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Editor's Note

Social science research is often reactions to contemporary issues of immediate concern and plays the role of a social engine. Even history, which is supposed to deal with issues of the gone past, is largely a response to the living present because of 'our own position in time' and the 'view we take of the society in which we live', as E.H. Carr has put it. The continued interest shown by the West on Afro-Asian issues affirm this fact, though their study of the east is to find justification for their own past record of domination and exploitation and to escape from the hegemonizing present. This may also be attributed to the dearth of serious academic initiatives in the East or partly to the continued existence of the spirit of orientalism. But the third world responses to several vital social issues is frustrating; many are indifferent to take up them seriously and to link academic research with social activism. Most of such researches are hence of peripheral value; some people are even unaware of using theory in explaining data. Theoretical incapacity notwithstanding, the inability to analyze things from recent social science perspective makes most of the researches truly meaningless.

The present volume contains articles from fresh and novel areas of live and ongoing research. It is promising either, as they contain 'thick description' of the problem under study and attempt to explain things differently. In recent times people have shifted to micro research, though within the largely existing macro fields, for analysing social structures/relations or cultural practices. Pursuing the micro is certainly rewarding for the rich and uncommon data they could provide and for treading fields hitherto unexplored. Scholars were often sceptical of exploring the 'small' and the 'local' for the fear of losing a global perspective. But we have started to realize that what is important is the way we look at things; pursuing the simple, ordinary, everyday things from a social science perspective may certainly be rewarding as it would help position ourselves in the contemporary global politics.

This is the point in which we look at the developments of our own times – politics and economy in particular – in both realms we are fast moving towards the extreme right. It is greatly distressing as it widens the already existing divide – in terms of caste, class, race,

and gender. In the garb of creating a global society the new technological innovations contribute heavily towards dividing the world into mutually antagonistic interest groups in which the 'developed' people have been the principal beneficiaries. The sweeping exploitation of the east by the west is now a matter of the past; the role of the east itself has changed greatly – now it has gained considerable autonomy as an economic force, though its earlier role of collaborator and comprador continues to persist. The fact that the national bourgeoisie is in no way qualitatively better than the imperialist has created a challenging situation before the social scientist – it is expedient to explore and expose the Right-wing forces and the means through which they impinge on the growth of a true civil society by promoting social divide and social tensions.

The Indian situation makes things even more problematic. The fast rightward turn of the economy is as disturbing as the furiously right-going politics – whether on claims of national unity and cultural integrity. The traditional and the hard-earned values of tolerance and diversity are under threat now and the secular ethos are in great peril. The Hindu rightwing is all the more organized and powerful enough to protect global capital and to silence forces which challenge it. Sincere academic activity in this context is not simply explaining things but to take sides with the victims of resurgent capitalism. History reminds us that slogans of liberty, equality and fraternity are not obsolete yet.

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Land Measurement Methods and the Use of Fractions During the Chola Period in South India*

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Abstract

The medieval period saw advancement in land measurement methods, since land revenue was important for land administration. The inscriptions of the medieval period present various land measurement units and their symbols. The calculation of land area, taxable area and non-taxable area is mentioned in detail in these inscriptions. In the process various fraction units are mentioned in the inscriptions. This paper discusses some of the fractions and the methods of calculations in the medieval period in Tamil Nadu.

Keywords: Traditional Arithmetic, Chola Administration, Land Measurement, Fractions.

I. Introduction

Land measurement was an important aspect of medieval administration in India, since the states (governments) derived most of their income through land revenue. With the development of an organized administrative system, from the medieval period in South India, proper measures were adopted to accurately measure lands and to standardize the existing land measurement system, in order to collect land revenue. Questions such as 'How was land measured?' 'How was it assessed for tax?' and 'What was the ratio of tax in relation to the total productivity of land?' have been addressed by scholars (Subbarayalu, 2001a; 2001b; 2001c). However, more research in this area is necessary in order to understand the development and use of assessment methods, and especially the scientific concepts and operations related to measurement that were used during the medieval period. The land measurement system also has implications for understanding the development of history of science in India. This paper presents a few observations on the land measurement system under the Cholas.

In the medieval inscriptions, the measurement rods, measurement units of the total area of land, tax free area and amount of tax in coin

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or kind are frequently referred to. However, often only the area is mentioned without mentioning the size of the measurement rod used. The inscriptions mention the total area of a village and the areas that were under settlements, highways, canals, cremation grounds and tanks, which were exempted from tax, are mentioned, and after deducting the tax exempted lands, the taxable area is mentioned very accurately. Simple arithmetic operation to convey the taxable, nontaxable and total land area is found in many inscriptions. Comprehending this system of simple arithmetic calculation is not easy for many people, and only a few researchers of the modern times understand this system. The traditional measurement rods called *kōls* or *dandas*, which were based on measurement units such as finger-breadth (*aṇgulam* or *viral*), span (*vitasti* or *cāṇ* in Tamil), foot (*pāda* or *ati*) and cubit (*hasta* or *muzham*), were used in the medieval times for measuring lands. The dimensions of these measurement rods are marked on the temple walls and on rocks in the remote areas in South India (Selvakumar, 2014; 2015). These measurement rods were named after their dimensions (e.g. 8 span rod, 16 span rod and 18 foot rod) or after the kings and their titles (e.g. *ulagalantān kōl* and *kaṇdarakandan kōl*).

The land measurement system of the medieval times was very well developed across India and people in many parts of India were using locally defined measurement units for the calculation of an area. This knowledge still continues in the villages. The tradition of using body-part based measurement units for linear measurement perhaps goes back to the Harappan times, as evidence of Harappan scales have been found (Balasubramanian and Joshi, 2008). The Vedic texts mention about the various measurement units in the *Sulba sutras* (Sen and Bag, 1983) and the texts including the *Artasāstra* (Rangarajan, 1992) and those on architecture describe the various measurement units that were employed in ancient India. In Tamil Nadu, the late Medieval Tamil work of *Kaṇakatikāram* composed by Kāri Nāyanār describes the various measurement units (Kāri Nāyanār nd). These measurement units were taught in the schools of Madras Presidency during the colonial times (Babu, 2007). In Tamil Nadu, people belonging to the older generation, especially those who were educated in the first half of the twentieth century still remember the calculations based on fractions and the traditional units of measurements.

