis as kuttaccis* who later continued as the

Manipravalam heroines. This impression regarding medieval Kerala's sexual life was one that was largely accepted and subsequently employed without any serious questioning. One may perhaps find overlaps in the functions of these women but to merge all distinctions into one single narrative of prostitution is to leave unattended the dynamics of caste and production relations that were crucial in determining the sexual lives of women in medieval Keralam. That sexual relations between the *koothathis* and Namboodiris or between the women in *Maniparavalam* and those in rank may have been a reality. But instead of emerging as a systematic institution that was state regulated and promoted, they might have remained at the level of either an expression of social dominance as in the former or in lieu for gift making within a context of an open discourse on sexuality as in the latter.

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DOMESTIC LIVES AND LEISURELY PURSUITS IN COLONIAL MALABAR*

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ABSTRACT

In the early twentieth century, when matrilineal tarawads were breaking down and patrilineal nuclear households were slowly replacing them, an educated elite in Malabar re-invented the notion of 'home.' In valorizing 'home', they were influenced by the colonial conditions they were living in, and the Victorian debates on domesticity. The imagined 'home' in middle class discourse, however, remained more of an ideal, for, in reality, it remained a place seething with internal conflicts — male-female, master-servant, as well as family-individual. Inspite of women being placed at the centre of the domestic universe on paper, in reality, the father, the head of the family, remained its central element. The ultimate power in the domestic sphere including decisions concerning education and marriage remained in his hands. Meanwhile, new, secular ways of spending leisure at home were devised, gardening and listening to radio, to name just two. And, with the growth of individualism, individualistic ways of spending leisure came to the fore, none more illustrative than reading, which a literate class took to with passion.

Keywords:Middle class, Malabar, home, woman, domestics, childhood, leisure, radio, reading

Introduction

In 1975, Arnie J. Mayer, while lamenting that academics, over time, have not done research on the middle class, even as they write prolifically on the working and peasant classes, wondered whether it was due to the fact that social scientists are hesitant to expose the aspirations, lifestyle, and world-view of the social class in which so many of them originate and from which they seek to escape. (Mayer, 1975: 409) This was the period when the Indian academia as well, dominated as it was, by the Marxists of various persuasions, exhibited a similar reluctance in exploring the history of the Indian middle class. Since then, however, a large body of work on the middle class has piled up both internationally and nationally. Regional studies have enriched

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our knowledge about this class which came into their own during the colonial period. However, not much work has been done on Malabar in this regard. This paper is an attempt in this direction insofar as it seeks, by examining fiction and non-fiction produced in late colonial Malabar, to show how the new middle class conceptualized domesticity, and how far it reflected reality. The second part of the essay shows how new, secular forms of leisure emerged during this time to enliven life at home.

The Setting

In late nineteenth century Malabar, the new middle class did not constitute a high percentage of the population. According to the 1871 census, in Calicut, the most important of the towns in the district, out of a population of 48,338, there were only eighty government servants and 188 learned professionals.[1] At the end of the nineteenth century, the number of graduates, undergraduates and matriculates in the district was about 1,000 and the number of officials drawing a salary of more than 10, 20 and 50 rupees a month was 1063, 245 and 90 respectively.[2] Though a minority, the influence of the middle class was disproportionate to their numerical strength, a fact acknowledged by the Malabar Marriage Commission in the context of their demand for marriage legislation:

> Though the minority that desires legislation is small, it is a growing and an educated minority, and every year will add to its strength and influence. The educated few are the leaven which will leaven the whole lump, and…their good example will in two or three generations … lead the rest to adopt the same standard.[3]

The new middle class came from different sections[4] even though, as the Statistical Atlas of Malabar, 1906, says the "Nayars supply the bulk of the learned professions such as vakils and schoolmasters and a large proportion of those engaged in scriptory work."[5] According to K. N. Panikkar, the reluctance of the British authorities to appoint as revenue and judicial officials those men of wealth and respectability due to their role in rebellions, threw open opportunities for the Nairs of inferior economic status. Amassing wealth using their official status they raised their social prestige. Their children who went to the government run schools and colleges ended up being munsiffs, magistrates and judges while they themselves had begun as petty village officials. It was this class which had the economic independence, and who had imbibed new cultural values that were at the forefront of the agitation for marriage and other reforms at the turn of the century. (Panikkar, 1977: 38)

However, the Thiyyas, inspite of their relatively low social status in the Hindu caste hierarchy, produced a high percentage of middle class

professionals and bureaucrats during the colonial period. In the mid-nineteenth century, Uppot Kannan and Dewan Bahadur E.K. Krishnan, both belonging to the Thiyya community, became deputy collector and sub-judge respectively. The community had made tremendous advances during the colonial period. Initially, during the Company rule, a sizeable section among them had become economically prosperous through trading links with the English, which, in the course of time, even led to loose conjugal ties with the colonizers, "their caste rules not making so much objection to temporary alliances as other castes." (Dunsterville, 1898: 52) Moreover, as there was a superstratum of Thiyya pundits throughout the land, the Englishmen used them as *munshis* to learn Malayalam. Naturally, therefore, there were several Thiyyas occupying clerical jobs, positions in the police department, and even junior executive posts in the revenue sections.

It was, thus, the lower strata of the upper castes (Nairs) and the upper strata of the lower castes (Thiyyas) who, by acquiring English education, and, consequently, obtaining government jobs, constituted the majority among the Hindu middle class.On the other hand, the Nambuthiris, the erstwhile privileged group in society took time to adapt to the new circumstances. Of course, a radical intelligentsia did emerge from among the younger generation in the group in the context of the reform movement led by the *YogashemaSabha*. But, for a significant section amongst the community as well as a few elite Nair feudal chieftains, loss of political power did not put an end to their illusions of grandeur. Turning their back on English education, they tried to maintain the indulgent life of the past, still possible through the possession of extensive lands.

Upto the early twentieth century, amongst the various communities in Malabar, polygamy and polyandry prevailed, best exemplified by *Sambandham*, the multiple, looseconjugal ties which existed between the Nambudiri males and Nair women. It was only later, with the backing of the English-educated natives, that the colonial government passed Acts which brought into existence monogamous marital unions among the Hindus. Other Acts followed which destroyed the *Marumakkathayyam* (matrilineal sytem) and the *tarawads* (joint family households).[6] The stage was thus set for the emergence of patrilineal nuclear households in the region which G. Arunima deals with in great detail in her work. (Arunima, 2003)

The Home

In a tract from Malabar of the early twentieth century, the 'home' was described as:

…one of the most sacred places on earth, where children possessing innocence akin to angels are born and grow up. This is the place made

sacred through the performance of hospitality, and which provides fertile ground for the 'divine radiance' of matrimonial love to emanate. (Menon, 1912: 2)

In the imagination of the middle class during the colonial period, as is clear from the passage above, 'home', counterpoised to the world outside, was given a great deal of importance.[7]

From the late nineteenth century onwards, alongside the traditional homesteads, houses constructed along modern lines were coming into existence in Malabar. In the fiction of the times, the ambience of these new homes is vividly described. In *Vasumati*, for instance, Murkoth Kumaran begins the story with the description of a bungalow belonging to a well-off Thiyya, one of the upwardly mobile lower castes, with a neatly kept garden outside, while inside, in the drawing room, the heroine plays harmonium, and the hero sits on a sofa amidst curtained windows, tables, and chairs. (Kumaran, 1935: 257)

The ideal was the middle class home in Victorian England. During his stay in England for higher education, M.A. Candeth, who later became one of the first Indian Director of Public Instruction, wrote thus of the house he stayed in:

Very nice house, parallel walls, low ceilings, long nooks and fireplaces, the whole house ramblingly built. One of the country houses of which I have read so much. There is a very fine garden with hedges, small apple trees. Oh! All so lovely…How nice English home life is… so lovely, so clean. There was a very nice gramophone …At heart, I wish I were an Englishman. It is an honour to belong to this nation. (Candeth, 1907)

A feature of Victorian middle class domestic life had been the display of surplus wealth in over-cramped living rooms filled with curios. Home had become a site to express one's taste. Piano, sculpture, paintings, and a few green plants indicated a well domesticated nature. In Chathu Nair's *Meenakshi,* the interior of the home is done up in the style of the Victorian bourgeois domestic spaces with painted mirrors, expensive carpets, sofas, chairs, glass lamps, and there is a library with two cupboards holding Sanskrit and English books. (Nair, 1949) Inside middle class houses, in the sitting room, shelves lined with books had become the norm. In *Indulekha*, for instance, Surya Namboodiripad, who represents the old order, is stunned by the number of books kept on the shelves in the drawing room of the heroine. (Menon, 2010: 117) At a time when, transport and communications were in their infancy, the home library was a window to the outside world. It encompassed the world within the confines of the home, and satisfied the desire to know the world without leaving home.

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Perhaps, some of the descriptions of inner spaces in novels and short stories could have been mere flights of fancy. But there are indications that, in some cases at least, they reflected reality. For instance, Balamaniamma, in her autobiographical writings notes the changes inside the home during her lifetime. During her childhood in the early part of the twentieth century, decorations at home were minimal, confined to shiny aluminium pots and tobacco boxes her grandma would place under the cots in dark small rooms. Later in her life, she was to live in modern houses where there were changes in architecture as well as decoration, which reflected both the changing role of women as well as her own individuality in nucleated families. There were gardens, high boundary walls and gates outside, while the interiors of the house would inevitably have a showcase with dolls, other toys, well bound books, kitchenware, and colourfully decorated handfans as well as Ravi Varma paintings on the wall. (Balamaniamma, 1982: 10) In the photos available of public figures during this time, the background is almost always provided by bookshelves. A section of the traditionalists did not take kindly to the mimicking of the West. For instance, it was pointed out that "the blind imitation of western architecture in the construction of houses without properly comprehending it had resulted in the absence of beautiful houses, and the proliferation of fourth-rate English houses without taste. Like Varasiyar in *Parangodi Parinayam*, a drawing room was compulsory, even if the rest of the house is dirty — crowded with chairs and tables of little use or aesthetics; a gramophone in one corner, and a harmonium in the other just to look civilized."(Menon, 1918: 270) The new products carved out by the carpenters reflect the changes taking place in the interior of middle class homes. M.S.A.Rao, at the end of our period of study, wrote:

> a significant change in the articles prepared about thirty years ago can be observed. They [carpenters] were preparing mostly agricultural implements, cots, boxes, benches, doors and windows. Now they make chairs, tables, modern cots, almirahs, easy-chairs, tea-stools, dressing tables, mirror-stands… (Rao, 1957: 41-42)

Another new development was the photograph, which, in the course of time, replaced portraits. Most of the photos were taken from the studios which cropped up in different parts of the district, like *Pinto* studio in Tellicherry, *Pithambhar* and *Nina* studios in Calicut. Those who could afford, got theirs taken from home. As a form of inheritance these fixed images of the self and family — its changing lifestyles, family events — were stored for posterity on mantelpieces, and elaborate frames, or else, albums. Traditionally, in India, portraits and later photos of the dead ancestors were place alongside those of deities. So, photos, in a way, had been portends of death, but this

did not prevent them from catching the imagination of the newly emergent middle class. As Malavika Karlekar points out, "precious evidence of a recently acquired mobility and status, the photograph's value obviously outweighed likely proscriptions of caste and community." (Karlekar, 2005: 72) Several photos are available of the middle class representatives in Malabar belonging to the first part of the twentieth century, the males in modern attire, in some cases where the photos had been taken at home, with shelves lined with books in the background, and later, photos of the whole family including women and children.

The New Woman

In Partha Chatterjee's opinion, as an alien rule established its sway over the Indians in the external domain by virtue of its superior material culture, the Indian intelligentsia gave shape to an inner space that was taken to be inviolate and autonomous.(Chatterjee,1997: 238-239) The Hindu home was thus counterposed to the world outside which lay beyond their immediate power and control. With the strategic placement of the home, the Indian intelligentsia invented the new cult of domesticity, where women were to play a crucial role. In the middle class division of the world into public and private spheres, women's role was confined to the latter. The dominant view was that they should not have to go out and work for their maintenance, which should be the responsibility of the menfolk. The rationale for this was:

> There is and should be a division of labour. In every family there are two kinds of work — earning wealth and household work. Only men can do the former as that work entails staying far away from home for long hours. Due to problems like menstruation, pregnancy, child birth, child rearing, etc women cannot do that. Instead, they should concentrate on running the household. (Nambuthiripad, 1926: 288)

The 'ideal' type of woman portrayed in literature was someone who was educated enough to be a friend to the enlightened middle class husband, in conformity with the concept of 'companionate' marriage' popularized by Victorian sensibilities, but who would, at the same time, stay at home and perform her role as wife and mother to perfection.

The education of women was expected to help 'create' this New Woman. From the late nineteenth century onwards, girls were being admitted to schools, but not always in institutions meant exclusively for them.[8] This invited criticism, and the *Kerala Sanchari* of August 21, 1889 drew the attention of the Directorate of Public Instruction to evils arising from sending girls to boys' schools.[9] But by the fourth decade of the twentieth century, attitudes had changed. It was, for instance, felt that "apart from the fact that

co-education reduces expenditure, boys would not feel unnecessarily shy in the company of girls, nor misbehave with them if given a chance from a young age to mingle with them." (Kuruppu, 1939: 49) More persistent was the disquiet regarding the content of education. In an article informed by current patriarchal values, an editor of a women's magazine wrote of the need to restructure women's education in which 'housekeeping' was to get pride of place in the syllabus, and which would include courses in primary economics, cooking, child-rearing, etc. (Bhagirathy Amma, 1932:35) The outcomes expected from education varied for men and women. In the novel *Indulekha*, whereas Madhavan's education is geared to gain him employment and thereby independent income, the heroine's is of a private nature meant mainly to sanitise the mind. In Malabar, by the 1940s, the percentage of girl students to female population constituted 10.6 which was the second highest in the Presidency.[10] However, a dominant male discourse ensured that very few girls went for higher education, and even those who did, ultimately ended up staying at home, performing household chores.[11] Even someone like K.P.Kesava Menon, educated at Madras, editor of *Mathrubhumi*, and a Congress leader of prominence by the 1920s, writes in his Memoirs that even though his wife was educated only up to the fourth standard, it did not matter as she was adept in household matters, and that to someone like him who was particular about food, her culinary talents came as a blessing. (Menon, 1957: 23) Muliyil Krishnan, lecturer at Presidency College in Madras, kept an English mistress to tutor his semi-educated wife, sixteen years younger to him. Everyday, before going to college, he used to assign 'homework' to her in order to improve her handwriting and knowledge in Maths. It is not clear whether her English and Maths improved, but Krishnan's biographer points out that she became adept, like many other women of her generation and class, at cooking, once winning the first prize in an 'Indian Food competition' organized by the National Indian Association. (Nair, 1932: 36-37) Within the limits prescribed for them, and not grossly violating the stereotypes they were supposed to conform to, some women did try to combine the qualities of a good housewife with their own creative and commercial initiatives. For instance, Madhavi Amma, wife of C. Krishnan, though she spent her time mostly in the kitchen, had started her own business from home – 'Mrs. Krishnan's Malabar Medical Store', specializing in Ayurvedic medicine, which soon attracted orders from even distant Ceylon, Burma and Singapore. (Sankaran, 1967: 92)

The new conceptions of sexual difference built upon existing traditions ensured that women stayed at home, and the few who ventured out had to face the consequences. Revathy Amma, wife of a police commissioner at

Mahe, recounts in her Memoirs how her attempts at a life outside the home even in philanthropic activities came in for much criticism. (RevathyAmma, 1977:28) Similarly, ParukuttyAmma, a character in the *Wound of Spring*, after a stint as a music teacher, finds a life of isolation at home.(Menon Marath, 1997) Under the circumstances, the sole objective in a woman's life was to find an ideal husband. It was pointed out that "the biggest thing for a woman in material life is marital happiness, and to gain a conducive husband for that."[12] While talking of her childhood in Malabar, Kamala Das refers to one woman in her neighbourhood who ended up being a spinster because no one was willing to marry her as she was too highly educated! (Kamala Das, 2003: 179)

Some men belonging to the middle class found it difficult to combine public life with their family life. An active public life prevented a few from providing sustenance to their family. K.P. Kesava Menon, with his wife increasingly becoming ill, had to give up his public life as well as the editorship of *Mathrubhumi,* which was anything but remunerative in those days, and go first to Madras, and then abroad. When it appeared that his wife was expecting another child, G. Sankaran Nair noted in his diary "I fear she is getting pregnant. God help her and me. My family seems to grow and it is high time that I took to my own affairs instead of spending all my time for the public." (Sankaran Nair, 1926) The reverse was also true. For those men whose family life was a failure, there was the possibility of fulfilment in the world outside. K.P.S. Menon, after revealing his share of problems at home, consoled himself thus: "Felt perfectly miserable as Chima is becoming more and more indifferent. How the romance of our marriage has fled. I feel she does not care for me. The old spontaneity is gone. But it is all my own fault. Why should I, after all, allow myself to be wrapped up in a mere girl. I have other interests in life, enough to make man ignore such worries." (Menon, 1923) For women there was rarely such duality; home was their 'all in all', the 'natural' site of their femininity.

Husbands of those women who did not conform to the expected norms were pitied. As one sarcastically put it,

> There are organized efforts on to protect the tenant from the oppression of the *jenmi* (landlord), the worker from the capitalist, the debtor from his rich creditor, and the nephew from his *karanavan* (the all-powerful maternal uncle under the matrilineal system). But it is a pity that there is not any such equivalent attempt to save from the wife the husband who, in effect, is more oppressed than any of the ones mentioned.[13]

Childhood and Domestics

Childhood attained importance during this time. Earlier, during a period

of domestic production, after infancy, a child became an adult, helping in the production process. Now, there was a long process through which a child went through before attaining adulthood.(Bose, 1995) Children provided a lot of joy to devoted parents. As someone put it, "a child having the traits of both husband and wife, a source of great joy, was somebody to shower all your love on." (Elayathu, 1932: 26) Manuals appeared telling housewives how to raise children. In well-to-do families, separate physical spheres were kept aside for the children. To keep the kids amused, a variety of toys became available in shops specializing in them.