The inscriptions serve as a valuable source for understanding the measurement units and their diversity during the medieval period. The land areas were documented in the inscriptions, based on various units of fractions, and different varieties of measurement rods. References

to these measurement rods are found in many parts of India. A few studies have been conducted on the land measurement methods of the Cholas, especially by P. Shanmugam (1987), Y. Subbarayalu (2001a; 2001b; 2001c), N. Karashima (2006), Kodumudi Shanmugan (2007) and Selvakumar (2014; 2015).

The use of very minute fractions as part of "Kīzh kaṇakku" system is found in the inscriptions and they were in use till the advent of the colonial times (Bhagavathy, 2003) and with the introduction of the modern education and mathematics, these traditional measurements and fractions lost their importance in education. Now there is an urgent need to reuse and teach these traditional measurements and fractions in the schools in order to improve the cognitive skills of the students.

II. The Measurement Units of the Medieval Period

In the medieval inscriptions, the measurement of land is conveyed in terms of a whole unit, called *véli*, and then the smaller units are defined in relation to the *véli*, as fractions. The fractions used in the inscriptions are *mukkāl* (three fourth, 3/4), *arai* (half, 1/2), *kāl* (1/4 or quarter), *araikkāl* (1/8), *mā* (1/20), *kāṇi* (1/64 or 1/80) and *muntiri* (1/320 or 1/256).

Kōl or *Danda*

Kōl means a measurement rod in Tamil, and in Sanskrit it is known as *danda*. These terms refer to wooden measurement rods or scales or poles. The measurement rods were fundamental for the measurement of lands, and they were devised on the basis of smaller units such as *aṅgulam, piti, cāṇ, ati* and *muzham*. Their length varied from 8 *piti* to 22 *cāṇ*. The length of these rods was marked on the temple walls and on rocks using symbols such as "+", "|" and tridents. The staff members of the village administration selected a wooden pole, probably bamboo or from other trees, and then cut the size of the pole according to the measurement marked on the temples or on the rocks in the remote areas of the villages. These measurement rods, which were used for land survey, were called according to their size or after the titles of the kings. Many villages had their own measurement rods, and there was no uniform measurement rod across medieval Tamil Country. An area covered by one unit of measurement rod in length and width formed a square, and it was called *kuzhi* in Tamil, i.e. one square rod. This *kuzhi* was the basic unit of land measurement used in the medieval times.

Véli

Véli is a larger, whole unit of measurement of land, and this unit is still used by people in Tanjāvūr region, although for legal documents related to land ownership, they use metric measures. A *véli* is about 6.66 acre of land in Tanjāvūr region. *Véli* means fence in Tamil; but, for area calculation a *véli* consists of 20 *mā* units of land. We do not know why this unit was named as *véli*; perhaps, it meant a unit of fenced or defined area. While quantifying lands, *véli* was used as a main unit and the smaller areas were conveyed as fractions of this main unit. A *véli* has 20 *mā* units, and 2000 *kuzhi* units (according to one type of calculation), means 20 by 100 or 200 by 10 or 40 by 50 *kuzhi* units, and it forms a rectangle shape. However, interestingly the term *véli* is not often directly mentioned in the inscriptions, only the number of whole véli units are mentioned, e.g. 93 3/4 means 93.75 *véli*. Although a *véli* refers to a specific area, it is not necessary that in all contexts *véli* refers to same extent of land. There are references to different *véli* units with their area varying from 2000 *kuzhi* to 10240 *kuzhi* units (Subbarayalu, 2001a: Table A p. 38), based on a 8 *piti* (bow-grip, which is the width of four fingers) rod or 12 span, 12 foot, 16 span, 16 foot and 18 span and 18 foot rods. Therefore, a *véli* in one region based on a 12 span rod would be different from a *véli* based on a 16 span rod.

Mā

Mā refers to the fraction of 1/20. In the context of area measurement, it refers to the 1/20 of a *véli*. In modern day convention in the Lower Kāveri valley, a *mā* consists of 100 *kuzhi* units, which means a square of 10 units x 10 units = 100 *kuzhi* units. Therefore, one type of *mā* unit forms a perfect square shape. Twenty *mā* units form one *véli*. The size of *mā* also depends upon the nature of the measurement rod and the number of *kuzhi* units. It should be remembered that 100 *kuzhi* units forming one *mā* was used only in certain regions. There are references to 128 *kuzhi* units forming one *mā*, and also 256 units or 512 units constituting one *mā*. It appears that sometimes, a 16 foot rod or an 8 foot rod or any other rods were used to arrive at the unit numbers such as 128, 256, 512 and 1024. Hence the size of the *mā* unit was also not uniform on the ground. However, it appears that 100 *kuzhi* as one *mā* became an accepted standard at a later context.

Kāni

Kāni refers to the fraction of 1/80. Four *kāṇi* units make one *mā*. *Araikkāṇi* (half *kāni*) is 1/160 and eight *araikkāṇi* units make one *mā*. The term *kāṇi* appears in the Sangam texts; in *Nalatiyar*, there is a reference to "*muntiri mér kāni*," which means that a *kāṇi* is larger than

a *muntiri*; however, no direct reference is present to specify the exact size of the fractions here. Interestingly, there seems to be another fraction associated with *kāṇi*; N. Subrahmanian (1966) in his *Pre-Pallavan Tamil Index* lists 1/64 as the meaning of *kāni*. Similarly, in the context of Karnataka, Jagadish and Rajaram Hegde (2012) list 1/64 as representing a *kāni*. In the contemporary usage, while *mā* and *véli* are very frequently used, *kāṇi* is rarely used in the Lower Kāveri valley, although it is also known to people. Like the other units, the size of *kāṇi* depends upon the size of the measurement rod.