In the new nuclear households, keeping a domestic servant became a criterion of social distinction; every middle-class housewife wanted one. Attitude towards them was a bit ambiguous, though. Normative texts on child-rearing denounces servants for their bad influence and ill-treatment of the children. Murkoth Kumaran who authored a Mothers' Manual, cursed "those lazy mothers who out of consideration for their own convenience, beauty and health put the responsibility of feeding and bathing their children to paid Ayahs." (Kumaran, 1977: 22) The latter was also blamed for depriving the young mothers of any kind of physical exercise.(Menon, 1916: 32) But, lived experiences were sometimes radically different from the contents of these normative texts.[14] Murkoth Kunhappa recollects how Koran, one of their servants, had his wedding at their house, and his son, who was born and brought up there, stayed with them even after his father's demise. Later he became a peon, and when Kunhappa's mother lay dying, sent a sad letter accompanied by a five-rupee note.(Kunhappa, 1975: 88) While talking of Krishna Menon's childhood, his biographer mentions how the children were taken wherever they wanted to go by a horse-drawn carriage, the coachman of which was their cherished friend. When the latter got unfairly implicated in a criminal suit, Krishna, though still a child, volunteered to go to court as a witness for the hapless coachman who was finally acquitted.(Ram, 1997: 4)

Leisure

Inspite of a busy schedule, the urbane middle class in colonial Malabar found space for leisure. As one writer put it "while entertainment without purpose is like dead leaves, life without entertainment is like a tree without leaves."(Kumaran, 1936: 158) Leisure was given its due importance in the life of the individual, and indeed, in some cases, its relevance as a serious topic of research was stressed. As was noted in the pages of *Malabar Quarterly Review*, one of the premier contemporary English magazines from these parts, "it is not the serious side of man's nature alone that deserves our careful study. His games, his pastimes, his diversions... equally call for minute

research...For, there, the spirit, bereft of artificial conventionalities, runs riot in her perennial atmosphere, and shows herself in her true colours. It is in those happy moments of relaxation that the inmost virtues of man come out...relaxation repairs his weakened spirits and makes him the fitter to face the future struggle..." (Varma, 1904: 158)

According to Joffre Dumazedier, the French sociologist, leisure serves three main functions to the individual - relaxation, diversion and personality development. (Dumazedier, 1967: 16) Work is distinct from leisure. While the former is specific as well as predictable, the latter is not. But this was not the case earlier when there was hardly any distinction between the two. Leisure, according to Stanley Parker, was a product of industrial society. When work came to be done in a separate place, with special timing and under special conditions, all of which were absent in earlier times, leisure got its new identity distinct from work. (Parker, 1976: 27) George A Lundberg defined leisure as "the time we are free from the more obvious and formal duties which a paid job or other obligatory occupation imposes upon us." (Lundberg, 1934: 2) In more recent times, feminist scholars have rejected such a residual definition of leisure by pointing out that such an explanation fails to account for the unpaid labour women (both housewives and employed) perform at home in the form of child-rearing and housekeeping. For women, the private domestic space is not always a realm of non-work. Women have less time of their own after their household chores, whereas men's leisure activities get priority. Home, thus, becomes a gendered space reflecting the unequal relations that exist between men and women outside it.(Wearing, 1998; Deem, 1986)

John Mcguire observes that in colonial India, leisure for the British ruling class meant a closed class activity revolving around ritualistic club life, whereas the *bhadralok* preferred to relax in traditional ways, most of which involved household activities. (Mcguire, 1983: 77) The same could be said of the middle class elsewhere in the country.

In Malabar, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, under the impact of colonial modernity, changes occurred in the modes of leisure. Some among the middle class, recollecting a 'golden past', rued these changes, and fondly recalled an era when, for instance, during the Onam celebrations, "people enjoyed new clothes, the feast, and games afterwards, where women, children and men participated" in contrast to the present where "after the perfunctory meals, the husband takes a newspaper, and smoking a cigarette, settles down on his armchair." (Govindan, 1934: 8)

With the growth of individualism, leisure, like other things, had taken an individualistic turn. This is indicated in the nature of reading. In earlier

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times it was a collective enterprise. The growth of the private domain and changes in the nature of enjoyment ensured that reading now took place at home. The emergence of the novel reflects best this transition. As K.N. Panikkar observes, the emergence of the novel was rooted in the intellectual needs and aesthetic sensibility of the burgeoning middle class.(Panikkar, 1995: 96) Similarly, Shivarama Padikkal argues that the novel was an entirely new genre, arising from the historical moment when the English educated middle class is attempting to imagine a modern nation. (Padikkal, 1993) Early novels in the Malayalam language beginning with *Indulekha* enjoyed colossal success.

In earlier times, leisure was not seen as something distinct from religious activities. For instance, in Malabar, as M.S.A. Rao points out, women in old *tarawads* and *illams* spent their leisure hours in reading sacred lore. (M.S.A. Rao, 1956: 179) Religious literature continued to have its fans even in the twentieth century. For instance, in the novel *Premabandham,* Devikutty reads out *Puranas* and stories of mythical heroes to her daughter Amukutty. (Menon, 1917: 17) Churia Canaran, who went on to become the deputy collector of Malabar, spent his leisure hours in reading Sanskrit works, especially those devoted to theology and philosophy. (Krishnan, 1904: 29) But these instances were becoming rare as religious poetry based on the epics gradually gave way to secular prose in the popularity stakes.

Even as novels and other forms of fiction took their rightful place in the reading world of the newly emergent middle class, critiques were produced against popular novels by some middle class intellectuals. Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar made fun of intending novelists who were proliferating in an article titled 'Akhyayika Allengil Novel.' (Nayanar, 1987) Ramankutty Menon wrote a novel titled *Parangodi Parinayam* which was a parody of the immensely popular *Indulekha* as well as a critique of modernity. (Menon, 1892) These critiques were prompted partly due to the male middle class fear that reading novels might develop base instincts and corrupt the readers, especially women. A critic pointed out that "in most of the novels, which, in their wisdom, text-book committees prescribe for young students, there are vivid descriptions of the amorous activities of love-lorn couples… if only the talents of these writers are used for narrating the biography of great men which would set the right example for young minds." (Sukumaran, 1933: 167) As Tapti Roy says, in India, initially, the colonial regime categorized the press and defined what is obscene and what is not. Later, it was left to the indigenous elites to define what was 'proper' and 'improper' in literary aesthetics. (Roy, 1995)

Before the advent and popularization of electricity, evenings were spent in darkness. In his account, Mayer wrote that in many parts of the district,

"lighting is made possible using coconut –oil lamps, or lanterns of kerosene oil; electric power exists only in the largest towns." (Mayer, 1952: 108) But that did not prevent those who were swept off their feet by the printed word from devouring books by daylight. For example, Sanjayan, the famous satirist, during his childhood used to rush home from school and before the sun went down, read his favourite *Bhaktamala* authored by Tharavathu Ammalu Amma. (Pazhassi, 2000: 17) Sukumar Azhikode who later went on to acquire fame as orator-writer-academician writes of how in his childhood, his reading habit got a boost through his father's library which, according to him, contained more books than some of the public libraries around! (Azhikode, 2010: 23)

That the middle class had taken seriously to reading is clear from the diary of G.Sankaran Nair, a lawyer and a congress activist who regularly used to read, apart from Malayalam magazines like *Mitavadi* and *Prabudha Keralam*, English newspapers like *Times of India*, *The Hindu* as well as *The Modern Review* published from distant Calcutta. Sanjayan was an ardent reader of *Punch* from young days as well as *Tit-bits*.(Pazhassi, 2010) Often, members of the middle class subscribed to more than one magazine, and, in some cases, even foreign ones. Kamala Das, the famous poetess, recalls how, while in Calcutta, her father used to get the British 'Daily Mirror', and the American weekly 'Saturday Evening Post', and while staying at her village in Malabar, he used to subscribe to *Manorama*, *Mangalodayam, Parijatam* and *Mathrubhoomi.*(Kamala Das, 2003: 106-107) Men, since they were more literate and had better access to the public sphere and, therefore, kept track of literary and cultural developments, had a wider range of periodicals to choose from, but women were not altogether kept out of the process. Kamala Das, for instance, talks in her Memoirs of how she was an avid reader of the weekly-love stories of Uroob and Pottekkat, and used to enjoy solving puzzles which appeared in the magazines. (Kamala Das, 2003: 107) One periodical the middle class in these parts could identify with was *Mathrubhumi*. Beginning with articles and short stories, it soon had different sections on children, women, science, gardening, literature, cinema, etc. alongside its regular commitment to nationalist politics. A.R. Venkatachalapathy has shown how, in the context of Tamil Nadu, the magazines, as a new business tactic, indulged in a successful mix of humour, crossword puzzles with fabulous prizes, cartoons, fiction with its thrills, suspense, melodrama, and passed them under a new legitimising label-nationalism. (Venkatachalapathy, 1997)

Another source of home entertainment was the radio. It had its origins in 1926 when a private concern under the name of the Indian Broadcasting Company Limited, in an agreement with the Government of India, set up two

stations, at Bombay and Calcutta. The former was inaugurated on 23rd July, 1927 and the Calcutta station on 26th August the same year. By the mid-30s, the Government had taken over, and on June 8, 1936, the Indian State Broadcasting Service was re-designated as All India Radio. (Awasthy, 1965:2-3) In Malabar, during the first half of the twentieth century, the initially bulky and expensive apparatus was not very common, and in the smaller towns and villages, it was almost unknown. Even as late as 1939, "Ottapalam had only one [a battery – operated] radio set in its only club." (Kutty, 2009: 51) Those who could not afford it, listened to the radio at restaurants and other public places, while others took refuge in their rich neighbour's house. In late 1933, one girl recalled in the pages of *Mathrubhumi,* the excitement she felt while listening to music from the radio of her doctor neighbour who had invited her family over in the evening. (Sumangaladevi, 1933: 24) Radio programmes included music, news, weather report, market fluctuations, etc., and had a wide audience. Of radio's significance, one commentator observed:

> Only twenty years have elapsed since its inception. But during this short period it has assumed such marvelous proportions that today it has almost become a household necessity...only problem is its prohibitive cost...the government should do something. (Chintan, 1938: 4-5)

By the middle of the twentieth century, there was the widespread use of radio.[15] M.S.A. Rao writes, "with the invention of the wireless, gramophone has become less popular. For the people who can afford to possess a set, it is the chief mode of spending one's leisure. As it caters to different interests (music, songs, news, lectures, plays and sometimes religious programmes) it has come to be considered as a necessity of a home."(Rao, 1956: 183) Many people who could not afford it, listened to the radio in public places, restaurant and parks. In Calicut, for instance, there was a big transistor radio placed at the Mananchira square where people in the evenings used to come and listen.

We have already seen the interest shown by the middle class in decorating the interior of their homes. If a spurt of interest in maintaining flower gardens is any indication, they were equally concerned about how the house looked from the outside. The fiction of the times is replete with gardens adorning middle class homes. In *Vasumati*, for instance, Murkoth Kumaran begins the story with the description of a garden with marble statues, fountain and benches belonging to a well-off Thiyya. (Kumaran, 1935: 257) The coming into being of nucleated families living in separate homes enabled people to work out their botanical fantasies. The vegetable garden which partly fed the family continued to exist, but the new craze was for the flower garden which soon became a symbol of middle class status. Appreciating flower gardens

has been traditionally seen as a feminine attribute, but there is no evidence for that in contemporary literature. Members belonging to both the sexes recognized in equal measure the aesthetic pleasures they offered, and the health benefits one stood to gain while working in them. The following passage from a college magazine is a case in point:

> a flower garden is a veritable paradise on earth. It has a charm of its own. A beautiful garden in front of a home or a public institution is indeed a delightful sight that welcomes the visitor...Gardening...besides giving exercise to the muscles, provides an interesting and useful pastime for one's leisure hours. Ministering to the dumb colourful plants and flowers in the open air, inhaling the sweet scented air, is sure to add to physical as well as mental growth and refinement.(Iyer, 1938: 21-22)

The middle classes, in order to distinguish themselves from the lower orders, avoided menial labour at any cost. But there was no such taboo as far as garden tending was concerned.

Of course, it is not always possible to distinguish between leisure partaken at home and those available outside it. In many cases, as in certain kinds of games, as well as music, there is an overlap. Similarly, talking was an important pastime, traversing both home and outside. "Talking," according to Nels Anderson," is the most universal of pastimes, and also quite the cheapest, in our society…it has its place in every society. To be exiled from it, as when prisoners are put into solitary confinement, often leads to madness. It enables one to identify with one's social mileu." (Anderson, 1974: 94) Dipesh Chakravarty writes of the institution of *adda* in colonial Bengal which, as a legacy of an earlier period, persisted inspite of Victorian reservations regarding it as it went against the values of modernity. It was believed to confirm the 'laziness' of the natives and hinder family life. Inspite of such reservations, *adda* in the coffee houses, parks and beaches helped one to feel at home in the epoch of modernity, providing a democratic space – though women were conspicuous by their absence- the discussions not having any telos, no conclusion, and no agenda.(Chakravarty, 2007: 180-213) The talking sessions were facilitated by the proliferation of friendships, similar professions and common public interests bringing people together. Kamala Das writes that her uncle's friends including advocates, literary figures, diplomats, and physicians would turn up at their home in the evenings and have conversations on the verandah, and that when the discussions got heated and lasted long, some stayed back overnight. (Kamala Das, 2003: 15-18) Visiting homes of people with similar background and interests had become popular. P.S. Variar of Kottakkal Arya Vaidyasala fame was "a great host," his biographer notes, "and entertaining guests was like a hobby to him."(Nair,

1953: 164) By the early twentieth century, the institution of caste no longer had the prohibitory effect it had earlier in restricting public interaction between members of different castes.[16] The period threw up several close friendships between the Nairs and the Thiyyas inspite of the latter occupying a distinctively lower status than the former in the traditional caste hierarchy. Murkoth Kumaran, a prominent Thiyya literary figure, while staying at Tellicherry, was a friend and neighbour of K.T. Chandu Nambiar, a well known criminal lawyer as well as a leading literary critic. Regarding literature, they had their differences which they made public through their respective columns in the leading magazines of the period. Later, Murkoth and Nambiar started separate newspapers - *Katora Kutaram* and *Ramabanam* respectively-where they continued their literary dispute, which, however, did not, in any way, affect their friendship. Infact, Chandu Nambiar was Murkoth's *Shashtipoorthi* celebration committee's chairman, reading out his *Mangalapathram* on the occasion.[17] There were other instances as well. Murkoth Kumaran, in his biography of Chandu Menon, the famous early Nair novelist of Kerala, writes of his subject's close friendship with E.K. Krishnan, a prominent Thiyya of Tellicherry. - "it was only natural that both of them being accomplished, honest and innocent, they would get attracted to each other. While Krishnan was a natural scientist with a keen interest in plant and animal life, Chandu Menon was an expert on human affairs, caricaturing their faults and exalting their qualities. Both were interested in hunting." (Kumaran, 1996:36) As G. Arunima points out "sharing the same literary space created a community of intellectuals with at least one shared concern – of engaging with the experience of modernity that was shaping and often, confusing them.(Arunima, 2004: 213) Often, these friendships did not remain confined to the public domain, but extended to the interiors of their respective homes. The closest friend of C. Krishnan was Manjeri Sundarayyar, one of the prominent Brahmin *vakils* of Malabar who used to frequent the former's house in the evenings. This was the period when 'taste' was gaining in prominence in middle class life, the capacity to discriminate beauty and perfection in art and literature. The art of conversation, the ability to express the opinions gained through appropriate reading marked out the 'cultured' from the rest.

A relevant question in this context is whether leisure and work are inherently incompatible. H.L. Wilensky distinguishes between two types of people – those who try to compensate for the frustrations they experience while at the work place through leisure, and others who look for similar experiences during their leisure time to those they experience while in the office. While the former holds true for those whose working conditions are

harsh, the latter refers to those whose work is interesting and requires a certain amount of skill and education. (Wilensky, 1960: 544) Among the latter, would be examples of the middle class. O. ChanduMenon, the famous novelist who combined his literary work with a job in the judiciary, is a case in point. On reaching home after settling a difficult case, he would relax at home by making his servants take sides in a mock case, occasionally joining in himself. (Vaidyar, 1913: 12) On other occasions, during office hours, after his superiors had left for home in the late afternoons, he would indulge in songs and dance with friends.(Kumaran, 1996: 46)

Conclusion

Administrative changes during the colonial period provided the backdrop to the emergence of a new middle class in colonial Malabar. Government offices and the courts provided the arena where the educated natives could hope to find employment. When the sale of land became common following the break down of tarawads, and marriages began to be registered, registration offices became a reality. The spread of education witnessed from the late nineteenth century onwards resulted in the creation of several hundreds of school and college teachers who became an important segment of the new middle class.

Among the Hindus, the middle classes came from all the castes. However, the financially less privileged among the Nairs and the slightly well-off among the Thiyyas, who went for western education, dominated. The rich Nairs and the Nambudiris, in general, took time to adjust to the rapid changes taking place around them, and, in the process, got left behind.

Though in the initial stages, the middle class was not dominant numerically, its influence was significant all along. The middle class had become the custodians of dominant cultural values in a society undergoing rapid transition. This was possible due to the knowledge the group possessed, mostly through western education, and its ability to communicate it. Almost inevitably, it dominated a nascent public sphere. However, women only had a minimal presence here.

Even as men dominated the public sphere, the 'home' was designated as the realm where the woman was expected to hold sway. Here, she was expected to raise children and perform her wifely duties to perfection. There were calls during this time for women's education to be re-structured to suit her role at home. Though theoretically, women controlled the home, in practise, men continued to dictate terms. Laws strengthened the position of the father, as did the literature of the times. Women's financial dependence on their men ensured their subordinate status at home.

Leisure took new forms during this time. Religious functions which passed off as entertainments in the past gave way to new secular ones. Now, within home, one important way to spend time constituted reading which was, in no small measure, helped by the spread of education and literacy. And, with the proliferation of publications, there was sufficient reading to be had. Of the literature available, secular prose attracted readers the most; spiritual poems, which was the main component of literature in an earlier era, now, catered to a minority. Radio provided information as well as entertainment. Some took to gardening, while others engaged themselves with the interior decoration of their house.

NOTES

[1] *Statement of Population of 1871 in Each Village of the Malabar District Arranged According to Area, Caste and Occupation*, Govt. Gazette Press, Madras,1874,p.7

[2] *MMCR,* The Presidents Memorandum, p.9 cited in K.N. Panikkar, 'Land Control, Ideology and Reform: A Study of the Changes in Family Organization and Marriage System in Kerala', *The Indian Historical Review*, 4, no. 1, (1977). In contrast to the West, in India, the middle class was also marked by their linkages to land. As K.N. Panikkar shows, those who secured government jobs or practiced as advocates, also held Kanom tenure or belonged to 'tarawads' which had Kanom rights over land. Ibid., p. 38

[3] *Report of the Malabar Marriage Commission*, Lawrence Asylum Press, Madras, 1891, p.43

[4] Even among the Mappilas, for long stereo-typed as backward, there were the occasional professionals and bureaucrats. Lord Pentland, Governor of Madras, on a visit to Malabar in 1913, in his reply to Himayat-ul-Sabha, notes that "you now have a Mappila tahsildar, and a deputy superintendent of police besides a number of Mappila officers in the Registration, Police and Educational services with many representatives in the clerical posts." *First Tour of H.E. The Right Hon. Lord Pentland, Governor of Madras (Coimbatore and Malabar)* Govt. Press, Madras, 1913, p.103

[5] *Statistical Atlas of Malabar*, 1906, p.10

[6] The acts include The Malabar Marriage Act which sanctioned the registration of customary *sambandham* union as legal marriage where the wife and children could claim maintenance from the husband/father without forfeiting their rights to property from the household. The Malabar Wills Act of 1898 gave right to individuals to pass on their self-acquired property to their wives from legal marriages. In 1933, the Madras Marumakkathayam Act was passed by the Legislative Council which effectively ended the *tarawad* (joint family household) system. It legalized *sambandham* marriages, granted the right of adoption, and allowed branches the right to

demand partition. It also legalized inheritance from father to son. Meanwhile, these changes as well as the various tenancy Acts in the twentieth century affected the Nambudiris which necessitated changes in their own community. The *Yogaksema* movement which was started in 1908 had, among other objectives, the reform of marriage laws within the community. Partly due to its efforts, the Nambudiri Act of 1933, was passed, according to which, younger Nambudiris could now marry Nambudiri girls, and *Illom* (house of the Nambudiri Brahmins) property could be inherited by the younger sons.

[7] Inspite of differences in specificities, following urbanization after which the division between 'home' and the 'world' gets pronounced, in middle class discourse, there is a universal valorization of the former. For instance, the middle class of England in the nineteenth century, found "the market place … dangerously amoral. The men who operated in that sphere [thought they] could save themselves only through constant contact with the moral world of the home, where women acted as carriers of the pure values that could counteract the destructive tendencies of the market." Catherine Hall, 'The Sweet Delights of Home', in Michelle Perrot, ed, *A History of Private Life, Vol. IV: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990, p. 74. According to John Tosh, a home was seen by the English middle class as a haven from all the troubles in the outside world, to spend with your wife and children, where there would not be intruders to destroy your peace and privacy. John Tosh, 'The New Men; The Bourgeois Cult of Home' in *History Today*, Vol. 46 (12), December, 1996, pp. 9-15.

[8] By the late 1930s, the number of girl students even in the centres of higher education was quite significant. T. Narayanan Nambiar, while proposing the 'Toast of the College' twenty years after he had graduated from Government Brennen College, mentions how while he was a student there, "we had very few girl students …. In those days we lived in two different worlds. But now I find the girl students moving freely with boys and taking an active part in all the activities of the college." T, Narayanan Nambiar, 'Toast of the College', *Government Brennen College Magazine*, Vol. VIII, No.1, December, 1939, p. 84

[9] *Kerala Sanchari* 21st August, 1889 in NNPR in the week ending 31st August, 1889, p. 172

[10] *Report on Public Instruction in the Madras Presidency for 1939-40*, Vol.2, Parts I and II, p. 51

[11] A Women's Education Commission appointed by the Namboodiri Yogakshema Sabha, in its report, recommended that if considerable number of Illams existed together, schooling could be organized in one of them, thereby denying the need for public schooling. Education was also to be limited to girls between five and twelve. Married women's education, meanwhile, was to be decided by their husbands. K.M. Sheeba, 'From the Kitchen to the Stage and Back: Continuing Forms of Women's Exclusion in

Keralam.' in *Journal of South Indian History*, Vol.2, No.2, March, 2006, p. 65

[12] Bandhusamudayangalile Manya Sahodarikaloduoru Apeksha, Unsigned Article *Unni Nambuthiri*, Vol.8, No.12, 1928, p.682

[13] Unsigned article, 'Bharthakkanmarude Vishamasthithi, *Vijayan*, vol.2, no.7, August 1938, p.17

[14] Swapna M. Banerjee, 'Child, Mother, Servant : Motherhood and Domestic Ideology in Colonial Bengal', in Avril A. Powell and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, eds. *Rhetoric and Reality : Gender and the Colonial Experience in South Asia*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006

[15] In the post–independence period, the government consciously promoted the use of radio. According to an analyst, this was for two reasons: the need to speak directly to a huge population of illiterates, and to preserve the cultural–literary tradition of the region. K.M. Narendran, 'Kozhikode Akashavani' in *Malabar: PaithrukavumPrathapavum*, Mathrubhumi Books, Kozhikode, 2011, pp. 535-536.

[16] But a genuine breaking down of the caste barrier, especially at the personal level, still remained a distant dream. The biographer of Muliyil Krishnan, one of those Thiyyas who 'made' it, having become, among other things, a teacher at Presidency college in Madras, recounts how Nair friends of Krishnan used to say good things about him on his face, while pouring scorn on him behind his back, and how they would take food from his home, but would be wary of others coming to know of it! K.M. Nair, *Muliyil Krishnan*, Norman Printing Bureau, Calicut, 1932, pp. 72-73. Murkoth Kumaran is said to have confided in private his anguish that his good friend O. Chandu Menon, in his first and most famous novel, *Indulekha*, did not include as a character a single Thiyya, a community numerically dominant, and by then educated and decently employed. Murkoth Srinivasan, 'Apoornamaya Oru Atmakatha', *Mathrubhumi*, Vol. 22, No. 16, July2, 1944, p. 1. C. Krishnan ended up converting to Buddhism, which would suggest that he never felt quite comfortable with his Hindu identity, where, in spite of his material success and public fame, he continued to occupy a lower position in the caste hierarchy.

[17] Mangalat Raghavan, 'Poyi Poya Thalamurakal' in *Thalasserry: SaradaKrishnayyar Memorial Fine Arts Society Smaranika, Chitra DTP Solutions, Tellicherry, 2002,* p. 73 In his presidential address on the occasion of the *Sashtipoorthi* of Murkoth Kumaran, Ulloor waxed eloquently of his friendship with the former. According to him, both of them, vassals at the temple of Saraswati, the Goddess of knowledge, enjoyed a special bonding, 'taramaitri', possible due to compatibility of their respective star signs. *Sreeman Murkoth Kumarante Sashtipoorthi Aaghosha Vivaram*, Imperial Printing works, Tellicherry, 1934, p. 2

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THE SPACE OF ETHICS AND THE ETHICS OF 'POLITICAL' IN M. SUKUMARAN'S STORIES

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ABSTRACT

The theoretical constructions and contestations of 'what is ethical' is very much connected to the parallel, yet more deviant question of 'what is political'. To paraphrase Alain Badiou, this troubling question raises more 'combinational paradigms' of underscoring what is political rather than what is ethical. In this paper, I will look at the Malayalam modern writer M. Sukumaran's stories to highlight this problematic paradigm of understanding the ethical and the role of the narrative that situates/ explicates the same.More than any other modern writer in Malayalam, Sukumaran's stories are overtly political. Most of his stories aim to create a space for the marginalized, the ones that never map in the geographical and political territory of the state and the succinct way by which the gender disequilibrium is carried out in the society. Sukumaran breaks the parameters of the naturalistic tradition of Malayalam by posing the question of the engagement of the 'ethical 'with the subject formation and interconnected subjectivities. His characters, far from being prey to the circumstances, also become the constantly differentiated and understood people as the plane of their discourse changes always with various readings.
Keywords: Ethics, politics, witness, subject, discourse

Modern Malayalam writing has in it ethics operating at two important levels: the concern of the subject as the ethically coherent and inescapable one when we look at the need of the expression and the political context in which the idea of 'being ethical' is implanted. Both these expressions are seriously contested as the philosophical assumptions of the ethics are more wide and multiple. As in all regional writing in India, the rise of modernism in Malayalam, to certain extent coincided with the colonial grid from which the writing took its shape and the fall of any rigid system in which the subject of literature finds its expression. The rise of modernism in Malayalam literature while owing a lot to the translation of western literatures and cultures, also need to be located in the precincts of the rise of the public sphere, birth of the bourgeois individualism, the unequal division of wealth among the Kerala citizens, marginalization of the lower class, the array of the unemployed youth and the disintegration of the family situations. Theorizing the modernity in Malayalam literature involves the task of reinterpreting and rehistoricising the

changing patterns of the Malayali culture in the post 1950s and the various discourses connected to the evolution of a new subjecthood.

Ethics is first and foremost a philosophical conception. This is connected to the expression of the self in the society, the platforms of the self and the level of internalizing the 'other', the question of morality connected with individuals, the issue of the choice, the role of the agent to internalize what the moral code provides and further the exemplification of one's social status. Right from the time of Aristotle, different dimensions of ethics was carved by thinkers and philosophers together. The crucial distinction of ethics was provided by Immanuel Kant. Kant observes : " In law a man is guilty when he violates the rights of others. In ethics he is guilty if he only thinks of doing so" (Kant, 2000:123) However, to take introspection, the Kantian categories and moral precepts were very much challenged while acknowledging its relevance for repositioning ethics in our time. The question of the moral conduct, the level of participation in any social index and the culmination of human behavior are the key elements of looking at the question of ethics in the post- Kantian phase. This also implies that the post-Kantian phase is riven with a series of contradictions as the notion of ethics is both subjectified and taken as the discourse at a personal realm. The relationship between the personal and the public matters a lot in the reconstitution of ethics at the moral plane. The question of an 'ethical community', therefore, is as difficult to postulate as the 'ethical literature' or literatures of ethics. While this debate is endless in its theoretical formulations, the practical implications of ethics are understood by the act of the agent in the society. In Kautilya's *Arthashastra* , we come across the rules codified for the practical realm of man. Later in the Gandhian social tenets also we encounter a moral sphere of activity, which more than a social act, move toward the realms of an ethical plane. Literature, irrespective of the fact that, written in any continent and country is open to all the codes and conducts of the public act of enunciation and rearticulation of the morals. Sometimes, this may serve as the other of what the writer intends to work on; at other times, its implications are wide enough to engulf all acts of interpretation.

In modern Malayalam literature, there has always been a shift from the public to the personal. This shift was primarily a shift from the expression of everything in literature of modernism from the public to the internalization of what the inner world of the writer is all about. Moreover, this shift needs to be understood from modernism's internal combination of act of resistance and the act of incorporation. While in most of the Indian regional languages, literature needs to be understood as an act of resistance, it is equally true that modern literature tended toward recouping many things from the tradition

and other spheres by submerging into the act of involving writing with the social sphere and appropriating what it has generalized. Modern literature, therefore, is the involvement of the personal into the space of engaging in the public domain, where personal many times can become a powerful tool of resistance. P.P.Raveendranobserves:"It may not be possible, either theoretically or in terms of a cohesive methodology, to carry forward a sustained argument in support of the presence of an ontologically related body of knowledge with a shared discursive history called Indian literature"(Raveendran,2009: 28). As Raveendran's arguments may elucidate, it becomes difficult for all of us to think and reimagine a particular point of the evolution of Indian literature as well as modernism in Indian literature. While this is true with all Indian languages, the collective body of modern literature in the Indian context also is the one that needs lot of rethinking. In Malayalam particularly, the works of K Balamani Amma, M.T. Vasudevan Nair on the one hand are examples of creating a separate sense of modernism by their adherence to a particular social aesthetics that negated modernism. The powerful impact of modernism in Malayalam began by the socio-realist writings of Vaikkom Muhammed Basheer, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai and Kesavadev. These writers created a space of the public very much internalized in the wanderings, struggles and opinions of the individual turned against all social customs. However, the next generation turned the switch of writing from the public to the private with notable exceptions like Anand where the public resurfaces as the domain of all discourse. This includes writers such as O.V.Vijayan, M. Mukundan, Zacharia, Sethu and Anand. M. Sukumaran follows this footstep with a remarkable difference. Sukumaran's turn is not to reclaim the modern agenda as the ultimate in Malayalam writing; on the other hand, that was meant to restructure the struggles in the individual, particularly the dispossessed within the social milieu. Sukumaran kept the glass open for reflection to the society where all ideologies and promises fell blindly and the turn of the blind mass toward the party politics also evaporated in the air without offering a bright tomorrow. This intense phase of modernism in Malayalam writing was experimented by very few writers- P.K.Nanu, U.P.Jayaraj, and relatively few more including M. Sukumaran. The question of ethics here operates at two levels: on the one hand, this asks the question of the writer's social responsibility by putting the issue of moral rights and on the other, this exposes the deviance of modernism from the stringent assumption of its "newness". Ethics here questions the 'newness' attributed to language, class, caste and orientation. Ethics no more serves as the philosophically right word for a correct life, but this works as the mechanism where correction as an act of moral duty is put into question in literatures.

Set against the backdrop of intense political strifes in Kerala as well as in India involving the trade unions against the landlords, bourgeois class, bureaucrats and the internal divisions within the working class, Sukumaran's collection *Chuvanna Chihnangal* (Red Signs) exposes the nature of the Kerala citizen compelled to live a life of faithlessness, dejection and utter poverty. The *a priori* set up of these stories is the post-independent Kerala politics, particularly the post- 60s politics where the public life in Kerala underwent a radical change. The promises given to the labour class very soon turned out to be fallacious and the new generation or the new class among the trade union leaders turned out to be the new capitalists in the god's own country. The story "Ashritharute Aakasham" (The Sky of the Dependents) is an exposition of the cruel irony of the existence of a labourer who becomes the prey to the inner dynamism of capitalism and the corporate world. The character in the story expresses his homage to the death of P.K., the person who tells him how to be an obedient worker under the owner. His cremation is an ethical act where he becomes the witness. "The cemetery was on the hillside. The pit they had dug was not that deep as their heads were swirling in the intoxication of arrack. If a strong rain comes, the upper layer of sand will wash away and the dead body can be seen. The eagles will swoop down and peck. The foxes after tearing it will deposit the bones at different places. Since this is an unknown body, I didn't have the courage to express such anxieties to the Municipal workers who were drunken louts" (Sukumaran, 2004: 12). This passage is an example of the anxiety of the local worker toward the safe burial of a dead body. His ethics is deeply entrenched in his thoughts of expressing something; but refuses due to the nature of the man who led a life of seclusion. The visibility of the body, here is also the visibility of the danger and derision. If the body would be seen by others, it may evoke a sense of derision. Sukumaran creates the space of the Municipal cemetery as the place of deliberate and hidden discourse of the body. The unnamed character in this story very soon sacrifices his ideas and thinking for the sake of Krishnaveni, his wife and his son. He changes the job and becomes the representative of another company under a new master. His sacrifice also turns out to be the sacrifice of his morals. Sidelining Krishnaveni, he becomes a prey to Aani, a seductress who treats him with drinks and cigarettes. The internal conflicts within this unnamed narrator turn out to be the survival mechanism when the city and the people failed to recognize him and buy his products. Further, when Krishnaveni accidently comes up in a company meeting, dressed in full attire, the narrator fails to recognize her and later shoots at her. His testimony before the police that he did not like her dress and behavior while she wanted to reclaim him had

provoked him is the final break of his ethical platform of a moral living. He further claims that he loved her throughout his life as she was his wife also opens up the platform of ' ethicality' in conjunction with his act of murder. While lying down inside the lock up, he thinks:"Not even a single ant didn't pain me. I had seen the different ways of solving the crimes in a week. The police which does that became the engines of closing eyelids, beedi smoking and saluting. They wandered inside the station with their blood shot eyes. The wailing cry of the humans out of pain would be falling in their ears like music. Having seen those body tortures daily, I discovered a principle full of selfishness for myself. Man can be killed by throttling or by shooting. But he shouldn't be killed like this inch by inch. The pins, sticks from the coconut leaves, chinks of blade, ruler are not made to kill man" (Sukumaran, 2004: 33). The central question arising here is whose ethics are we likely to protect and maintain? The unnamed narrator's moral disposition to the job and the survival instincts, and later the murdering of Krishnaveni all imply the non-ethical platform of his ethical world. Before his tragic death in the hospital, he realizes that his son and Dhanapalan's son are arrested for attacking the owner under whom he was working. What needs to be underlined is the fact that Dhanapalan was another owner who committed suicide as his company business was collapsing. The systems in collapse and the alignment of the owner-labourer networks create the ethics of the post-60s Kerala society in confusions. The intertwining discourse of the owner and labourer is the one of perpetual confrontation and collusion.