Muntiri

Muntiri is the smallest unit in the series of traditional fractions, and it refers to 1/320 of a *véli*. Four *Muntiri* units form one *kāni*, 16 *muntiri* units form one *mā* and 320 *muntiri* units form one *véli*. The fractions below *muntiri* are called *kīzh* and the fractions that are smaller than *muntiri* are conveyed by using *kīzh* (*Kīzh*= i.e. those units which are below *muntiri*; *kīzh* means below) along with units such as *mā*, *mukkāl*, *arai*, *kāl*, and *araikkāl*. The unit of *muntiri* is not commonly used by people, like the three above-mentioned categories. Sometimes, *muntiri* is given a meaning of 1/256 (Subrahmanian, 1966). The size of *muntiri* depends upon the size of the *véli* and the system of calculation.

***Kuzhi*, the basic unit**

Kuzhi in Tamil means a pit. *Kuzhi* is a square unit and it is the Tamil equivalent for *caturam* in Sanskrit; it covers an area of one rod by one rod in size. A *véli* consists of 2000 *kuzhi* units, according to traditional accounts. It is not clear as to why 2000 *kuzhi* units were considered to have formed one larger unit of *véli*. Interestingly, the units of 2000 *kuzhi* do not yield a perfect square root, and it can be framed by a rectangle of 20 *kōl* x 10 *kōl* units. The actual size of a *kuzhi* depends upon the size of the measurement rod.

The nature of Fractions

In the context of land measurement, the fractions are reduced in the series of 1/20, 1/40, 1/80, 1/160 and 1/320, and they appear as multiples of 20, 40, 80, 160 and 320. A *véli* is divided into 320 *muntiri* units. Why 320? Why 1/320 has to be a unit? The answer perhaps lies in the dimension of the measurement rods. The measurement rods of 16 span/foot were frequently used during the Chola times and hence, the multiples of 16 span rod and decimal based numbers of 10 and 20 resulted in 320 square units. However, we are not sure, if the 16 feet rod was used in the Lower Kaveri valley and it might have been used at least in some contexts. It appears that multiples of 8 as 16, 32, 64,

128 and 256 were also used as units or sub-units of area measurement. The area unit of *mā* units is defined as consisting of 100 or 128 or 256 or 512 units.

Kīzh Fractions below *muntiri*, i.e. below 1/320

The *Kīzh* fractions are very interesting in the inscriptions and Karashima argues that this system was introduced by Rajaraja I to standardize the assessment of land for taxation (2006), and he has established a connection between *matakku* and *kīzh*. After the smallest unit of fraction *Muntiri*, *Kīzh* is used in the inscriptions. *Kīzh* fractions are the fractions below, i.e. smaller than 1/320. *Kīzh arai*, *Kīzh araikkal* and *Kīzh mukkal* are some of the smaller fractions. If *Kīzh* appears after *Kīzh* it means 1/320 x 1/320. In the Medieval inscriptions, sometimes, *Kīzh* is repeated thrice and in a rare case it appears four times.

Kīzh = *Kīzh* refers to the fractions below 1/320

Kīzh Muntiri refers to the fraction of = 1/320 x 1/320 = 1/102,400

Kīzh Kīzh Muntiri = 1/320 x 1/320 x 1/320 =1/3,27,68,000

Kīzh Kīzh Kīzh Muntiri = 1/320 x 1/320 x 1/320 x 1/320 = 1/10,48,57,60,000

Very minute fractions are mentioned in the Tanjāvūr temple inscriptions. A unit of the last series *Kīzh Kīzh Kīzh Muntiri* x 1/2 is used in the Tanjāvūr temple inscriptions and it is considered to be the smallest unit found in the inscriptions. It refers to the unit of 1/5242,8800000 of a *véli*, according to Venkayya (1913).

Nature of Minute Fractions

Noboru Karashima points out that such small fractions were the results of conversion of old units into standard units as part of standardization (2006). These fractions are so minute that one wonders why they had to measure such micro units. We do not know if these minute units had any significance in land assessment. But, before going into this aspect let us understand the actual dimension of these micro units.

Conversion of Fractions

In order to understand these fractions, we have to convert them to metric measures. There were different measurement rods and we are not sure which rod was used for the determination of a *kuzhi* in an area unless there is a specific reference. According to the traditional account, in the Lower Kāveri valley, a *kuzhi* consists of 12 feet by 12 feet = 144 sq. ft. In some cases, it appears that 16 feet rod was used leading to 16 feet x 16 feet = 256 sq ft.

a) Calculation based on 16 span rod and 100 *kuzhi* = 1 *mā*

Calculation up to *kīzh muntiri*

1 *kuzhi* by 16 span rod = 16 x 16 square *cāṇ* = 256 square *cāṇ*

If 1 *mā* = 100 *kuzhi*, then 256 x 100 = 25,600 square *cāṇ*

20 *mā* = 1 *véli* = 512,000 square *cāṇ*

Therefore, one *muntiri* of a *véli* is 512,000 /320 = 1600 square *cāṇ*, which is 40 x 40 square *cāṇ*.

There are references to fractions further below *muntiri*, i.e. *kīzh muntiri*, which is below 1600 square *cāṇ*.

Kīzh muntiri equals to 1/320 X 1/320= 1/320 of 1600 square *cāṇ* = 5 square *cāṇ*.

From the above account, measuring an area up to 5 square *cāṇ* is very much possible and practicable, and hence the unit of *kīzh muntiri* of a *véli* appears very relevant.

If we have to go further below *Kīzh muntiri*, for the purpose of clarity it is better go to the sub-units of a *cāṇ*. We have to divide a *cāṇ* into *aṅgulam* units, as illustrated below.

Calculation beyond kīzh muntiri

As mentioned earlier, if we need to understand the measurements beyond *kīzh muntiri*, we have to split a *cāṇ*, into its sub-unit *aṅgulam*.

According to convention,

1 span/ *cāṇ* is equal to 12 *aṅgulam*,

1 square *cāṇ* = 12 x 12 = 144 square *aṅgulam*s

Therefore, *Kīzh Muntiri* (1/320 x 1/320) of a *véli* is = 144 x 5 square *cāṇ* (as illustrated above) = 720 square *aṅgulams*.

Therefore, *Kīzh Kīzh Muntiri* (1/320 x 1/320 x 1/320) = 1/320 x 720 = 2.25 square *aṅgulam*s, which is a square of 1.5 x 1.5 square *aṅgulam*s.

Therefore, measuring such a small area is also very much feasible, and hence the use of such an unit should also be considered relevant.

Calculation beyond *kīzh kīzh muntiri*

To go beyond *kīzh kīzh muntiri*, we need to further reduce an *aṅgulam* unit.

One *aṅgulam* is equal to 8 *tōrai* or the width of a paddy or rice grain, according to tradition.

Then 1 square *aṅgulam* is equal to 8 x 8 *tōrai* = 64 square *tōrai* units.

From the above account we know that *Kīzh Kīzh Muntiri* (1/320 x 1/320 x 1/320) =2.25 square *aṅgulams* x 64 = 144 square *tōrai* units.

Therefore, *Kīzh Kīzh Kīzh Muntiri* (1/320 x 1/320 x 1/320 x 1/320)= 1/320 x 144 square *tōrai* units.

= 0.45 square *tōrai*.

Which means 1/320 X 1/320 x 1/320 X 1/320 = 1/1048,57,60,000 of a *véli* =0.45 square *tōrai*.

If an *aṅgulam* is 1.76 cm in an average, then 1 *tōrai* is 1.76/8 =about 2.2 mm

Therefore, 1 square *tōrai* is = 4.84 sq mm.

Then, 0.45 square *tōrai* is = 2.18 square mm, which is 1.476 mm x 1.476 mm

The smallest unit mentioned in the Tanjāvūr inscription is3/4 x 1/20 of *Kīzh Kīzh Kīzh Muntiri* of a véli (of 2000 *kuzhi* units); if this is based on 16 span rod, in metric measure it is = 0.081 square mm, which is practically impossible to measure on the ground, and it should have been obtained by reduction.

b) Calculation based on 12 span rod

Calculation up to *kīzh muntiri*

1 *kuzhi* = 12 x 12 square *cāṇ* = 144 square *cāṇ*s

1 *mā* = 100 *kuzhi* = 144 square *cāṇ* x 100 = 14,400 square *cāṇs*.

20 *mā*= 1 *véli* = 288,000 square *cāṇ*s

Therefore, one muntiri of a véli is 288,000/320 = 900 square *cāṇ*, which is 30 x 30 square *cāṇ*.

There are references to fractions further below 900 square *cāṇs* in the inscriptions.

Kīzh muntiri equals to 1/320 x 1/320= 1/320 of 900 square *cāṇ* which is equal to 2.8125 square *cāṇ*s.

If we have to go further, we have to divide *cāṇ* into its subunit aṅgulam.

As mentioned earlier, measuring 2.8125 square + is reasonable and appears relevant.

Calculation beyond *kīzh muntiri*

If we need to understand the measurements beyond *muntiri*, we have to go to the units smaller than a *cāṇ*, i.e. *aṅgulam*.

1 *cāṇ* is equal to 12 *aṅgulam*s.

1 square *cāṇ* = 12 x 12 = 144 square *aṅgulam*s

Therefore, *Kīzh Muntiri* (1/320 x 1/320) of a *véli* is = 144 x 2.8125 = 405 square *aṅgulam*s.

Kīzh Kīzh Muntiri (1/320 x 1/320 x 1/320) = 1/320 x 405 = 1.265 square *aṅgulam*s.

Calculation beyond *kīzh kīzh muntiri*

To go beyond *kīzh kīzh muntiri*, we need to further and reduce an *aṅgulam*.

If 1 *aṅgulam* is equal to 8 *tōrai*,

Then 1 square *aṅgulam* equals to 64 square *tōrai* units.

Kīzh Kīzh Muntiri =1.265 square *aṅgulam*s x 64 = 80.96 square *tōrai* units

Kīzh Kīzh Kīzh Muntiri = 1/320 x 80.96 square *tōrai* units.

= 0.253 square *tōrai*.

Which means 1/320 X 1/320 X 1/320 x 1/320 = 1/10485760,000 of a *véli* =0.253 square *tōrai*.

If an *aṅgulam* is 1.76 cm in an average, 1 *tōrai* is about 2.2 mm

1 square *tōrai* is = 4.84 sq mm.

0.253 square *tōrai* is = 1.22 square mm

It is highly difficult to measure such small area on the ground.

Comments

The above analysis reveal that by using 16 feet and 12 feet rods, the medieval land surveyors could measure areas smaller than one square mm. If we use the definition of a *véli* as equal to 128 *kuzhi* units, there would be variations in these measurements. What is clear from the above discussion is that in land administration very minute fractions were used, and the medieval surveyors were very particular that even the smallest areas had to be accounted for without any exception. In addition, as we noticed earlier that various measurement rods from as small as en-*piti* to larger 22 or even 54 span rods were used during the medieval times in different micro regions. Therefore, when the ar-

eas that were measured using smaller rods were converted to the areas that were based on longer measurement rods, such small fractions were produced. Therefore, as pointed out by Y. Subbarayalu (2001a), these minuscule fractions perhaps resulted due to theoretical conversions. The jewelry and the bronze images donated to the Brihadīswara temple at Tanjāvūr reveal the use of *tōrai* units in actual terms. Now the question is if the surveyors used these smaller units for the land survey. We could assume that the measurement rods used by the land surveyors of the medieval period had markings of *aṅgulam*s and even *tōrai* units. Perhaps when the dimension of the area that they measured was smaller than an *aṅgulam*, they might have meticulously documented even the smallest unit of length. Perhaps such a rigour in measurement was dictated by the standard of surveying practices and also perhaps by the insistence that no part of land should be left out during the measurement. It is still a question if they measured the units less than an *aṅgulam* for land measurement.

Area and Reduced Areas

Apart from the size of the measurement rods, several other factors also conditioned the assessment of lands for tax. The terms such as *virivu* (area), *matakku* (reduced area) and *taram* were used for land assessment.