In "Udayam Kaanan Urakkamozhichavar"(Those who didn't sleep to see the Rise), Sukumaran conflates the feelings of a group of young revolutionaries, their activities and aspirations. Written from the perspective of constant dialogues between members in the youth, this story has the canvas of students, government employees, the press and those who live in isolation. The story mixes up the public realm and the private through a series of juxtapositions. The revolutionary in this story P.L. has the existential crisis when he thinks about what to be done and how things need to be revolutionized. Sukumaran writes : " P.L. asked himself. There mayn't be any other doubt popping up in the head of the comrade. Don't worry Comrade. When the net falls on me, the story of the river where I floated and the mountain crags will remain with me as organs without life. It's a light for me the realization that some of my predecessors had worked hard to become traitors. In that light, my followers can travel. Bravely" (Sukumaran, 2004: 241). The question here is not the one of uneasiness a revolutionary is having with his times of capture and surrendering to the powers of administration; but the one of self- choice. This self- choice, that is one day he will become

a traitor, is what marks his identity. Looking at the nature of ethics and the subject's dependence, Barbara Johnson comments, "...if ethics is defined in relation to the potentially violent excesses of the subject's power, then that power is in reality being presupposed and reinforced in the very attempt to undercut it. What is being denied from the outset is the subject's lack of power, its vulnerability and dependence" (Johnshon, 2000: 48). The revolutionary P.L.'s decision to become a traitor to the movement is an ethical choice as we see his contemporaries are drawn into that either by choice or by compulsion. The clash between the state of dependence and the state of autonomy, as we see in Barbara Johnson's comments, is exemplified here. But in P.L.'s case, more than Johnson's notion of 'subject's power', his casual observation of what he is or where the movement goes is typically noteworthy. Kerala's left movements and its failure to offer all the needy the wanted is highlighted here as the subject's ethical question; not as 'vulnerability'.

Toward the end of this story we see P.L. going to see another comrade from whom he thinks he will get some contribution for the running of the revolutionary magazine. To his surprise, P.L. meets the comrade who had changed completely and studies for a departmental test. P.L's dialogue, "the wasted moments would be important for a careerist" (Sukumaran, 2004:249) is his realization that he alone is left in this world to think and lead the revolution. His doubts also testify to this statement as he thinks himself as the agent who is employed to betray his fellow beings. This doubtful platform of ethics is what creates the divided modern sensibility in Malayalam literature. Abandoning the former comrade walking on the road, P.L's mental conditions are described by Sukumaran : " Comrades, I don't have any enmity toward any one of you. At a critical juncture, you all will be with us. That is for certain. That is history." (Sukumaran, 2004: 249). This internal monologue, if we can use that dramatic term, is the crux of the revolutionary ethics of P.L. where he encounters in daily life a number of comrades who have shrunken from the revolutionary activities and have turned out to be the careerists in the Kerala society. At the same time, P.L. does not want to end his dreams of the revolution as he consoles himself in the empty future of its coming. The fervor of revolution and the internal dynamics of the ethically shrunken society of Kerala, as shown in Adoor Gopalakrishnan's film *Mukhamukham* (Face to Face) is becoming the core of Sukumaran's stories. P.L's ethics is not the one of abandoning what he believes and make him the object of another movement. His ethics is the belief that he is existing, a contra- dynamic articulation of the Kantian postulate by sacrificing the moral conduct. While in Kantian ethics, we have no alternatives provided, the modern Malayalam story through M. Sukumaran asks the counter- mechanism of stationing oneself

in the valueless society to create some values or rather to search something while everything is vapourising.

"Kunjappuvinte Duswapnangal" (The Nigthmares of Kunjappu) is perhaps the most deviant and politically radical story written by M.Sukumaran. This is the story of the rag picker called Kunjappu who has no land, place and identity in the space of his search for the thrown outs. Haunted by the police and dogs, his life is thrust on the pedestal of his own survival, however crucial that may appear before him. His life reminds us Walter Benjamin's famous statement, "therag picker is the most provocative figure of human misery" (Benjamin, 2007: 262). Set from one corner of the street to another, the rag picker does not have any staticity. He becomes the condemned for all and he stumbles before all structures of power. Kunjappu in Sukumaran's story is such a figure who does not have any place to stay or move around. In his meanderings, he reaches a public space where people have thronged and raise slogans as the counting of the election takes place. He is appointed temporarily by a shop keeper to clean glasses and serve the people who come to the shop. His observations become the plethora of what happens in the surroundings as far as the situation there finds doubly dangerous for his own existence due to the cacophony and the imminent danger of the police lathi charge approaching. Sukumaran analyses the rag picker's mental tensions: "All roads are filled with people. They may be coming here to find out who had won. Though strange, Kunjappu also is here. But he is waiting there not to know the results of the election. It is Appuvannan who had made him stand there. His head is filled with old and useless objects. His dreams flourish in the market place where the old objects are bought and sold" (Sukumaran, 2004: 138). This observation is relevant when we look at the difficult situation of the rag picker and his/her role in any democratic system. The ethics in operation here is the one that looks the citizenry, public space, the voice of the underprivileged and the lack of articulation of those who are condemned to live a life of perpetual danger.

Nowhere in any democratic system, the ethics of the rag picker is not heard or articulated. The reason behind this can be the multitude where in he/she has to live a life of the dispossessed. But apart from being a citizen who lives the life of an animal, this non- represented ethicality gives the rag picker some power of observation, as Sukumaran's Kunjappu shows. The lathi charge that follows the announcement of the election results and the destruction of Appuvannan's shop and the consequent hospitalization of Kunjappu and Appuvannan clearly indicates the dangerous and paradigmatory nature of anarchy embedded in the very democratic electioneering process. Kunjappu looks at Appuvannan's pathetic situation inside the hospital and forgets about

the money he owes him for serving him. While thrown again into the open ground, Kunjappu decides to get his abandoned sack. While going back with the sack, Kunjappu finds a load of trunks arranged inside a lorry. He finds out from another boy that these boxes are the 'ballot boxes'. His doubt is centered on the idea that with what metal are these boxes made of. The last line of the story is, " If it is iron, one day it will rust; this rag picker who doesn't have the conscience, education and the right to vote also may be knowing that" (Sukumaran, 2004: 145). Sukumaran offers a powerful critique of the public space and electoral democracy of India by highlighting the desire of Kunjappu. Whose rights are protected by our democracy? Who are its masters and prey? These questions go naturally beyond the philosophical assumptions of ethics. Dorris Sommer comments:"Ethics means demoting the self to strive the Other, to be the hostage object of the Other subject "(Sommer, 2000: 207). What we find in Kunjappu's case is perhaps the other of what Sommer argues as his desires are always met being a rag picker of a particular place; but it is equally true that his ambition to be one with the public never fulfills. Sukumaran carefully mis- matches the ethics of Kunjappu from the "Other" who perpetually create no space for him to enter. The idea that being the subject of democracy, he too has his opinion and ambition is thrown out here. Kunjappu's ethics being the rag picker is to know from which metal the boxes are made of.

The subject of interpretation claims for the reasoning and validity of a 'witness'. In Malayalam modern literature, this act of witnessing is not clearly outlined. The subject which claims to have an ethical content or the political needs to orient itself toward a series of witnessing – as Sukumaran's depiction of Kunjappu suggests, would be rather mere ' absences' in the public sphere. As Margalit Avishai argues, "to become a moral witness one has to witness the combination of evil and the suffering it produces: witnessing only evil or only suffering is not enough" (Avishai, 2002: 148). Sukumaran, on the contrary, seems to suggest this moral witnessing as an act of introspection. The fate of Kunjappu is resonant of the emptying of the space from where a group of jubilation is taken away and consequently the public space turns out to be the inner realm of the reader where in the clash of various power structures and innocents happen. The inevitable recognition of what is ethical is the subjective realization of the subject thrown out from all platforms of participation and as the fate of Kunjappu suggests, that looks at the 'usability' of the material for a day's living.

The relationship of ethics and literature, though interdependent, raises certain fundamental questions. Can literature be a part of ethics that is always morally and philosophically grounded? Can the subjectivity be an ethical

choice? Are there mutually existing characteristics between ethicality and the positioning of the subject? How do we recognize the politics of ethics when we have a series of differences? These questions, though difficult for a serious theoretical postulation, needs to be pondered time and again to analyse the role of literatures in the more modern context. Alain Badiou in his *Ethics* writes:"Every truth as we have seen, despises constituted knowledge, and thus opposes opinions. For what we call opinions are representations without truth, the anarchic debris of circulating knowledge" (Badiou, 2001: 50). Badiou's insistence of finding out truth from the opposition to opinions is indeed a powerful stand that critiques the systems of governance. This perhaps would be the way how one can offer a vehement critique against all representations in literatures also. Literature, no more is an autonomous entity. There are multiple discourses and paradigmatory shifts occurring inside all writing. Therefore, writing too needs to be understood as the mechanism of governance.

As far as Sukumaran's stories are concerned, we come across a shift of the subject from the intense personal suffering – which was a part and parcel of the modern writing in Malayalam to the place/space where the subject undergoes a realization in conjunction with the ethical choice that need to be taken. The subject here is very much political seeking the space of expression. Sukumaran, unlike other modern Malalayam writers such as M.Mukundan, T.R., M.P.NarayanaPilla, Zachariah and others never makes any aesthetic judgment to this subject of dispossession. The role of ethics in politics is very much highlighted in Sukumaran's writings. The writing is the liberation of ethics in which the 'other Malayalee modern sensibility' is couched in. This writing marks , to paraphrase Badiou again "As for the question why the siren come to a stop, immobilized as it is in the ideality of a lack which, for its part, can not come back, to lack, we will not have time to answer it today" (Badiou, 2009: 82). The need of the hour, though idealized differently, becomes the centre in Sukumaran's writings. It is both an ethical choice and an expression of the political as we find this political is what marks the nightmare of modern Kerala making.

(The translations of the stories are by the author of this article only).

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ANTHROPOLOGY OF POSSESSION
AND THE CASE OF A NON-BRAHMINICAL DEITY*

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ABSTRACT

In this article I try to summarize the methodological problems involved in the ethnographic study of such phenomenon which are understood to be evil, supernatural or/and magical. I have tried to review the very limited source of ethnographic study related to the cult of a little known deity called Kuttichaathan or Chaathan in Kerala, in order to discuss my own ethnographic findings While I argue that such phenomenon as understood to be evil form a religious practice in its entirety for its believers (Tarabout:1997), I also maintain a distance from theories which give such cults a heroic personage(Gough:1958). This article is also critical of the theories of Brahminization and Sanskritization which demarcate supernatural phenomenon or cults involving possession as marginal to the study of religion per se.

***Keywords*:** Magic, Possession, Transgression, Caste, Parasite, Sanskritization, Kerala, *Kuttichaathan*, *Velan*.

Introduction

One of the most contentious and fraught areas of the study of caste has been characterizing the diverse forms of ritualistic practices of worship associated with possession. The manner in which it divides the practices of Hinduism into Brahmanical and Non-Brahminical (or Sanskritic and Non-Sanskritic) as one can observe, for instance in anthropological literature on

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possession is perhaps one reason behind it. Frits Staal for instance says that "anthropologists commonly regard possession as a non Sanskritic form *par excellence*" (Staal, 1963: 267). While arguing that such distinctions arise out of the dichotomies envisaged in the conception of Hinduism as separated by little and great tradition or context and text, Staal cautions that they cannot be superimposed merely on the assumption that Sanskrit as a language has always been the source integrating the sub-continental spread of Hinduism. While looking at rituals such as those invoking possession Staal contents that there are elements of the little or the non-Sanskritic tradition that prevail over the great or Sanskritic tradition that it becomes difficult to make a notwithstanding Srinivas' reservation regarding sanskritization that it "is a two way process, though the local cultures seem to have received more than they have given"(as quoted in Staal, Ibid).

The Anthropological Case of *Chaathan* as a Deity of Possession

Focusing on the anthropology of one deity called *Kuttichaathan* which is prevalent predominantly in the state of Kerala, a part of Southern or peninsular India, the devotees of who cuts across Malayalam, Tamil, Telungu or Kannada speaking states in the South, different castes from the lowest untouchable to the highest Brahmins this paper will try to explore this problematic in a little greater detail. Although its recent peninsular spread signifies only a random explosion in the number of devotees to *Chaathan* the cult as such remains localized to certain regions and certain ancestral temples in Kerala. It is a pastoral, Saivite cult with representations of cattle- buffaloes and cows – as the vehicles for *Chaathan* and *Karimkutti* finding a significant place in the rituals. The priests for this ritual called *Velan* abstain from eating the meat of either because of this. As such, this is the only form of a pastoral cult still remaining in the temples of Kerala. Even here, it is only in parts of the state, especially central Kerala, or the areas adjoining the district of Trichur where this property of this deity is emphasized through the ritual of *Kalampaattu*. Elsewhere for example in the north of Kerala (Payyannur) where he is worshipped in *Teyyam,* his vehicles- the cows or/and buffaloes-are not given due representation. Besides, as examined by Sontheimer (1997) in the case of pastoral deities like Aiyyanar (Tamil Nadu), Mailar (Karnataka), Mallanna (Andhra) and Khandoba (Maharashtra), *Chaathan* is depicted in stories linking the plateau or plains with the ghats or the forests. But things get more complicated in the case of *Chaathan* because he adds up to the role of a herder, also the role of an agrestic slave who works the fields of the Brahmin (*Bhattathiri* of Punchanellur, *Nambuthiri* of Kattumaatam are a couple of his masters). The issues arising from this combination of roles will be one of the themes of this paper.

The word *Chaathan* signifies a multiplicity of siblings all but one, born to Siva of which *Kuttichaathan* (born to *Vishnnu* and hence called *Vishnnumaya*) is the most popular followed by *Karimkutti* and hundreds of others the names of the entire pantheon it will be difficult to record. Folklore speaks sometimes of 400 and sometimes of 336 although the arithmetic of counting him in numbers or by names is a gain-less task[1]. *Chaathan* here exudes divinity as a form of quasi-object that multiplies itself through possession. A quasi-object is another name used for a parasite in the philosophical explorations of Serres into the nature of human relationships in a post-modern world. Serres' ideas which lament the reduction of the human subject to the level of a parasite, seeks to redeem the subjectivity of human beings by claiming that human relationships can no longer be understood from a subject-centered world of meaning. It is only by means of a form of objectivity, known as quasi-objectivity that the subject position of individuals can be explained.

Chaathan's divinity is a quasi-object in caste society that defies the fixity of position which is often attached to Sanskritic deities. Although *Chaathan* is believed to have the power to assume any shape or form there are certain species of nature that is linked to him as agnatic and recording this I think will be a challenge for ethnology. They are supposed to be known merely to his priestly attendants from the caste called *Velan* and even for one of them to recall all these species of *Chaathan*s by name could be right now impossible. This unpredictability in form and shape that he can assume in terms of entering into a relationship adds to his divinity perceived in the form of a quasi-object.

The nearest I could get in terms of understanding this multiplicity of forms was when in the midst of my conversation with *Aasaan* (a priest of *Chaathan*), an insect of the species of grasshopper was indicated to me as a *Chaathan*. A multiplicity of this sort represents a quasi objectivity which is far from the anthropocentric divinity of Sanskritic deities. An installation for *Chaathan* can be as simple as merely a *Peethham* which appears like a small stool with three legs. It is quite possible to think of *Chaathan* as a generic name given to all sons of Siva including *Murukan* (Tamil Nadu) and *Saasthavu* or *Aiyappan* (Kerala). In order to understand how critical the notion of multiplicity of forms is for a study of the worship of *Chaathan* one has to first dispel the rather blanket reduction of *Chaathan* to a malignant, non-Sanskritic deity executed by colonial and modern anthropology.

F.Fawcett (1901) was perhaps the first to describe *Kuttichaathan* as a devil who was worshipped alongside a lot of similar deities like *Gulikan* and *Karimkutti*. Though he does not offer in detail the description of the

practices associated with this worship he does give some details about the cult of *Karimkutti* but not adequately accounting for the agnatic relationship shared between *Karimkutti* and *Kuttichaathan*. Much later L.K. Anantha Krishna Iyer it was who made his foray into this domain saying "*Kuttichaathan* is supposed to be a mysteriously working mischievous imp in Malabar demonology" (Iyer, 1925: 197). He also gives them the description that was to stick on for years as "most willing slaves of masters who happen to control them" (Ibid). But Iyer warns about the repercussions of using the powers that accrue to the masters from the servitude of *Chaathan* as capable of bringing childlessness to themselves who have to cross through a lot of mental agony because of this. This fault as entirely due to the disturbance of *Chaathan* is something his ethnographic account tries to corroborate surreptitiously[2].

For a modern anthropologist like Kathleen Gough (1958) who follows a method of political economy in her approach the worship of *Chaathan* amongst the *Nairs* of Kerala as a practice was coupled with the lesser educated from the caste. She discusses the case of a young educated *Nair* male who visited her often without the knowledge of his mother deliberately for the fact that she would shun his eating Christian food with them. This man but would never argue with his mother or complain about her food which he did not find at times suitable to his taste. Except on one occasion when he had to arrange for a sacrifice for *Chaathan* a "minor, malevolent deity" upon his mother's bidding because she thought her calf died because of the intervention of the spirit (Gough, 1958:456).

The reason as Gough tries to surmise behind this attitude among the lesser educated was that the worship of *Chaathan* was supposed to be originating from veneration of the spirits of lower caste men or women who happened to be slain by the higher caste *Nambuthiri* or *Nair*. Their spirits returned to trouble or avenge their deaths and hence were made into gods and necessarily propitiated by the upper castes in small temples or shrines adjacent to their main temples or in parts of the compound of their households (Ibid:466). While it may be gratifying to find that a certain semblance of justice is delivered and some form of secular balance of power is attained through such descriptions, as explanations for the worship of *Chaathan*, the heroic cult of martyrdom or the lack of education amongst his devotees are hardly sufficient.

Ontological Perspectives on Possession

Tarabout (1997) sums up the problem of possession in colonial anthropology in India as borrowed from the sense of religion in Europe where it was linked to the work of magic, sorcery or witchcraft, as something separate and distinct from what can be called religion proper. As Levistrauss (1964) in

his study of totemism had summarized the failure of erstwhile ethnography and ethnology to understand the problem of totemism in Polynesia because of a vision or philosophy of religion that held human beings at its centre and the multitude of natural objects as tied to it, possession also as a problem in the Indian context owed itself to its antithetical role attributed to it vis-à-vis religion. From a social-anthropological perspective, Raheja (1988) was the first to introduce the problems of evil spells or possession through the critique her work makes of the concept of purity in the system of Hindu prestations known as *Daan*. Visuvalingam (1989) also emphasizes the importance of possession through the concept of transgression vital in decoding the diversity of religious experience which earlier was branded merely as evil, black or *Taamasik*. Tarabout (1997) has pointed out in his study of similar phenomenon which he calls magic that it was studied as speculative, following the logic of a ritual and as an antithesis to religion. Tarabout tries to overcome the separation of religion and magic on the basis of his study of the cult of *Kuttichaathan* in Kerala that such practices that have been termed magical constitute the religious life of the lower castes, and is distinguished by its patrons, their degree of violence and the officiating castes.