Virivu: Expansion

The size of the cultivable fields was determined according to the length of the scale, in certain instances. An inscription from Chidambaram mentions about the (SII VIII 52). Two lands that were purchased and they each measured 512 *kuzhi* units, with a total of 1024 *kuzhi* units. The inscription mentions the units of 1024 *kuzhi* according to the convention of the village and they form 8 *mā*, which means each *mā* in this village meant 128 *kuzhi* unit. In this system a *véli* had 2560 *kuzhi* units. The inscription mentions that *virivu nilam* would be 1/2 *véli* and one *kāni*, which means 10 *mā* and 25 *kuzhi*s; but, actually the units are one *kuzhi* less than 1025 *kuzhi*s. Hence, the term *virivu* is used here in the case of reduced size of *mā* from 128 to 100 *kuzhi* units, and as a result the overall area increases. In some cases, the size of land decreases; therefore, the term *virivu* means conversion to the existing scheme of measurement.

Matakku: Reduction

Matakku means ‘to fold’ in Tamil and it refers to reduction in the size of the area .In some cases the actual are of the land was reduced

for the purpose of tax calculation and in order to standardize. According to Karashima (2006) this term occurs from the time of Rajendra I. It referred to conversion from a type of measurement to standard unit, according to Subbarayalu (2001b), and Karashima (2006) presents evidence for this from a rare inscription of Sundarapandiyan from Chidambaram. He clearly traces the links between *matakku* and *kīzh*. In one case, with the use of *matakku*, the land size was reduced to 6.15 times, according to Subbarayalu (2001b: 55). The reference "*taramittu matakki*" occurs in an inscription. The measurement of actual land is different from the measurement that we get after *matakku*. As pointed out by Karashima, even large areas in one scale becomes fraction in another (2006) and therefore, the first case from the Chidambaram inscription was measured using a smaller scale and when the large scale or rod was used these units became very small.

Taram (Quality or standard)

Taram refers to quality of the land and it refers to productivity. According to Subbarayalu 12 standards of lands are mentioned in the inscriptions (Subbarayalu, 2001a; 2001; 2001c). The *taram* referred to the quantity of production from an area. The production rate was also taken into consideration while assessing the land for tax.

III. Discussions and Conclusions

The land measurement system of the medieval period incorporated numerous measurement rods in different micro regions. The size of the rods varied from 4 spans to 32 spans and some during the Nayaka period measured even up to 54 spans (Stephen, 1992). Because of the diversity of measurement rods, the actual area of land also varied on the ground, although similar terms such as *véli* or *mā* or *kāṇi* were used in different contexts.

The descriptions found in the inscriptions reveal that the surveyors and accountants used very accurate measurement scales to measure the lands. One is surprised by the fact that land as small as 1/5242,88,00000 of a *véli* was measured. The idea behind such small fractions was perhaps that the land assessment had to be very accurate. The large area of *véli* was used as the main unit and its fractions conveyed area as small as 1 square mm or even less.

In some cases the areas were conveyed in terms of *kuzhi* units. But, in many instances, rather than conveying area in the form of *kuzhi* units or even the smaller square units such as *aṅgulam* and *tōrai*, they conveyed the areas in terms of *véli* and its fractions. The fact that very minute fractions were used in the measurement suggests that length

even up to the size of a *nel* (paddy) or *tōrai (a kind of paddy, approximately 2.2 mm) were measured. Can we assume that they adopted the same approach, which they followed for measuring the bronze images, for land measurement too? Perhaps, such small units were marked on the measuring rods*. It indicates their care for accuracy of land measurements. The measurement of length up to *tōrai was actually used as indicated by the measurements of bronze images donated to the Brihadīswara temple at Tanjāvūr*. In modern times, people may not sometime use such accurate measurements for land, i.e. up to 1 or 2 mm; however, in the medieval times, they had the scales to measure such smaller units on the ground for accurate taxation. They might have measured on the ground, the fractions of an *aṅgulam* such as *3/4, 1/2, 1/4 and 1/8*. It is not certain, however, if they used such small units actually, though there is a probability up to 1 sq mm area. As pointed by Y. Subbarayalu, when an area measured by a smaller rod was converted into area units based on longer measurement rods, it resulted in such minute fractions. However, an important point to be noted here is that they used such miniscule fractions in the land measurement, and it reveals their cognitive advancement in arithmetic and land measurement skills and methods, and their concern for accuracy. It also reveals the systematic efforts towards standardization and uniformity. Another point that emerges here is the pragmatics of the medieval administration which did not attempt to completely change or ignore the local measurement rods, and they preferred the mathematic conversion to standardize the measurement units, which was an important effort. The meticulous survey and calculation of the area of entire villages are indeed monumental tasks undertaken by the Chola administration.

In this paper, we have dealt with only a few aspects of the medieval measurement system under the Cholas and more detailed research is necessary to understand the conversion ratios and method of reduction of land areas for tax assessment. The use of traditional fractions, and the mathematical solutions offered by the inscriptions as well as those found in the ancient texts (e.g. *Kaṇakkatikāram*) could be taught in schools in order to develop the cognitive capabilities of the students in the subject of mathematics.

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Introduction to Indian Epigraphy and Palaeography

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Abstract

Inscriptions are the most important source for early and medieval Indian history and hence a good knowledge of epigraphy and palaeography is necessary for students of Indian history. Only from the late eighteenth century onwards, real interest was evinced in epigraphical studies, that too by the English administrators and scholars. The office of Epigraphist for India that came up in 1886 and some other institutions have so far collected nearly a hundred thousand inscriptions from various parts of India, the bulk of which comes from the south. Because of the complexity of scripts and languages used in those inscriptions over the centuries, the decipherment, editing and publication of the texts of the inscriptions could not keep pace with the progress in collection. About forty to fifty per cent of the collected inscriptions are yet to be published. Earnest efforts are therefore required to train a good number of young scholars/historians in epigraphy and palaeography.