Tarabout follows an ontological framework in the only known existing ethnographic work that is devoted to the study of *Chaathan*. All earlier works discussed were fragments in the discussion of larger themes like caste system, religion or magic in ethnography of Kerala. Tarabout has certainly pitched it on to a level where articulation of a 'demonic' cult can at least claim to some amount of academic integrity. This he achieves by placing it within the framework of master- slave relationship of command and servitude, of ontology, of a theory of being.

Tarabout's framework although expository of the blindness to magic as a form of religion in Europe, does not speak much about the relations of hierarchy in which the cult exists. The form of religion assumed by Tarabout in the context of the worship of *Chaathan* can be understood only by invoking the lower caste, untouchable critique of society itself as a termination of all human relationships, any new relationship being a result of exclusion from society at large. I argue that this critique looks at caste system as a network of relations with no fixity of subject or order and that it functions through chaos and reordering. The lower castes use *Chaathan* as a metaphor for the unifying field notion of culture by which they are represented in Hinduism.

Parasitology as Anthropology of Possession

The fact that *Chaathan* represent a multiplicity (of siblings) is a syllogism of the untouchable lower castes' existence largely uncounted and unidentified outside the *Chaaturvarnya*. It is in fact a critique of the alienating caste

subjectivity itself to be seen here. *Chaathan* is therefore seldom alone. If not his siblings, he is always with a host. The host can be from different households, often prosperous if not of the upper castes. Two, even with a host he is not alone. He is many and lives off the host so long as willingly kept satisfied by the host and if not, stealing from the host. *Chaathan* cannot be chased away or killed because even if one tries to do it, he always returns in his multitudinal indestructible forms[3]. According to a popular proverb, it is the diffidence of *Chaathan* in spite of the efforts of his masters to assail or kill him for his mischief that instigates his return in numbers, not one or two, but many.

One needs a look at relationships sans obstructions of any of the categories of binaries of the good and evil if one were to get a fair idea of what it means to be possessed (*Baadha*) by *Chaathan*. It is a certain form of excluded-ness that is strung within a chain of relationships objectified in nature as caste. *Chathhan* is a reflection on the basic truth about human relationships. The form of exclusion practiced by *Chaaturvarnya* as that which essentially gave birth to the caste system is criticized by implication in the way *Chaathan* often rebukes the pedantism of his *Nambuthiri* hosts. *Chaathan* can move from host to host and is always present or accessible to anyone who is willing to solicit his services to dominate any position of disadvantage he or she may have fallen. *Chaathan* assumes the position of the excluded and plays on the very position to dominate the relations of the caste system which seeks to jeopardize his supplicant[4].

As already mentioned Tarabout (1997) while trying to understand the cult of *Chaathan* links him to a relationship of master-servant which can be linked to an ontology or a theory of being. Tarabout highlights the initiation of a *Mantravaadi* into the worship of *Chaathan* as a spiritual quest involving meditation of a kind by which forces necessarily stored for a future incarnation in a person's life are released in the present. It is on the strength of these forces alone that a cult of *Chaathan* can be pursued and hence the significance of the *Mantravaadi*. Meditation is used by the *Mantravaadi* as a technique to augment the possession of his own self by cleansing it of the innermost recesses of the fear of the supernatural.

While providing breakthrough on many fronts, I think Tarabout's work still does little justice to the way *Chaathan* is always in a kind of surreptitious hegemony over his hosts thus allowing none to enter into a dominant or masterly position vis-a-vis himself. By spreading noises and nuisances in an otherwise structured order of things, *Chaathan* always dominates a relationship by assuming the role of a parasite that plays with its position or location. *Chaathan* is in that sense the complete contrary of what may be termed the subject that tries to affirm its position or its locus in a

relationship. *Chaathan* satisfies all the demands or requests of his hosts not in order to reciprocate the offerings made to him but to ensure that a certain domain is created for relations to exist independent of their locus.

As is well known for those familiar with it, the presence of *Chaathan* is always indicated by a disturbance or *Upadravam* as they call it. This is a parasitic order, a harmonious dispersion of things through a process of exclusion[5]. For *Chaathan* this is derived from the gradual exclusion from that order of *Chaaturvarnya* to which he is destined, nonetheless holding sway over the multiplicity of forms in which he can dominate all relations, including that of the *Varna*. The certainty that a domain would exist for relations independent of the *Varna* is because in *Upadravam, Chaathan* or his siblings do not transform the caste system as such, but they change its state, through a minimal action, neither revolution, nor reform.

The master-slave relation in the way it exists between the *Mantravaadi* and *Chaathan* if at all thrives, then it is due to the open challenge or competition to which such a relation can be thrown rather than one of order and obedience. As a dependent of the elder *Nambuthiri* of *Akavur Mana*, *Chaahan* had shown extraordinary brilliance to rid him of his sins of promiscuity and outshine his wisdom to prove that he was actually as much powerful a devotee of the same force or ideal called *Parabrahmam* that is worshipped by Brahmins. So much so that he could realize it in the form of a buffalo and command it to obey him (Sankunni, 2009: 42-59).

Chaathan is always powerful to intercept the career of his superiors with a histrionic of heroism. The myths centered on *Chaathan* have always been and still is today an industry that prospers on the strength of alcohol. Alcohol consumption is mentioned in the songs and also used as *Kalassam* or offering that is indispensable to the god. Its representative function is one of subversion and questioning the *Tandaayan* of the toddy –tapping and tendering caste of the *Izhava* the dereliction in the practice of his trade. This serves as a local criticism on the scale at which illicit liquor is imported and sold in the state but not without the connivance of the major hosts of the deity himself. Therefore as it goes in the songs of the *Velan* the *Chaathan* says to the *Tandaayathi* or the *Izhava* female who sells the toddy tapped by her husband that if you give us toddy mixed with water then you will get only rice mixed with chaff in return.

This proves that so much as the master is capable of parasiting his slaves, the slaves or servants are also capable of producing counter masters or slaves who will be masters of the master and not the slaves. This relation becomes the quintessential core of the spirit of class rebellion and martyrdom read into the story of *Chaathan* by modernist interpretations including that

of Kathleen Gough which we saw earlier[6]. This relation has to be what can be called a quasi-object a term that I had also earlier used to designate the kind of relationship that may be conceptualized between the 336-400 different species of *Chaathan*s. For *Chaathan* and 335 of his siblings the arena is caste as a circulation of disturbances, where they are constituted as quasi objects and can never be permanently linked to any subject dead or living[7].

The cult of *Chaathan* is often understood as a votive offering by his clients in order to realize particular aims or remedy specific illnesses (Iyer,1925; Gough,1958). This also lives on the predicate of a relationship of gift exchange or a paradigm of reciprocity in the caste system. But as a chain of circulation of objects the caste system takes count of only two positions, that of the donor and the recipient. The position of an excluded and the third that occupy the chain of exchanges sans position is not discussed anywhere[8]. *Chaathan* as a representation of the excluded multitude spans the material cycle of exchanges, of the relation of the donor and the recipient. He partakes of gifts or offerings made to him only to the extent they can be parasited through his host, irrespective of the host's position in the hierarchy of gift exchanges. *Chaathan* creates a system of the parasite out of such exchanges, beyond the donor and the recipient whereof he finds sustenance.

The caste system as understood in the context of the cult of *Chaathan* will have to be not only a critique of the donor-recipient theory of relations of exchange or that of the master-slave relations of command, but also the friend- enemy relations of the contract theories of society. Susan Visvanthan's ethnography on the Christians of Kerala (1999:88-91) revealed how a Christian family became believers of the *Chaathan* and in the process also began a propitiatory donation of food grains to a dependent *Izhava* family who were patrons of *Chaathan*. Interestingly her account makes no mention of the caste or other whereabouts of a 'man' who actually invoked *Chaathan* against the Christian landlord. This man was not fairly treated in the payment of his wages as an employee of the landlord. It is ideally in the form of enforcing a contract that *Chaathan* must have been invoked in this context as the author tries to conclude but stops short of explaining why only one family and not all the landlord's dependants should be reciprocated. As an explanation towards understanding the dynamic of inter-caste and inter-religious relations in this context it implicitly moves towards a contract theory of caste, the occasional renewal of which ensures the perpetuity of deities like that of *Chaathan*.

But the notion of subject crucial to a theory of contract[9] and of rights is nonexistent in the cases involving possession of *Chaathan* as it is difficult to examine the field of his possession as involving merely human subjects. It

manifests sometimes as a person possessed and at other times as burning clothes, shattered lamps, flying roof-tiles etc. *Chaathan* as earlier mentioned constitutes a quasi-objectivity through his possession that encompasses relations engendered in objects through possession, which is always excluded in a contract.

Chaathan merely ensures that relationships continue despite caste conceived as a social contract which as a formation of relationships always tries to exclude him as a parasite[10]. It is the irreducibility of divinity to any structure, system or order, which is represented in the visitation or possession of *Chaathan* as a disturbance. *Chaathan*'s disturbance is an objectification of relations in the nature of human setting or habitation in a place. It forms a link between humans, his hosts such that *Chaathan* materializes his own divinity in the form of a quasi-object.

In this section we saw how the possession of *Chaathan* can be used as a heuristic means for criticizing some of the well known theories of the caste system although not on an exhaustive scale. This criticism followed a line of argument sans the distinctions of theory and practice represented as a disturbed set of relations. In the next section I will examine attempts to historicize the cult through writings which also point to reasons for its constellations around certain castes in Kerala.

A Historiography of the Cult

Historiography as used here means a study of the resources linking the cult to the mainstream devotees of Hinduism. Sontheimer (1997) has argued that the pastoral deities of Deccan like Khandoba (Maharahtra), Mallanna (Andhra) and Mailar (Karnataka) have traits of the pre-Vedic god Rudra, although the association with Siva is popular today betraying its Brahminical influence. These deities which are not traceable back to any of the Puranas of Siva, therefore find their stories narrated in folk religion, especially as tales of the pastoral heroes of communities like Dhangar and Gavli. Despite the several invocations of these gods by the popular Bhakti literature linking them to Puranic deities like Siva and Paravati, the roots of these cults remain pastoral and folk according to Sontheimer.

Chaathan, though may be likened to a pre-cursor to *Yama* because of the buffalo he rides and also because of the name s*aastappan* (he who has the power to scold and correct wrongs in people, a power vested with Yama as the world's keeper of justice or *Dharma*), it is through his association with *Vishnumaaya* of *Padmapuraana* that the initial breakthrough was created for Brahminical Hinduism in creating foot holds in lower caste worship of *Chaathan*.

This emerged out of the rising popularity of the cult since the 1960s in the *Izhava* household of the *Aavanangotte Panicker*. Subramanya Panicker, scion of the family of the *Aavanangotte Panicker* wrote a book as early as 1963 claiming *Saastavu* (*Chaathan*) to be the same as *Vishnumaaya* of the *Padmapuraana* paving the way for its immense popularity today. The work of Panicker which was written as a *Kilippaattu* or the form in which the medieval Bhakti poetry was written has sought to club a folk and lower caste religion with the renascent culture of popular Hinduism dominated by the upper castes.

More recently Narayanan a scion of the *Kaattumaatam Mana* near Valanchery in Malappuram has claimed that the worship of *Chaathan* is a form of magic practiced by the *Nambuthiri* Brahmins of Kerala which is otherwise forbidden to them but coming in the form of *Vaishnavamaaya Durga* becomes acceptable in principle as a union of the elements of the Sanskritic deities Siva and Vishnu. In an article written for a popular weekly in Malayalam in 1991 Narayanan claims that it was also a source for knowledge of magic for the *Nambuthiri* households of *Kaattumaatam* and *Kaalakutam*.

All attempts at writing a history of this cult therefore will have to content with the claims of different castes in the authenticity of rituals performed for *Chaathan*. Yet at the bottom of things, it remains that this cult happens to be a distinctively, folk, pastoral and lower caste practice, into which many new castes including the Brahmins have been initiated only of late.

The restricted and rather upstart writing of history of this cult in the vernacular may be attributed to the shroud of secrecy that surrounds its practice till date. The scenario is also largely unlikely to change and the only possibility of a study that then arises is that of the manifestations of the cult in the form of possession at various places, which are reported as events. Kovur, a rationalist undertook an extensive survey of such reports and went on to collect first hand information regarding them in order to subject them to psychoanalytic interpretation as cases of psychic maladies. He even tried to ridicule the faith in such phenomenon as superstitious by claiming that he could actually heal many victims of possession by using film songs in place of the *Mantras* that are generally supposed to be uttered for these. Though popular as a form of literature for a considerable period of time when many of these stories were published in a serialized form in a Malayalam weekly called *Keralasabdam*, it failed to deliver the promise of emancipation from superstition with which it came and hence is verging on obscurity today.

Folklore had a better understanding of the legend of *Chaathan* that allows its historic contextualization in the form of a transformation of the kinship structures amongst the *Izhava*. It is the work of Kottarathil Sankunni on the

legends of Kerala in 1926, a first of its kind in Malayalam that created a niche for *Chaathan* amidst the modern literate public in Kerala. According to it the worship of *Chaathan* grew in Peringottukara village of Trichur district following a crisis that arose in the family of *Aavanangotte Panicker* when there were no successors in the male line. It was left with a lone male member who had no sons-in-law the system of inheritance being matrilineal. In order to find a successor for himself he married a woman and brought her home thus breaking the convention of matriliny which stipulated the residence of the wife after marriage at her natal home. Children born of this union retained the title from their father instead of their mother.

When they grew up they also learned *Mantravaadam* or sorcery from their uncle and so began a cult of *Ganapathi* to realize their goals. But they soon realized that the cult of *Chaathan* was much more powerful because *Chaathan* could be commanded to do things becoming only of slaves which *Ganapathi* could not. So they exchanged *Ganapathi* with *Chaathan* from the house of *Punchanellur Bhattathiri* in order to fortify themselves. *Aitihyamaala* says that they received in exchange 390 of the 400 *Chaathan*s- 10 were already given away to *Kaattumaatam Nambuthiri-* who were with the *Bhappatiri* and established it as the new family cult. The male descendants of these brothers it is who are believed to have brought the *Aavanangotte Kalari* to its prominence today (Sankunni, 2009:552-61).

This could not have been an easy task as songs used in the *kalampattu* (the ritual veneration of *Chaathan* performed by the *Velan*) say that they had to overcome resistance from their own uncle, or mother's brother's claim that *Chaathan* is his property asserting the avuncular rule of inheritance and also because he taught the brothers magic. This they did by claiming *Chaathan* not on their own behalf having actually procured *Chaathan* in exchange from the *Punchanellur Bhattathiri*, but by claiming that *Chaathan* was the dowry that should be duly given to their mother.

The point which could be taken from these accounts is that hybrid structures of family seeking redemption from tradition can give rise to new religious practices. That matriliny as a rule was once followed and later contested by a lower caste like the *Izhava* is what the legend of the *Aavanangotte Panicker* illustrates. Anthropologists have studied matriliny as structures of transformation which should not be observed as stationary or in isolation from patriliny (Levistrauss, 1969; Aiyappan,1934). Insofar as the cult of *Chaathan* is concerned one can only surmise that one of the most respected and well known devotees of *Chaathan* were *Izhava* who changed from a practice of matriliny to patriliny. It is a pointer to hybrid structures of family and inheritance arising out of disputes amongst the patrons, the

preponderance of which has arguably risen to prominence with the contemporary popularity of *Chaathan*. This is a point the details of which have to be yet examined at length. It is also an indicator of how *Chaathan* as shown above dwells on the strength of a domain of relationships any consolidation of which into a specific locus or position is asking for trouble.

There is one more mention of *Chaathan* in this book of legends. This is in relation to an entirely different context and setting. The place happens to be *Akavur* and the patron household a *Mana* or *Nambuthiri* household. The legend forms part of a bigger legend famed as *Parayi Petta Pantirukulam* or the 12 lineages of *Parayi* or a woman of the *Paraya*, untouchable caste and *Vararuchi* a Brahmin saint. The children born to them are abandoned by them because born to exceptionally talented parents, they assume the children will fend for themselves. Eventually they are adopted by 12 different households and they absorb the skills of their foster parents and excel in them as basket-makers, priests, warriors, washer-men, salt sellers, nomads, agriculturists and brick makers thus bringing them together under the description of the singular lineage as born from the womb of a lower caste untouchable woman as *Parayi Petta Pantiru Kulam*. Of these 12 one is *Chaathan* who was brought up in the *Akavur Mana* as one of its dependants. Although the *Mana* has been made famous by legend there is as such no place to worship *Chaathan* here.

A survey of historiographic literature reveals that *Chaathan* has not yet been absorbed into Brahminical Hinduism fully. The account of Kottarathil Sankunni especially seems to suggest this fact. It gives importance to the specific, lower caste and hybrid nature of this worship in terms of accepting new forms of relationships amongst humans. This feature of the cult becomes even clearer when one looks at the story in which *Chaathan* is placed in the rituals of *Velan* as a neutralizing force between the Brahmincal cults of *Saivism* and *Vaishnavism* and as a catalyzing force in the cult of *Sakti* , especially the way it is practiced amongst the non-Brahminical Hindu castes.

Mythology of the Cult

By mythology, I mean one of the different songs telling us the story of the birth of *Chaathan* and his siblings. It is usually told in the form of a performance- a song, as part of a ritual, held almost annually in different lower caste temples in the southern parts of Trichur district, i.e adjoining the areas mentioned in the *Aitihyamala* of Kottarathil Sankunni.

The myths of his birth of late have so overwhelmingly been taken over by the presence of the upper caste deities like *Siva*, *Visnu* and *Paarvati* whereas there is a whole array of elements into which it was initially dispersed

such as those of insects, plants, animals etc. Even within the terms of its mythology, sharp variations can be seen with respect to the lower and higher castes. The one version which I am going to now present belong to the caste *Velan* who is actually addressing a multitude of a species numbering 336 and not any one God.

The peculiarity of this account also lies in its iconography of the mother of *Chaathan*. Venerated in the devotional songs as *Kulivaaka*, the mother of *Chaathan* is herself neither a deity worshipped in or for herself with a specific place associated with the Hindu pantheon other than that of *Chaathan* himself nor is her name taken in ordinary or common parlance because it is in the songs alone that such a name surfaces if at all. Usually though people's names take after the names of gods and goddesses like for instance *Chaathan*, *Siva* or *Paarvati*, *Kulivaaka* hardly ever features in such a list. As we can gather from the songs to *Kuttichaathan*, *Kulivaaka* is a surrogate mother who conceives by consumption of a seed, a tuber into which *Paarvati* had transferred her fetus. This raises several questions as to why *Kulivaaka* is not being portrayed as the real mother of *Chaathan*.

Sontheimer's arguments that the pastoral deities of Deccan are always depicted as having two wives – one from the plains and another from the hills- can be also seen to be partly true with the birth of *Chaathan* who is born to *Kulivaaka* though conceived by *Paarvati*. The only difference is that it is in *Chaathan*'s mother, and not wife that merge elements of the tribal and the pastoral.

Lord *Siva*, once when he stepped out of his abode in *Kailaasa* for hunting came across *Kulivaaka,* a woman of such beauty that he was instantly in love with her. When he approached her she tried to save herself by requesting him to return from his hunt when she will wait for her. As soon as *Siva* departed *Kulivaaka* approached *Paarvati* and informed her of the incidents that happened. *Paarvati* upon hearing this took the matter to *Visnu* who suggested that *Paarvati* should take the form of *Kulivaaka* and wait for *Siva* at the designated spot. *Paarvati* agreed and when she took the form of *Kulivaaka, Visnu* himself was enticed by her that it led to the conception of *Kuttichaathan* by magic or *Maaya*. Later on in the rendezvous of *Paarvati* with *Siva* the rest of the *Chaathan* clan were also conceived by *Paarvati* in her form of *Kulivaaka*.

Kuttichaathan and his brothers though conceived by *Paarvati* was born to *Kulivaaka* and she took their care until time came for their naming ceremony. Sent to *Kailaasa* by their mother for this *Kuttichaathan* who grew up as a son of *Vishnu* challenges *Siva*'s step- fatherly attitude to not merely him, but also his brothers who were true sons of *Siva* . He asks for

ornaments at the time of initiation from *Siva* and refuses the plantain string with which *Siva* adorned his brothers. Not only that, he also asks *Siva* to choose a host to offer him and his brothers the daily hospitality of rituals and offerings. The *Bhattathiri* house hold of *Punchanellur* is then chosen by Siva of which *Chaathan* and his brothers become slaves but not before they have all taken the best of cows and buffaloes from Siva's stable.

Velan who are the composers of this song are freelancing ritual specialists in performing the calendrical festivals for *Chaathan* in the ancestral temples of different families, of different castes and also the healing specialists in treating cases of possession. They can also practice the *Mantra* for the appeasement of *Chaathan*. There is a strong belief also among them that its use in public or for anything other than related to its object, i.e of healing possession could be dangerous to themselves.

Conclusion

To sum up, there are three points from which I have raised tenable perspectives to an understanding of the cult of possession in the case of the deity called *Kuttichaathan*. The ethnographic perspective points to its conception as a critique of the assumed notions of hierarchy ruling or governing human relationships according to the caste system. The historiogrpahic perspective which becomes relevant because of the different attempts to historicize the practice of the cult in the twentieth century tries to compare and evaluate the perspectives which seek to combine the cult with other dominant traditions of Hinduism. These have been by and large attempts at Sanskritization, but with the clause provided by Staal (1963) added to it that it is also vernacularization at the same time. The mythological perspective tries to highlight the irreducible elements of a non-Sanskritic culture that dominates the cult in its performative aspect which is integral to certain ancestral groupings belonging to different castes- higher and lower- of which the sources yet remain unknown.

To conclude, I will begin with a point which has to be noted that those houses devoted to the worship of *Chaathan* desist from eating the meat of cows or buffaloes. This is for the reason that these animals, it is believed are the vehicles of *Chaathan*. Notwithstanding which they continue to make offerings of chicken-cock sacrifices to *Chaathan* for his propitiation and distributing its cooked meat as *Prasaadam* (offering) to be distributed amongst the devotees. A documentation of the tribes and castes of India by the Anthropological Survey of India cites on the contrary that the *Velan* do eat beef and they are not aware of the *Varna* system suggesting that the consumption of beef is a practice concurrent amongst all lower castes.

Sanskritization as an example of post-colonial anthropology has always maintained that let alone beef, all kinds of meat are becoming taboo to the lower castes, slowly emerging to the ways of vegetarianism generally followed amongst caste Hindus. Caught between the domains of colonial and post-colonial anthropology one can clearly see here a case of how subtle details could have been lost when they are employed with the tendency to generalize social phenomena.

This is a point that requires a little more elaboration in terms of the method of observation which fore-grounded the theory of Sanskritization as well as Westernization[11]. Srinivas (1989:169) while commenting on the categories of the observer and the observed had earmarked for the anthropologists observation only human beings and not "rocks, plants or ants". The world of objects existed only in so far as they were reducible to the subjectivity of the anthropologist himself without which no observation is possible. But his method lacked a theory of observation per se except for the exclusion of everything non-human from it. Such a theory falls into the assumption that the observer is perhaps the in-observable. He must, at least, be last on the chain of observables. If he is supplanted, he becomes observed.

One must be careful to notice that Srinivas though mixes up the notions of subject and object to eventually make it possible to reduce everything to the subjectivity of the anthropologist little does he permit any transgression or exchange in the roles of the observer and the observed. If one were to evaluate the role of the anthropologist in such a scenario, one can notice the method of observation itself turning from a scientific procedure to a cultural phenomenon, which is not without its implications for the scientific research that the anthropologist has set out to do. This nuanced area of the theory of observation could not be of more relevance to anything than the caste system.

Living in an era of information and recognizing the role of anthropologist him/herself as one of an informant the gravity of this conjuncture and disjuncture in the theory of participant-observation cannot be overemphasized "It might be said that the anthropologist helps to provide a background knowledge for the journalist, bureaucrat, and the information-seeking politician" (Srinivas, 1989:169).

The idea of subject is human for the theory of participant-observation emphasizing a panoramic view from the centre. It has no place for non-human or the excluded. This comes to the fore in the study of objects representing supernatural phenomenon, this being also a domain to the study of which participant-observation can never seriously be contemplated as a method. But the relevance of this cannot be ruled out also because phenomena that an anthropologist seeks to observe has to include all, without distinction

of good from bad or evil or natural from supernatural.

Here one must return to what has been accomplished by the literature on possession vis-à-vis the caste system. As an attempt to objectively understand the processes of its functioning, a binary of Brahminical and non-Brahminical ways or methods of possession has been already established. This was accomplished on the basis that the Brahminical methods are always intended to inculcate controlled states of possession through complicated and precise processes whereas non-Brahminical methods inculcated strategies for release rather than control (Smith, 2006:591). But like certain Brahmanical rituals which have to be treated as cases of possession as argued by both Smith (op.cit) and Staal (1963), the possession of *Chaathan* is never calendrical or life-cycle based. It is more of a fleeting phenomenon in which aggrieved individuals can invoke the power of the deity to get compensated for disadvantages accruing to them because of the status quo. So the invocation of *Chaathan* is specifically an instance of domination that transgresses the distinctions of Varna imposed on caste.

NOTES

[1] Frederick.M.Smith (2006:549) stating that Chathan is a spirit indigenous to Kerala adds that it is a class (Gana) of Bhutas, specifically a Jangli Bhuta (primitive, undomesticated jungle spirit).

[2] *Karimkutti* a sibling of *Chaathan* was a servant in the *Nambuthiri* household of *Kaalakutam* in northern Kerala. He was punished for protecting the chastity of the wife of this *Nambuthiri* when he was away. *Karimkutti* being left to guard the house had stopped a suitor to the *Nambuthiri* woman in the house because his master was away. The fact that *Karimkutti* stopped the suitor without seeking the consent of the woman and had him sent away brought on him the wrath of the landlord or his patron who disliked his servant acting on his own to thwart the interests of the masters and punished him mercilessly. *Karimkutti* became vengeful and burnt down the whole household and according to certain legends its occupants went childless till he could be sufficiently propitiated and venerated as a deity

[3] Metaphorically, the phenomenon of possession has been compared here to a parasitic movement. Chase the parasite- he comes galloping back, accompanied, just like the demons of an exorcism, with a thousand like him, but more ferocious, hungrier, all bellowing, roaring, clamouring (Serres:2007:18).

[4] To play the position or to play the location is to dominate the relation. It is to have a relation only with the relation itself. Never with the stations from which it comes, to which it goes, and by which it passes (Serres, 2007:38).

[5] It can be described in the metaphor of noise as Serres uses it. Claiming that communication only emerges from background noise Serres says, that dialogue is a game played by two interlocutors united against the phenomenon of interference and confusion, tied together by mutual interest in a battle against noise (Laura Salisbury, 2006).

[6] Serres (2007) argues that the word martyr means witness in Greek and this cannot be a subject.

7   A quasi-object is that which creates inter-subjectivity in its circulation like a ball which circulates in a game (Serres, 2007). The one who plays or holds the ball is the excluded and the ball itself is the quasi object that defines the realm of inter-subjectivity between the players. There is no subject as such but only a relation of inter-subjectivity. The parasite or the excluded one in playing its position, dominates or plays the relation of inter-subjectivity.

8   It is interesting to see how Serres (2007) says such a paradigm is derived from the Greek word eucharist. As currently known in its plagiarized form its function has been substituted by a word called "thank you" in all languages. This word which is often reciprocated with a "welcome" brings the recipient into the donors' position thus excluding every possibility of a third position. The response to eucharist in Greek meant Good or Holy Graces which includes a third, other than the donor and recipient, and which as a position is dispersed throughout the chain of relations.

9   "The social contract was thereby completed, but closed upon itself, leaving the world on the sidelines, an enormous collection of things reduced to the status of passive objects to be appropriated……..The subject of knowledge and action enjoys all Rights and its objects none. They have not yet attained any legal dignity. Which is why, since that time, science has all laws on its side" (Serres, 2008:36).

10   Michel Serres criticized the notion of contract when he said "The all-out war of all against all never took place, and will never take place……All against one is the eternal law…. The result is always certain, and the war is asymmetrical" (Serres, 2007:228). The only link is the parasite to which all relationships are in fact clubbed to each other as in a chain. There is as such no relationship that can be conceived independent of the parasite, says he while adding that "the theory of being, ontology brings us to atoms. The theory of relations brings us to the parasite" (Serres, 2007:185).

11   Srinivas saw in Westernization, a counterpart to Sanskritization as well as a strong commitment to ideals of British humanitarianism which also supposedly settles all problem related to egalitarianism in Indian society (Saberwal, 1979).

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RELIGION AS AN EMANCIPATORY PROJECT TWO DALIT 'RELIGIOUS' STORIES FROM COLONIAL TRAVANCORE∗

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ABSTRACT

Putting aside the conventional notions of 'religion' and the alluring debates of 'religious conversions', this study, as a working synopsis, tries to understand how dalits looked at religion and religious congregations of their own, by bearing an argument that these two notions used as an emancipatory project to elevate their own subjugated internal selves as well as external social selves in the context of colonial modernity. For doing this the present paper examines briefly the life of two dalit religious leaders i.e., Poyykayil Sri Kumaragurudevan and Sri Subhanandagurudevan and their activities in colonial Travancore.
Keywords: Dalit Religion, Poyykayil Kumargurudevan, PRDS, Subhanandagurudevan, Atmabodhodaya Sangham, Colonial Travancore**.**

Introduction

So far as Social Science is concerned, 'faith' or 'belief', which played a crucial role in shaping the course of the history of humankind, never attained enough importance to make it its subject matter. Most of the wars, bloodsheds, and struggles across world were actually either by and of or for 'faith' or 'belief'. Studies on religions also thought only through the constrained eyes of sociology, where 'faith' or 'belief' is often pushed to the realm of 'religiosity', which falls in the sphere of theology in the contemporary systems of thought. Quiet contrary to these concerns Social Science has to take a turn in its outlook and need to be have a 'reverse gaze' from the point of view of the 'oppressed'. This, I believe, helps to seek how religion and their own 'faith' or 'belief' played a major role to resist the oppression and make their survival possible. By saying this, at least as far as the dalits are concerned, what I

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precisely mean is that we need to look at from the people's point of view to understand the role of 'faith' or 'belief' that helped to formulate their own life-world in their life-struggles. And thus, by examining its social science aspects, this is an attempt to look at the role of religion as an emancipatory project and its foundational element i.e. 'faith' or 'belief' and its function in the anti-caste mobilisation in the early twentieth-century Kerala, especially Travancore. This paper briefly tries to investigate the lives of Poykayil Sri Kumaragurudevan and Sri Shubhanandagurudevan and their respective religious sects namely *Prathyksha Raksha Daiva Sabha* (*PRDS*) and *Athma Bodhodaya Sangham* and venture to argue the above mentioned conceptual formulations.

The Context

Let me introduce briefly the social context of Kerala, Travancore in particular, during late ninetieth and early twentieth centuries, where these two leaders and their movement emerged. During this time the condition of Dalits, the then untouchable castes were very pathetic than any other social groups in the globe. Not only untouchability but unapproachability and even unseeability prevailed. It was a system based on graded inequality, in which each of the castes should keep their socially instructed distances by caste norms. To put it in other words, an untouchable had to maintain a distance of 64 feet from a namboothiri Brahmin, and the other middle-ordered castes kept their places in between this distance and occupied their own socially prescribed places and strictly observed these caste distances (Bhaskaranunni, 2000: 136-137). Along with so many caste observances, irrespective of where they belong in the caste hierarchy, people lived their lives, with a fear of being polluted and subjected to be out-casted, which is the most degrading form of social expulsion, if they curtail any of the caste norms (Bhaskaranunni, 2000: 30; Padmanabhamenon, 1986: 251-252). Though slavery in its most brutal form embedded with caste, abolished by Princely State of Travancore with its Law in 1855 (Kusuman, 1973; Nair, 1986), it prevailed even thereafter for several decades. The efforts of Christian Missionaries, and the benevolent attitudes of colonial governmentality, brought initial changes in the society.

This was the social condition in brief and as a response to these oppressive socio-political and cultural subjugations, several social groups emerged under their own leadership through different forms of unification paradigms by asserting their own subjectivities. We could see that 'religion' was one of the powerful motifs in most of these unification processes, and it was in fact played a crucial role in the phenomenon called *Samudayavalkaranam*[1] (communitisation, *i.e.,* the formations of

communities) latter. Among dalits, Poyykayil Sri Kumaragurudevan and his PRDS and Sri Shubhanandagurudevan and his Athmabodhodaya Sangham deserve special mention due to not only their critical engagement with lofty religions and society but also their consistency to remain their critical little religion to alive in the present, as living artefacts of anti-caste struggle in Kerala from dalit side. Nevertheless, these personalities were contemporaries of other dalit and lower caste organic intellectuals, who shared their ideas, brotherhood and spaces and belonged to the same constellation of anti-caste struggle. Let me briefly introduce these two dalit religious personalities.

Poyykayil Sri Kumaragurudevan and PRDS[2]

Kumaragurudevan was born in 1879 in a Paraya family, who were slaves of a rich Syirian Christian family in Eraviperoor near Thiruvalla of the Present Pthanamthitta District of Kerala. His initial name was 'Kumaran' (Samithi, 1983: 26). Because their Landlord was Christian, he got a chance to learn to read and write, and ferociously read Bible and related literature during the off-time of his work, herding cattle. Even in his adolescence he expressed great talents in oratory mixed with his enchanting poetical skills, which amazed his friends and neighbours. Thus at the age of eighteen Kumaran and his family were baptised as Christians in the same church of their Landlord's, i.e. Marthoma Church and adopted a new Christian name, Yohannan. His intrinsic skills of oratory and unfulfilling enthusiasm in biblical and religious knowledge made him an *Upadesi*, pastor in the church. Though whosoever converted into Christianity, the untouchables in the Church faced very bad treatment within the Church, and Yohannan's experiences were not different from that. Thus he and his followers came out of the Church, and joined in the Brethren's Church. Due to the similar experiences he again changed his Church and joined in the *Verpadu Sabha*. After coming out from the *Verpadu Sabha*, later he started independent gospel activities within which, he attracted large number of believers especially from the lower castes. The Syrian Christians felt provoked and they tried to even murder Yohannan several times and fortunately he survived from these attempts. Wherever he preaches gospel, he used the themes of slavery, liberation, and so on, with this the Syrian Christians felt offended and they levelled several malicious charges against him including blasphemy. During at the time of a secret meeting at night in Vakathanam, near Kottayam in 1908, he asked to his followers: "Did you find any saying about your slave experience in the Bible? Do you believe that the Bible will help you to liberate yourself from your pathetic experiences? If not then why do you need this? Throw it in to the fire", he

commanded. Thus yohannan and his followers burnt the Bible (Samithi, 1983: 47).

In one of his poem Yohannan expressed his critique of the Christian missionary activities, which resulted the mushrooming of different churches on the basis of caste discrimination, and implied his desperation. He sang:

> "One church to the Pulayan
> One church to the Parayan
> One church to the Marakkan, who is a fisherman
> Though Churches and Churches came out and arrayed
> I did not see any change in the discrimination"[3] (Samithi, 1983: 37).

These activities provoked the Syrian Christians and they plotted criminal cases against Yohannan. During this time he conducted a procession with his followers in thousands, who dressed in pure white cloths with a slogan that "peace for world" which interpreted as he was spreading public appeal in favour of Germany. With all this convictions Yohannan got an arrest warrant and appeared before the court at Changanacherry, where he declared his name of the church for the children of the slave as *Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha*(PRDS) in 1910. The Magistrate could not find any guilt in his calm, peaceful and logical answers and freed him from all the charges (Samithi, 1983: 63).