***Key Words*:** Epigraphy, Palaeography, Brahmi, Vatteluttu, Grantha, Siddhamatrika, Prakrit, Sanskrit.

Ancient and Medieval Indian history is mostly written on the basis of inscriptions, which are found in several thousands all over India. Though strictly speaking an inscription is the writing engraved or inscribed on some hard medium like stone or metal plate, writings in ink and paint are also included sometimes under this category. Legends found on coins and on metal and terracotta seals are also studied here. The inscriptions in our country start appearing from the time of the Mauryan dynasty say from the early third century BCE and go up to the seventeenth century and even later. They are found in various languages and various scripts. Since the writing system of the Indus valley/Harappan civilization that prevailed in the first half of the third millennium BCE has not been deciphered satisfactorily, that is not considered for the time being. The ancient scripts used in the inscriptions are all familiar to us now and there are teachers and guide books to teach those scripts. But during the last quarter of the eighteenth cen-

tury when some European scholars and administrators took interest in knowing these scripts there were very few indigenous scholars to guide them. Practically there existed little interest among our people to read the old inscriptions. After this, particularly after the establishment of the Asiatic Society in Kolkata in 1784, things began to change gradually, thanks to the efforts of several European and a few Indian scholars in deciphering old inscriptions and within half a century most medieval period inscriptions could be read and understood. And finally in 1837 James Prinsep the most outstanding palaeographer of the times presented his more or less complete table of the Brahmi alphabet used in Asokan inscriptions. In between there were several other people who published their readings of many inscriptions of the tenth century and earlier in the journal of *Asiatic Researches*. In the latter half of the 19th century the progress in Indian epigraphy was remarkable, in keeping with the other archaeological discoveries at many important ancient sites with monuments like Sanchi, Mathura, Bharhut, Amaravati and so on. Many monographs and reports on archaeological sites contained also the texts of the inscriptions of those sites.

In south India Colonel Colin Mackenzie in the course of his official duties (as Surveyor) in the Royal Corps of Engineers serving the East India Company collected copies of nearly eight thousand inscriptions using some local assistants during 1783–1815. But a systematic survey for inscriptions by properly trained epigraphists had to wait for half a century more. In 1872 James Burgess inaugurated the famous Indological journal *Indian Antiquary* which helped the publication, by several scholars, of properly edited texts and translations of inscriptions. Two years later A.C. Burnell published his work on South Indian Palaeography, a pioneer work in the field. In 1894 G.H. Ojha published a comprehensive book on Indian palaeography, namely *Prachina Lipimala* in Hindi. Two years later (1896) John Georg Buhler brought out his most standard work *Indian Palaeography (Indische Palaeographie* in German) which summed up all the knowledge available then on old Indian scripts.

A separate Epigraphist's post was created by the Government of Madras Presidency in 1886 and E. Hultzsch was appointed as the first incumbent of the post. This post was later designated as the Epigraphist to Government of India, but his office continued to function in Madras (Chennai), some time in Bangalore, and then in Ootacamund. Since 1967 it is functioning in Mysore. From the beginning, Hultzsch started in earnest to collect inscriptions from several important places,

like Mamallapuram, Thanjavur, etc. in Madras Presidency (comprising the present Tamil Nadu, a major part of coastal Andhra Pradesh, and the northern part of present Kerala). The work of deciphering, editing, and publication of the collected inscriptions was also carried on simultaneously. From 1889 the official epigraphical (biennial) journal called *Epigraphia Indica* started its publication. This journal carried detailed discussion of some important inscriptions along with their texts, translation, and illustrations. Also the epigraphical series *South Indian Inscriptions* was started from 1890 onwards and Hultzsch was responsible for the major part of the first three volumes, wherein both the texts and full-length translations are given. As on today, some 30 volumes have been published in the *South Indian Inscriptions* series[1] containing about 15,000 inscriptions in all. The Archaeological Survey of India has been bringing out another prestigious series, called *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* in which each volume is devoted to the inscriptions of a dynasty like that of Asoka, the Guptas, the Vakatakas, and so on.

Besides the British Government, the governments of the princely states (like Mysore, Hyderabad, Travancore) also took steps to collect inscriptions in their respective states. Mysore was the leader in this regard. Lewis Rice published his first volume on Mysore inscriptions in 1879. Under his direction the first twelve volumes of the *Epigraphia Carnatica* (old) series were published between 1886 and 1905—really a stupendous task[2]. Those volumes contained nearly nine thousand inscriptions from nine districts of the Mysore state, presently the southern districts of the Karnataka state. The Travancore state (comprising the southern districts of present Kerala state) had its own publication entitled Travancore *Archaeological Series* (volumes 1–9 published during 1910–1947) fully devoted to the inscriptions of the state, numbering nearly a thousand. The Pudukkottai state published in 1929 the texts of most of the inscriptions (1130) in its jurisdiction in one volume followed by two volumes containing English translations of some 240 inscriptions. The *Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanam Epigraphical series* (vols. 1–6, 1930–1938) is another remarkable epigraphical publication brought out by a religious institution. This series includes about 1000 inscriptions in Tamil (with translations) in the temples of Tirumala and Tirupati.

The Office of Epigraphist to Government of Madras was also regularly publishing annual reports on the epigraphical survey, containing English summaries of copper plates and stone inscriptions, and comments on the significant historical contents of the inscriptions. The

annual report was called as *Madras Epigraphical Report* from 1887 to 1921, then it was designated as *Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy* and from 1945 onwards it is being called as *Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy* in keeping with its expanded activities. The publication of the texts of the inscriptions in *South Indian Inscriptions, Epigraphia Indica, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* and some other volumes could not keep pace with the enormous collection of inscriptions listed in the annual reports. If the inscriptions copied from other parts of India by different agencies are added to the above collection, the total number of inscriptions collected from all over India till now would run to several thousands. The great Epigraphist D.C. Sircar estimated the figure to be about 90,000 (Sircar, 1977)[3]. He also indicated that nearly two-thirds of the total number belongs to the three southern linguistic regions, Tamil (35,000), Kannada (17,000) and Telugu (10,000). About forty to fifty per cent of the inscriptions recorded and copied till now by the Archaeological Survey of India and other institutions remain unpublished and there may still be a large number of inscriptions yet to be discovered and copied from various parts of the country. Naturally, therefore, we need a large team of epigraphists to read, edit and publish the remaining inscriptions. That means we need to pay attention to training more and more young epigraphists.

Let me briefly indicate the nature of problems that a student of Indian epigraphy has to face. As mentioned earlier, there are several scripts and languages in different parts of the country. Obviously linguistic skills and familiarity with more than one script are required of an aspiring epigraphist. Though we cannot expect one to master all the scripts and languages, a broad understanding of the entire field would be helpful to properly read and interpret the inscriptions of one's special area. Almost all the scripts being used now all over India, except those used for Urdu and Kashmiri and the scripts of European languages, have evolved from a parent script, namely the Brahmi script. The scripts used in Sri Lanka and in countries of Southeast Asia also evolved from the same parent script. Even ordinary people, who are not initiated in the epigraphic literature, can recognize the close relations of the different scripts if they observe and compare carefully the shapes in them (See Illustrations). Those common structural features and shapes among the Indian scripts are more striking if we observe them stage by stage over the centuries. At the same time, they differ to some extent in orthographic principles according to the languages associated with the different scripts.

The evolution of Indian scripts can be considered under some four or five chronological stages. The earliest of course is the Brahmi script of the Mauryan (Asokan) times. So far there is no archaeological evidence to clearly prove that the Brahmi script had existed before the time of Asoka. Again, the origin of that script and its derivation from some earlier script either within India or outside is explained differently by different scholars. Let us not enter into this controversy. The one certain thing, however, is that the Mauryan script is already a mature script devised for the writing of some Prakrit language (of Middle Indo-Aryan group). Almost simultaneously another script called Kharoshthi was also used to write Asokan inscriptions in the north west (now parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan). Though the script was confined to Gandhara in the beginning, later it spread over a wider area, comprising Afghanistan and Central Asia. The script however became defunct by the early fourth century BCE.

In the beginning the Brahmi script was used just for writing a non-literary language for administrative purposes and only later it seems to have been used for literary purposes. The Brahmi script of the Asokan inscriptions had letters for six vowel signs *(a, ā, i, u, ē, ō),* 32 consonants, 8 medial vowel diacriticals *(ā, i, ī, u, ū, ē, ō, ai),* and anusvara. The signs for *ṅa, ṛ, ṝ, au,* and *visarga* are not found. The shapes of the letters look formal with simple angular and circular features. The orthography is not fully standardized. In conjunct characters there is some inconsistency in the relative positioning of the component characters according to the phonetic principle.

During the second and first centuries BCE the script shows some evolution such as the development of rudimentary headmarks and equalization of vertical portions in some letters. But the changes are not so much as to differentiate it clearly from the Asokan Brahmi. There are two exceptions. One is the Brahmi script found at Bhattiprolu in Andhra Pradesh and the other is the script used in the Tamil country in the south. In Mauryan Brahmi the basic consonant form is always treated as with inherent ‘a’, that is, there is no pure or vowelless consonant form. A horizontal diacritical mark is added to the right side of the basic form to get the long ‘a’ medial. But in Bhattiprolu the Mauryan ‘ā’ (long) is treated as short ‘a’ medial and for long ‘a’ one more diacritical is added to the above horizontal mark slanting downwards. Consequently the basic consonant form is treated as without inherent ‘a’, that is as pure consonant. Though in Bhattiprolu the modified script is used for writing the Prakrit language, it is believed that modifica-

tions would have been made for writing a non-Prakrit language, that is for the local Dravidian language (Telugu in this case). This becomes clear in the case of the Tamil area, where the Brahmi script is used for writing the Tamil language. There too, the basic consonant form is treated as without the inherent 'a' and with the addition of horizontal diacritical strokes the short and long medials are obtained. This devise for getting pure consonant was necessary in Tamil as there is a large use of pure or vowelless consonants in word final position. The script has four additional characters, which were newly devised to indicate the phonemic sounds (l̲, ḷ, r̲, n̲) peculiar to Tamil and Malayalam (l̲ and r̲ common to Kannada and Telugu too). Conjunct forms are not used at all. In early Tamil the *varga* letters and sibilants are generally avoided but some of the *varga* (aspirates, soft sounds) letters, and the sibilants are used to write Prakrit names (mostly personal names). In view of these special features this regional variety is called Tamil Brahmi.

In the next stage, circa first century BCE to third century CE, much regional differentiation appears in the Brahmi script. This is the time of many new states, that of the Kushanas in the north-west with their Kshatrapa subordinates in Malwa and Konkan, that of the Satavahanas and their successors in the western and eastern Deccan and so on. Naturally the use of the script would have increased for making administrative records, giving birth to regional features. This is the stage when Sanskrit slowly started appearing in inscriptions, though still Prakrit was dominant. Conjunct forms became more frequent and complex. Forms of basic characters also underwent significant modification with markedly angular forms. Head marks became regular feature but differed from region to region. Vowel signs became elaborate. The letters for *au, ṅa, ḥ (visarga), halanta* (sentence final position or verse final position) became vogue. Calligraphic elaboration became another new feature in certain regions, like in the Ikshvaku inscriptions of the Andhra coast.

This trend is continued during the Gupta period (circa fourth to sixth centuries) with more elaboration. Sanskrit replaced the Prakrits as the sole administrative language, besides being the medium of the Classical *kavya* literature. Hence the orthography of the Late Brahmi script becomes standardized accordingly. (A. H. Dani prefers to call the Late Brahmi as proto-regional scripts). Several regional varieties of the script appeared. Generally the right arm of the letters became prolongated downwards. Head marks became more elaborate. In the Vakataka inscriptions of central India, the box-headed form became a peculiar

regional feature. In the south, rounded forms became more prominent and this roundish feature is continued in the subsequent centuries. This is attributed to the use of stylus for writing on palm leaves in the place of pen and ink used in the northern regions. The script used in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka regions was more or less same and in both the areas, in addition to Sanskrit, the local languages (Telugu and Kannada respectively) are found in inscriptions for the first time in the sixth century. In Tamil area the dominant inscriptional language was Tamil and the first regional script that evolved out of the Tamil Brahmi from the fifth century onwards is called *Vatteluttu* (literally meaning 'roundish script'). Another parallel script that appeared in the sixth century in the northern parts of Tamil Nadu is called *Pallava Grantha*, to write both Tamil and Sanskrit languages.