It is evident that one occasion Yohannan expressed his agony on his own people's deprivation of spiritual wellbeing and an indication of his departure from lofty religions, once he sang:

> "We travelled like an orphan through the off roads-
> Of Hindu religion
> We travelled like an orphan through the off roads-
> Of Christian religion
> We won't get admission in Hindu religion
> We won't get admission in Christian religion"[4] (Appachan, 2011: 45)

Subsequently PRDS harnessed its growth and it became a well organised religious movement of the oppressed, irrespective of any sub-caste feelings, under an evoked notion of 'slave memory' as its basic theme of Unity[5]. Having become a God-like figure Poyykayil Yohannan led his people in any of their hardships they faced and people began to believe him, submitted their full faith in him. He prescribed cleanliness, healthy life, self-reliance and self-respect and cultivated a sense of owning their own land among the untouchable castes, which were totally new experience for them.

PRDS under the leadership of Poyykayil Yohannan flourished as a spiritual as well as a political movement of untouchables in Travancore. They bought their own lands, built their own churches and dwellings, established

schools including English medium, developed cottage industrial work places and so on and so forth. In 1921 Yohannan was nominated as a member in the Sree Moolam Popular Assembly (*Praja Sabha*), where he relentlessly pleaded for the policy measures from the government to uplift the condition of the untouchables. He met the high level authoritative people from both native and foreign side including the Maharaja to the viceroys and submitted series of memorandums to them in this regard. With all his ceaseless efforts and spiritual leadership for leading untouchable populace to a dignified life, people affectionately called him "Appachan", the father and came to known as Poyykayil Appachan. He passed away due to ill health in 1939, and his second wife, Jnanamma became the leader of the movement. Under her leadership PRDS gone through drastic changes and Poyykayil Yohannan renamed as Poyykayil Kumaragurudevan. PRDS is still a very dynamic influencial movement in Southern Kerala and it has around 2.5 lakhs members as followers.

Now let us turn to the story of Subhanandagurudevan.

Sri Shubhanandagurudevan and Athmabodhodaya Sangham[6]

Shubhanandagurudevan was born in 1882 in a paraya family near Thiruvalla of central Travancore in Kerala. His first name was Paappan (Theerthar, 1989: 201). From his childhood onwards he showed a spiritual inclination and said to have gone through an ecstatically spiritual experience at the age of seven. He got a formal education till second standard fortunately through a missionary school though the untouchables never allowed to study in schools during these period. Immediately after the death of his mother, at the age of twelve, he left his home and became a spiritual wanderer, and had been associated with several religious belief systems. Attracted with Christian missionary activities he converted in to Christianity and received the Christian name 'Pathrose' and worked with them for nine continues years and later came out of it (Vijaya Prasad, 2010: 27). In his entire religious quest, he was trying to find out a solution for the evils of caste system and wanted to destroy it completely. But he never got a satisfaction or solution from any of these religions. Eventually he continued his spiritual search and finally undergone a deep meditation(*Tapas*) for two years, eleven months and twenty two days (1915-1918) beneath a Punnamaram, an Alexandrian laurel tree in Cheenthalar, a remort forest area near Peermade in Idukki District, where it believed to that he got *Athma Bodhodayam* (Vijaya Prasad, 2010: 28) which can be loosely translated as self-enlightenment or self-realisation. He adopted himself a new name "Subhanandan", the one who possess good and supreme bliss.

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After his attainment of *Athma Bodhodayam*, he reached Cherukole a small village near Mavelikkara of Alapuzha District and founded an *Asramam*, in 1918. The next year, in 1919 he founded *Athma Bodhodaya Sangham*, through this he preached his teachings and addressed downtrodden people, attracted large number of disciples including upper-caste Hindus. Artist Ramavarma Raja, uncle of the Sri Chithira Thirunal, the then Maharaja of Travancore has later became the Patron of the *Athma Bodhodaya Sangham*. People called him with awe as Sree Subhanandagurudevan and his essence of teachings and ideals codified in a sentence as "*Athma Bodhodayam Subhanandam*" i.e. the self-realisation is the good and supreme bliss and he proclaimed that he born for destroy caste through his knowledge, *Athma Bodhodayam*, which he attained through his rigorous penance and intense meditation and he stood for "one caste one religion and one God". His fascinating and spontaneous speeches and recitation of fine poems, known as *Keerthanams*, carry his spiritual messages, emphasised in anti-caste themes, attracted large number of people[7]. It also enabled Subhanandagurudevan and his disciples, not only to organise untouchables as his believers and followers but also gathered large number of upper caste people as either disciples or friends and strong supporters. Naturally Subhanadagurudevan and his *Sangham* met serious threat and strong oppositions and humiliations from the caste ridden society. Gurudevan was ridiculed as 'Parayan Swami' and several times fortunately escaped even from murder attempts. He used to travel during night to avoid these kinds of dangers.

Subhanandagurudevan and his *Sangham* worked hard for uplifting the untouchable castes even in its material realm. They started weaving schools and other cottage industries attached to their several *Asramams* situated in different parts of Travancore. They opened orphanages, old age homes, and Ayurveda hospitals and Vaidya Salas . He advised his followers to cultivate cleanliness and instructed to wear fine and neat dress. He taught them to use refined language and built stable mind, good character and behaviour. In 1934 Subhanandagurudevan visited Mahatma Gandhi, when the latter visited Kerala, at Mavelikkara. Eventually in his speech Subhanandagurudevan said that though we could achieve independence through our politically organising power against the British slavery, Indian people can only experience real human freedom until we end completely the caste discrimination and its dreadful inequality (Theerthar, 1989: 102). After hearing about his activities Gandhiji offered his support to *Athmabodhodaya Sangham*. Having a strong believe that the caste discrimination concretised through temples, in 1935 Subhanadagurudevan and his 400 disciples conducted a long march towards

Travancore palace from Mavelikara to see the Maharaja Sri Chithira Tirunal for convincing him to the importance of temple entry (Theerthar, 1989: 111-114). After his relentless efforts to liberate the downtrodden both spiritually and socially, he attained *Maha Samadhi* at the age of sixty nine in 1950. *Athma Bodhodaya Sangham* is still continuing its spiritual mission and having nearly three lakhs of followers.

Religion as an Emancipatory Project

Having referred to the 'subordinated peoples'' attempt to emerge in to the history, Prof: G. Aloysius expressed his view that the multifarious and scattered emancipatory efforts of the generally lower and excluded castes, tribes and other marginalised sections of the society in the modern period were, in varying degrees autonomous, implying thereby an inspiration and trajectory of their own (Aloysius, 2000: *vii*). Here we can see that both Poyykayil Kumaragurudevan and Subhanandagurudevan emerged from the lowest untouchable castes and carried their mission to emancipate entire untouchable community through their own heuristically invented religious ideas and found their own autonomous religious organisations as a critique of the existed lofty religions in the context of colonial modernity. They confronted lofty religions, survived from the frictions of the colonial civil society and dealt with colonial State strategically. They built a social space, which relentlessly engaged in dialogue with the opposing societal psyche and forced them continuously to change. Though these little religious sects emerged and flourished in the matrix of colonial modernity, they were neither traditional nor modern and it was something different from that. From this what I mean that they came out from the traditional values and norms by offering a critique of it and flourished in the context of colonial modern by imbibing its possibilities to sustain but stepped out from it by being made a new but non-modern entity. If we did not look on this matter very carefully we my fail to understand its nuances.

This ambivalent nature or 'doubleness' of these two religious sects in fact suggesting a new vantage point for looking at the anti-caste intellectual labour in colonial India. Through this formulation if we take the case of Ambedkar, as suggested by most of the post-colonial scholars from India as 'unalloyed modernist', by sometimes pointing his three piece suite as a complete symbol of modernity, can be a gesture of dissent. Interestingly, Poyykayill Kumaragurudevan suggested his followers to wear clean white dress while Subhanandagurudeven instructed to his followers to wear clean and neat dress, as a symbol of purity of mind and human dignity in the context that the untouchables were not allowed to wear even proper dress. Similarly,

Ambedkar suggested "proper, clean and decent clothes, which is an "object of respect" and "enhances ones personality" (Dayal, 2011: 44-45). He used to wear his English suites when he appeared before English officials as well as native upper-caste political as well as social elites. He used to wear ordinary dress when he appears before his fellow folks. But he used to wear Indian dress for Viceroy's Parties (Dayal, 2011: 46). What I am suggesting here is that when we compare these three figures, the commonality is that, though this may apparently suggesting to the symbols of modernity but in contrast to that, it was an outcome of what they were aware of the 'politics of appearance' or 'politics in appearance', which was formulated in fact in response to their social context.

Similarly, Poyykayil Kumaragurudevan's *PRDS*, Subhanadagurudevan's *Athma Bodhodaya Sangham* and Ambedker's Navayana Buddhism were in fact are heuristically invented religions through which, they offered a critique of both traditional and contemporary society and lofty religions. Here again we could see that through their attempts they used the colonial modern/modern apparatuses to form their own 'new kind of religions' but stepped out from it, by using belief or faith as its foundational forms of making a collective consciousness among themselves for liberating inside and outside of the social life world. Any attempt to read these phenomena as simply as 'modern', which actually coming out from the 'political correctness' of the critique of modernity, would fail to capture the intricacies of these. To put it in other words the critical edges of these religions simultaneously critiquing the traditional as well as colonial modern/modern society and religions and claiming a status of 'new critical religions'. By doing this it is essentially imagining a socio-political and spiritual emancipation for the dalits.

NOTES

[1] The term *Samudayavalkaranam* was pointed out by Sri K. K. Kochu, a dalit thinker and popular writer in Kerala, through his several writings in many Malayalam periodicals from 90s onwards.

[2.] I prepared the biographical accounts of Poyykayil Kumaragurudevan by referring some of the biographies on him like Chentharasery, 1983; Samithy, 1983 and Renukumar, 2009 and articles appeared in different periodicals like Sanal Mohan, 2005 and Sanal Mohan, 2006.

[3] Translation is mine.

[4] Translation is mine.

[5] For more details on how PRDS used 'slave memory' as an artifact or a basic theme of unity see Sanal Mohan, 2006.

6   I prepared the biographical account of Sri Subhanandagurudevan by referring the works like theerthar, 1989, Prasad; 2010 and Thiruvadikal, 2010.

7   For more details on Subhanandagurudevans spiritual teachings see Thiruvadikal, 2010.

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RITUAL AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE WILDERNESS: ETHNIC PAINTING OF THE ALU KURUMBAS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the aesthetic sense and technical aspects of the ethnic painting/tribal folk art of the Nilgiri Kurumbas. Ethnic painting in general articulates the aesthetic expressions of tribal/folk life and hence is symbolic of harmonious blend of nature and the human. They are painted on the walls of their huts and the colours used are mainly herbal extracts and fruit juices. A study of Kurumba painting against Neolithic art or prehistoric rock art would reveal a lot about the evolution of tribal art and the mysteries of tribal life.

Keywords: Ethnic-Painting,Alu Kurumba, Rock-Art,Nilgiris, Everyday life

Introduction

Tribal folk art is generally known as 'ethnic art' and one such ethnic art form is tribal painting. Indian tribal paintings are highly diverse in character. Each tribal group, however small it may be, has its own significant and unique style. Though simple in nature, their paintings are highly expressive and full of vitality. They express the whole story of the material life of a tribal group and serve as a veritable visual source of study of the tribal communities. The present study, while attempting to give a broad idea of the diverse aspects of one of the rich cultural heritage of India, ethnic paintings in historical perspective, also aims at familiarizing one of the forgotten ethnic groups of South India, *Alu Kurumba*[1] of the Nilgiris and their paintings to art historians and art lovers.

Historically, the tradition of the engraving and painting on the walls of natural rock is the artistic expression of the *pre-historic cave dwellers* all over the world. Archaeologists have identified that the early *rock-art* paintings and engravings corresponded to different periods of the *Stone Age* and even continued up to a short span of the early historic period. For a long time the *rock-art* of the world was an enigma for archaeologists and historians. The entire surface of the rock shelters contain *engravings* and paintings of different themes involving human beings, animals, trees and geometrical pattern, each one is different according to the taste and culture of the pre-historic communities. The

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colour used is red-ochre, grey saffron, pinkish buff and brownish yellow.Sonawane argues that art is mostly a reflection of the human mind to a changing environment and culture. From times immemorial, such creative works of human origin have been controlled by his feeling of visual space and reflected how men perceived the world (2002:266). LeroiGourhan (1968: 48) has remarked that in a society models of weapons change very often, models of tools less often, and social institutions very seldom, while religious practices continue unchanged for millennia. Against this background it is not difficult to trace out the roots of the ethnic paintings from the pioneer *rock engravings* and paintings.

Ethnic Painting: Features

Ethnic art is a term used to define several types of aboriginal art in the form of painting, metal work, wood work, bead making, jewellery making etc. Paintings are one of the most important expressions of aboriginal art. Ethnic paintings are seen generally on the house/hut walls of the tribal folk of India and are called wall paintings. Wall painting represents graceful geometrical patterns, men, animals and symbols and is classified into two categories - simple drawings and sketches filled in colors. On the basis of theme, surface of execution and locality it is further divided into four categories. The four classifications are *abstract, representative, natural* and *symbolic*. The *abstract* paintings are drawn at the lower or upper portions of the wall or around the door corners. *Representational* figures are drawn singly on the wall and they and naturalistic forms are sketched at a certain height from the level of the earth and in the centre of the wall or on both the sides of the door. *Symbolic* forms are seen in the interiors. Abstract painting is the most common variety and is popular among almost all ethnic painters of India. The basic themes of abstract paintings are geometrical pattern akin to Paleolithic rock art and it is very difficult to identify the meaning or utility of these symbols. Symbolic forms represent some familiar figures in the surroundings like human beings, animals and birds. Most of the tribal paintings are representative in nature and are spontaneously painted on the basis of artist's creativity. In naturalistic forms human beings, animals and nature are depicted.

Ethnic Painting in India

Every aspect of Indian ethnic art blends into the pervasive greenery with perfect harmony. India is a rich store house of different varieties of ethnic paintings. It has won the admiration of all art lovers, historians and archaeologists in different parts of the world. Paintings are an integral part of tribal existence. They signify social and economic well being, important events

in life, merry making, festive joys, reverence to ancestors, and religious symbols. A cursory glimpse at the panorama of Indian ethnic paintings reflects regional, cultural and ethnic variations. On the basis of this variation we can classify the ethnic paintings as follows.

Western India

Tribal paintings of Western India are an extension of the ancient customs and traditions of the numerous ethnic groups of the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat. The prominent artists of these areas are *Rathwas* in Gujarath and *Warli* in Maharashtra. The celebrated paintings of *Rathwas* are known as *Pithora* paintings(Tribhuvan and Finkenauer, 2003) and the painters are solely male members and known as *Lakharas*. *Pithora* paintings (Fig.1) are colorful wall paintings dedicated to the Supreme Being; *Pithora* is painted on various ceremonial/festive occasions or to invoke the blessings of God *Pithora* or to eliminate natural calamities. A majority of *Pithora* paintings portray the wedding of *Pithora* and his consort *Pithori,* accompanied by dancing people, birds, animals, musicians, etc. Being a symbolic and ritualistic form *Pithora* paintings are found on the inner walls of the tribal houses. The exquisite character of these paintings are that they are dynamic figures with properly blended colors, symbol of happiness, peace and prosperity and it denotes auspicious occurrence like wedding, child birth and festive occasions. Before painting the walls are plastered with 2 layers of cow dung and a layer of white chalk powder. The raw materials are arranged by unmarried girls in the tribe, a process which they call as *Lipna*. The main wall, which is the largest, is considered sacred and paintings of legends of creation are made here. The two side walls contain figures of the deity and ancestor. The colour is prepared from natural products and is mixed with milk. Then this solution is again mixed with intoxicating solution made from *Mahua* tree or Indian Butter Tree (Maducalongifolia). The major colours used are red, vermilion, orange, yellow, indigo, ultramarine, green, silver and black and the brush is prepared by thrashing twigs of *Neem* tree (Azadirachtaindica) or bamboo (Bambuseae).

The *Warli* tribe in Maharashtra executed their artistic talent on the mud walls of their houses and is popularly known as *Warli* painting (Fig.2). Unlike the *Pithora* painters, artists are female members of the community. The main theme of this ethnic art is harvest and the name is originated from the word *Warla* which means a piece of land or a field. One of the interesting things related with this painting is the color usage. Only white color prepared from rice powder is used for painting. Besides harvest, other important themes are wedding, birth ceremonies, everyday life scenes etc. This painting is also notable for its relation with rock art of ancient

India because they used geometric patterns like dot, crooked line square, triangle and circle. They used triangles to indicate mountain and circles to indicate sun and the moon. Being an agricultural community we can relate their art form with Neolithic rock art.

Eastern India

The tribal areas of Eastern India are mainly the states of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa. Most popular ethnic groups in West Bengal and Bihar are *Santhals* and *Santhal* paintings (Fig.3) are prepared on hand-made papers with poster colours and the themes are natural surroundings, everyday life, fields, dances, harvests, wine parties, Hindu Gods and Goddesses (Kaiser, 2012). The paintings are popularly known among the *Santhal* of *Jharkhand* as *Paitkar* paintings (Fig.4). Specialized painters of this ethnic group known as '*Jadu Patua*' or magic painters inhabiting the borders of West Bengal and Bihar, paint images which speak about the life of *Santhals* and are painted with organic materials. The themes of *Paitkar* paintings are Goddess *Manasa,* the Goddess of Serpents, scenes of donation of alms to Hindu gods and also to the regional tribal gods, daily lives of the local people of Jharkhand etc. This painting is also known as scroll painting.

The *Oraon* tribes of Jharkhand are involved in several forms of paintings which include *Oraon Comb Cut* paintings (Ghosh, 2003). The designs of the *Oraon* paintings (Fig.5) are geometric patterns, birds, fishes, arches, cattle etc.

The notable ethnic painting in Orissa is *Ittal* painting (Fig.6) and artists are from *Saora* tribe. The expert *Ittal* painters are popularly known as *Ittalmaran*or picture man. These paintings are executed on the village walls to please the gods and ancestors for averting disease, promoting fertility, to celebrate festive occasions, and for ceremonial functions. It is believed that before *Saora* artists started their work they got revelation in their dreams regarding the theme and they acted according to the direction in their dreams. Their most important motifs are horses, riders, monkeys climbing or perched on trees, deer, peacock, dancing villagers, elephants, lizards, tigers, goats, monkeys, sun, moon, huts, cattle, women with baskets, flowers, birds, combs, villagers playing musical instruments like trumpets, drums, gongs, *Idital* the tribal deity, priests, worshippers, and scenes of ceremonies of seed sowing, harvesting, and hunting. Figures are placed in circular or triangular panels around the *Ittal*. One of the interesting elements in *Saora* paintings are their rich blending with nature. They used bamboo brush and the main colours used are black made from soot of oil lamps and white from sun dried rice powder. These two colours are mixed in water, juice from roots and herbs and made into a paste.

Central India

The most vibrant ethnic artists of Central India are the Gond and the Bhil inhabiting in Madhya Pradesh, Bundelkhand, Gondwana, Nimar and Malwa. The Gond paintings (Perdriolle, 2012) are lively expressions from their everyday life, religious sentiments and devotions and painters are womenfolk (Fig.7). They marvelously painted festivals like *Karwa Chauth, Deepavali, Ahoi, Ashtami, Nag Panchami, Sanjhi* etc. Other important items that figured in their paintings are horses, elephants, tigers, birds, gods, men in bright and multi colours. Some of these were etched on the mud walls of their houses (Fig.8).

The Bhil paintings (Ibid) are noted for their images from myth and folklore and are executed on the interior walls of their houses. They prepared colours from juice of leaves and flowers and brushes are made from Neem twigs. The traditional painters of this community are popularly known as *lekhindra* and they were experts in drawing *Pithora* horses. Being an agricultural community they painted seasons that affected their agriculture, natural calamities and gods who protect their field and life.

South India – Alu-Kurumbas

Kurumba is one of the traditional ethnic groups[2] of *Nilgiris* in South India. Their chief occupations are swidden cultivation, hunting and food gathering. The *Nilgiri* is a district of Tamil Nadu which is located at the point of the union of the *Eastern* and *Western Ghats*. The natural boundary of the plateau on the South is *Bhavani* river, on the North *Moyar* river where the *Nilgiri* borders the *Karnataka* State, on the West, it borders *Wayanad* plateau in *Kerala* State and on the East the *Coimbatore* district of *Tamil Nadu*. The *Kurumbas* are the smallest tribal group who are conservative and are remarkable for the degree to which they adhere to old ways of living. Among them there are two subdivisions – *Palu-Kurumba* and *Alu-Kurumba*. The *Kurumbas* of Attappadi are *Palu[3] Kurumba* and of *Nilgiri* are *Alu[4] Kurumba*. They are separated by the geographical setting. The *Alu-Kurumbas* live in the upper elevations of the *Nilgiris* and the *Palu-Kurumba* live in the lower elevation on both banks of the river *Bhavani*. The *Palu-Kurumba* are believed to be migrants from the *Kund*, a region in the Nilgiris. Dieter B. Kapp, who made two years' extensive study about the Kurumbas of this region, points out that the Nilgiris are a zone of refugee tribes like Kurumba, Toda, Iruïa, Kota and Badaga. They are small factions of groups flourishing elsewhere and came here. The earliest settlers of this region are Kurumbas and entire groups of Kurumbas were forced out of their hamlets by the Badaga who arrived here perhaps in the sixteenth century. According

to Kapp, "the Kurumbas were forced to leave the plateau of the hills long before the Badaga settlers arrived. There are strong grounds for supposing that the Kurumbas once occupied and cultivated the plateau of the Hills, and were driven thence by the Todas into the unhealthy localities which now they inhabit, on the pretext of their being a race of sorcerers, whose presence was a bane to the happiness of the other hill tribes. Several spots near the Badaga villages bear the name of Motta (the term used by the Todas, Kotas, Badagas and Irulas to denote the Kurumba hamlet). Kapp goes on to point out that to this day, the traces of their houses are still visible; and in one place a stone enclosure for buffaloes is seen, which, formerly belonged to a rich Kurumba, who was murdered by the Todas, at the instigation of the Badagas" (Kapp, 1985:506). A group of the retreating Nilgiri *Kurumbas* reached the Attappadi valley and settled there. Traditionally the *Kurumbas* played the role of sorcerers, medicine-men and priests not only for their own tribe but also for other Nilgiri tribes like the Badagas and Irulas. The field surveys[5] conducted among this tribe helped to recognize their capacity and efficiency as sorcerers and magico-religious practitioners and they are a nightmare for the other Nilgiri tribes.

Features of the Alu-Kurumba Painting

The Alu-Kurumba painting is a religious art rooted in complex beliefs that explain their everyday life, their customs, the presence and abundance of natural resources.

Area of Execution:- Usually the surface for the painting is the outer wall of the temple or the house plastered with cow dung. But today artist use whitewashed walls and handmade papers.

Artists:-Alu-Kurumba painting is an expression of their socio-religious ideas and that is why this art is traditionally practiced exclusively by the male members of the community like temple caretaker or priest.

Theme:-Traditionally the figures executed are of animals, birds, gods, festival of Gods, seasons, wedding ceremony, ancestor-worshipping ceremony, scenes of ritual performances before and after harvesting, scenes of rituals to ward off natural calamities, and scenes of ritual performances in festive occasions. But nowadays they also depict scenes from everyday life like of honey collection, cultivation, herding etc. Among these paintings[6] Figure 9 illustrates the Alu-Kurumba folk making channels in their fields for their seed-sowing ceremony, close to which is found the sacred tree (clearly visible in the second picture but not in the first) where the shrine of their God, Thuppa Kata Devar (protector of harvest) is installed in the form of a small mud pot. One person carries a seed basket and, in front of the field, a group of men and women are gathered around the shrine to propitiate the deity before

seeding – men with musical instruments like blow pipes and women in dancing postures. Three spades are kept before the mud pot; and offerings to the God are kept in leaves of the sacred tree. In Figure 10 there is a depiction of the Kurumba harvesting ceremony called Thodu Habba. A group of people dance around the fruits of harvest presented as ritual objects amidst the music of blow pipe,drum etc. On the background grazingsheep, a cow, deer and an elephant are seen. Figure 11 is related with the festival of Key Deva/ Malinga Deva. Seven women are portrayed as carrying pots. Stones encircle the shrine, which has a thatched roof, and a stone is placed within the circle at the entrance. The women are supposed to pour their seven pots of water over the stone. According to belief if the water runs out over the edge of the circle, abundant rain and a good harvest is assured. Several musicians play flute and drum, while an elderly person with white hair, stands looking on in the foreground, wearing a sash and carrying a cane. Figure 12 illustrates different ritual ceremonies connected with the annual festival of Malinga Deva like dancing, pounding the grain in the mortar and offerings to Good. Figure 13 depicts the ritual known as *Manal* which is related to the worship of forest god and is symbolic of Alu-Kurumba faith in animism. The theme of figure 14 is a wedding ceremony and the rituals associated with it. Figures 15 and 16 are related to season – the first being a depiction of the winter and the second portrays prayers invoking rain. Figure 17 illustrates the rituals related to ancestor worship. Being animists, ancestor-worship is indispensable to Kurumba life. Figure 18 describes different aspects of their economic life. Figure 19 vividly depicts the honey combs hanging down from the rocks and the technical skill of Alu-Kurumba honey collectors in tapping them daringly. Figure 20 depicts *Ola Manal* a ritual for the worship of tools and implements. Figures 21 and 22 illustrate people taking rest during leisure time after a day's work. Here, men and women are portrayed in white colour.

Colours:- Generally five colors are prepared from natural objects to portray figures. They are red, black, green, white and yellow. The red colour is prepared from *Sem manna* or red soil, black and brown from the resins of the bark of a tree called *Vengaimaram*or Indian Kino Tree (Pterocarpusmarsupium), green from *KataiGeda* plant,(could not be identified) white from *Bodhi manna* (lime paste) and yellow from *Kalimanna* or clay. Today they use water and poster colours because of the difficulty in gathering natural materials which, however, makes paintings more colorful than the traditional.

Brush:-Originally, they used to draw pictures with burnt twigs. Today they use a piece of cloth to apply colors.

Design:- They followed geometrical patterns similar to those found in rock art and the figures are drawn of stick like characters. Main patterns

used are lines, independent and concentric dots. While in traditional paintings it is difficult to identify the sex of the figures, in today's art work males and the females are clearly detectable.

Alu-Kurumba Painting and Nilgiri Rock Art

The continuity of rock art tradition from the Palaeolithic times to the present is evidenced in the contemporary ritualistic and sacred paintings of the Alu-Kurumba. In north-western Tamil Nadu the Nilgiri region, Kothagiri region and Coimbatore region are key centers of rock art. Prehistoric rock paintings and engravings are found in five places – Vellarikombai, Selakorai, Errpettu, Kallampalayam, and Porivarai of the Nilgiris, Karikkiyur near Kothagiri and Mavadaippu near Coimbatore. Among these, rock art galleries like Vellerikombai (Allen Zackereal: 1984), Karikkiyur and Mavadaippu have close affinity to the paintings of the Alu-Kurumbas. They call rock art sites as *eluthu-parai* means 'pictograph-rock'' and they believe that these paintings belong to their ancestors. They used to draw these pictographs on the body of those who have incurable diseases and also on the wall of their huts during a festival, ritual occasion etc.[7] The unique ecosystem and the material culture of the region had a significant impact on the rock art tradition here. The rock art of this region can be classified into two categories- petrograms or pictographs which are paintings done in white or red ochre and petroglyphs, figures etched out on rock surfaces. The material culture, especially the livelihood patterns and ritual practices, of the tribes have been reflected in their paintings like the rock art of the region. Garfinkal has argued that rock art can be a specially sensitive indicator of group affiliation and group identity when it serves as a method for symbolizing group boundaries. Also in many archaeological situations, rock art is the only data useful to the study of the stylistic elements characteristic of a particular prehistoric cultural group. Rock art functions, in some instances, as a manifestation of ritual/religious systems and exhibits elements (imagery) which serves as a response to stimuli from the natural and social environment. If these stimuli differ between particular ethnic units we can expect this to be physically manifested in the drawings painted and engraved upon the rock surfaces within their respective territories (Garfinkal, 1982:67). The paintings of Alu-Kurumbas during certain seasons especially in the harvest season and ritualistic occasions like festivals reflect a unique cultural continuity of rock art. They are the symbols of harmonious relation between the human and the environment. They remain an unbelievably rare example of the pre-historic perception of rock artists and it retains the flavour of the prehistoric rock paintings of the region.

The petrograms and petroglyphs of the Nilgiri, Kothagiri and Coimbatore region contain many elements similar to that of the Alu-Kurumba paintings and it is also quite distinctive in many aspects including its technique of manufacture. The similarity lies in its form, subject matter and style.The Alu-Kurumba paintings are primarily ritualistic which describes various facets of their everyday life in ritualistic manner and have close relation with the Vellerikombai, Karikkiyur and Mavadaippu petrograms. The petrograms in Vellerikombai (Fig.23) are stylized figures of animals and scenes of human activities such as hunting and dancing painted in red ochre within a religious fervour. The heads of the human beings in Vellerikombai, Selakorai, Errpettu, Kallampalayam, and Porivarai are in a circular form and the body is painted in strokes. The theme of petroglyphs of Karikkiyur rock art are battle scenes depicting men on horseback with bows and arrows, men on bamboo ladder, mystic symbols, elephants, cattle, tiger, deer, wild boar and porcupine, and of human beings dancing or fighting in white ochre. These types of figures and use of white ochre are seldom found in Alu-Kurumba painting. The images of Mavadaippu (Fig.24) petrograms include a tiger, a deer with straight horns, anthropomorphic figures marching inside a circle, an elephant seizing a man with its trunk while another man chasing it, and several paintings of bamboo-ladders used for taking honey from the heights. The main differences are in the usage of tools, colour preparation, colour sense, surface etc. The rock artists of Vellerikombai, Karikkiyur and Mavadaippu were familiar with the use of either red or white ochre while the Alu-Kurumba used brown, black, green, red and white colours. For making petrograms the rock artists used sharp tipped tools and after drawing the outline they filled the figure with colours but Alu-Kurumba used twig brush (today cloth) and directly painted on the surface. The pre-historic artists selected rock surface as their canvas while Alu-Kurumba prefer walls and paper (today) as their canvas. The petroglyphs in rock art like wild animals, human beings, fauna etc in stick like form of the Nilgiris, Kothagiri and Coimbatore also appear to have highly influenced the sketches of the Alu-Kurumba.

Significance

Alu-Kurumba paintings occupy a prominent place in the cultural tradition of South India and have a distinctive position in the ethnic art history of India. The uniqueness of this art is its harmonious and ritualistic blending of human life with the ecosystem. A systematic analysis of this ethnic art reveals the following fundamental elements behind it.

1. Alu-Kurumba paintings resemble rock art painting tradition in India.

The figures are stick like characters, with ritualistic, abstract and naturalistic themes; colours are prepared from nature, and are executed on the plastered walls.

2. The artists are talented and versatile.

3. Unlike other ethnic paintings in India the Alu-Kurumba paintings have close proximity to Neolithic rock art. A comparison of the Alu-Kurumba paintings with the ethnic paintings of the West and Central and Eastern India reveal the differences in theme, technique, design and colour.

4. Traditionally paintings are related to harvest, festival of Gods, wedding ceremonies, season, ancestor worshipping ceremony etc. Besides, scenes from everyday life, such as honey collection, cultivation, herding etc. also form frequent themes. A panoramic view of the economic activities of the Alu-Kurumbas like pre-harvesting, harvesting and post-harvesting and herding are clearly portrayed.

5. The paintings give a spectator visual treat of the flora and fauna of the region especially wild flora and fauna.

6. The art form comes as a part of hereditary responsibility of performing religious rites for the village. The technique behind Alu-Kurumba paintings are passed on from one generation to the other and this ethnic art is the means of livelihood of the artist.

7. The traditional style has been brought down from the walls and temples to paper due to its commercial value.

8. The traditional Alu-Kurumba style is losing its sanctity due to the lack of traditional artists and the emergence of a new style which is more comprehensible to the outside world.

Conclusion

As in the case of ethnic art of other parts of India ethnic art of the Alu-Kurumba also deserve more in-depth analysis as to their features and techniques. This is one of the fast-perishing ethnic arts very close to pre-historic rock art and in order to save it as well as the artists governments both at the center and states are making earnest efforts in recent times – by setting up handicraft emporiums at important cities all over India and in all districts of Tamil Nadu. These artisans are also encouraged by various government institutions to participate in national and international exhibitions to display their skills and share their expertise with others. Government also conducts art workshops for them and provide platform for youth and budding Alu-Kurumba artists for learning their traditional art form. One of the significant steps in this regard is the founding of KARI[8] and C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar

Foundation Chennai to revive the fantastic Alu-Kurumba art. These two organizations conduct workshops and exhibitions and encourage Alu-Kurumba youngsters for promoting this cherished tradition.

NOTES

[1] Most of the anthropological and ethno-archaeological studies are conducted on Nilgiri tribes like Irula Toda, Badaga and Kota.

[2] Other ethnic groups are the Toda-pastoral tribe, Kota-artisan tribe, Badaga-farmers and Irula-slash and burn cultivators.

[3] Palu means milk in Tamil

[4] Alu means milk in Kannada

[5] Interview with Raghavan Krishnan and his students of Vellarikombai village in Kotagiri district on 26-06-2014.He is the only expert traditional painter of this community and has been honoured several times for his skill in this field.

[6] Paintings 9, 10&11, Courtesy: KARI (*Kurumba Art Revival Initiative*); paintings 12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21&22, Courtesy: C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar Foundation, Chennai.

[7] This rock art site was first identified by Mr. Allen Zackerel, Professor of anthropology from USA in 1984.

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Pithora Painting (Fig. 1)

Warli Painting (Fig. 2)

Santhal Painting (Fig.3)

Paitkar Painting (Fig.4)

Oraon Painting (Fig.5)

Ittal Painting (Fig.6)

Gond Painting (Fig.7)

Bhil Painting (Fig.8)

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Seed Sowing (Fig. 9)

Thodu Habba (Fig. 10)

Festival of Keyi Deva (Fig. 11)

Festival of Malinga Swami (Fig. 12)

Manal (Fig. 13)
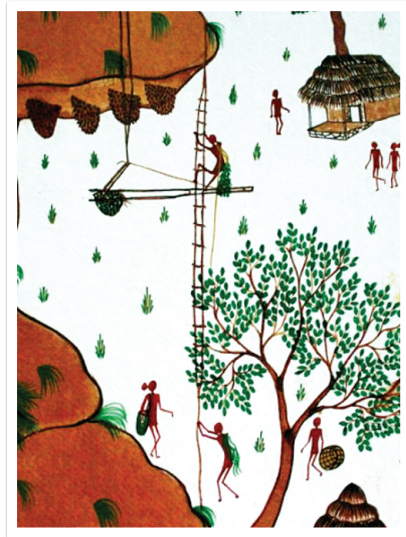

Wedding (Fig. 14)

Winter (Fig. 15)

Prayer for Rain (Fig. 16)

Ancestor Worship (Fig. 17)

Livelihood Activities (Fig. 18)
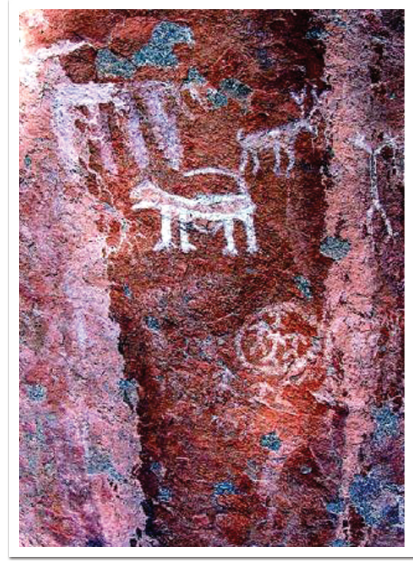

Honey Collection (Fig. 19)

Relaxing (Fig. 21)

Ola Manal (Fig. 20)

Relaxing (Fig. 22)

Mavadaippu Painting (Fig. 23)

Vellarikombai Painting (Fig. 24)