During the period from the 7th to the 10th centuries the regional scripts become quite conspicuous and get distinct names. The most popular script in the Gangetic valley was known as *Siddhamatrika* (also called Kutila) which at its later stage became Nagari or Devanagari. The letters of this script show angular features at lower right corner. Prominent wedges are found on the heads. There is more calligraphic elaboration. Some vowel signs become highly developed. During the same period in the north-west and Kashmir we get what is called Proto-*Sarada* script. In the south the *Telugu Kannada* script shows separate development with roundish features. In the bottom part of many letters of this script there develops a notch, which is a peculiar feature of this script in later centuries. In the Tamil region the Pallava Grantha branched out into Tamil and Grantha scripts, the Tamil to write the Tamil language and the Grantha script to write Sanskrit. The earlier Vatteluttu develops fully rounded forms for all letters and this script is also used to write the Tamil language.

By the 11th century most regional scripts reach the mature stage. Nagari became fully developed. In the east Proto-Bengali became a distinct script. And Gurmukhi (for Punjabi) evolved out of the Sarada script. In the extreme south, the Tamil script becomes dominant, the Vatteluttu being confined to parts of Kerala. From about the thirteenth century onwards the Malayalam develops out of the Grantha script in Kerala. Kannada and Telugu develop some distinct head marks, though for all practical purposes the two scripts look identical.

Indo-Muslim scripts start appearing in the late 12th century to write Arabic and Persian languages. Some three scripts were used according to the purpose—Kufic, Nashk and Nastaliq. Inscriptions most-

ly used the Persian language from the 14th century onwards, from the time of Khalji Sultanate. In the time of the Mughal state, when it was the sole administrative language, we get a good number of Persian inscriptions. But Arabic was continued to be used in the religious contexts. Indo-Muslim scripts were highly calligraphic scripts and so they were used to embellish ornamentation of doors, walls, etc.

As may be noted from the above summary of the development of scripts in India, Indian palaeography is a vast field. Though there were only a couple of scripts in the beginning, Brahmi and Kharoshthi, we get by evolution a number of scripts by the eleventh century, most of them being still in use in different regions of the country. It is explained that the evolutionary changes took place due to different writing techniques and also due to local cultural practices (A.H. Dani, 1986). Broadly speaking there were two writing techniques, that using pen and ink to write on birch bark or similar material in the north, and that using stylus to write on palm leaves, which is a practice followed in the south. While in the north the scripts developed conspicuous angular forms in course of time, in the south the scripts, both Telugu-Kannada and Tamil scripts developed roundish forms. Consequently the modern scripts look different from each other though they evolved out of the same parent script. The scripts also developed some special features according to the particular language for which the scripts were used.

The vastness of the Indian epigraphy, however, need not discourage enterprising students. The students may start with a small area and specialize in the script of that area. After that he can widen his horizon. Actually the earlier stages of a script are less complicated than the later stages. Now that most scripts are deciphered and their development is clearly known, one can start from the earlier stage, say the Brahmi stage and after getting familiar with the inscriptions of that stage, he can proceed to read later scripts gradually, century by century. There is any number of illustrations available in the published volumes (particularly in *Epigraphia Indica* and *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*) to learn by this process. By making he own tables of the letters that he comes across, it is easy to master the old scripts.

There is, of course, the language aspect to consider. According to the area of specialization, the scholar has to get some good knowledge of the language or languages used in the particular inscriptions. In the early stage, knowledge of Prakrit is essential for reading most old inscriptions in the north and the Deccan; in the extreme south knowledge of Tamil is necessary. From the first century onwards Sanskrit becomes

an important and widely used inscriptional language. Even in the south it is used along with the local languages, Kannada, Telugu, and Tamil in different contexts. In the case of post-Gupta Sanskrit inscriptions, it is generally observed that strict Grammatical rules are not followed in writing the Sanskrit inscriptions. It is usually dubbed as corrupt Sanskrit. Actually we have to consider them as locally understood Sanskrit language. That is, it is influenced by the vernacular languages of New Indo-Aryan group, according to the area. The purpose of the inscriptions is communication, not to write chaste Sanskrit. This is the case in the case of the southern languages too. Tamil, Kannada and Telugu inscriptions also show 'un-grammatical' writing generally. They actually reflect the current stage of the development of the concerned language. The aim of the epigraphist is not to look for chaste language in the inscriptions, but to produce faithfully the text as it is written in the original inscriptions, as generally most inscriptions use a documentary language that was used and understood by the people of the day in the particular region.

Finally, I wish to emphasize the difference between inscriptions and literary texts. As far as the literary manuscripts are concerned, generally we get more than one manuscript for the same text and therefore it is possible to arrive at the correct text after making a comparative study of the different manuscripts using methods of textual criticism. For inscriptions, with certain rare exceptions, there is generally only one version available for most inscriptions. Moreover since the inscribed stones are damaged in many cases due to long exposure to sun and rain and also due to human factors, good texts of the inscriptions can be obtained only after long and patient decipherment. The reliability of the texts thus made out depends upon the time and care spent on individual inscriptions.

Notes

1. See for a complete bibliography of the epigraphical publications, D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy*, Delhi, 1965; Noboru Karashima, *History and Society in South India: The Cholas to Vijayanagar*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001.
2. These volumes have been taken up for revision and elaboration by the University of Mysore and more than ten volumes in the new series have been published.
3. Riccardo Garbini estimated the total to be around 60,000 after a meticulous counting. See his 'Software Development in Epigraphy: Some Preliminary Remarks', *Journal of Epigraphical Society of India*, vol. 19 (1993), pp. 63–79.

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Illustrations

DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN SCRIPTS: GENERAL

KEY	Aśokan Brāhmī 3rd Cent B.C.	Southern Brāhmī 3-2 Cent.B.C.	Bhaṭṭiprolu 3-2 Cent.B.C.	Mahākshatrapa 1st Cent.B.C.	Kushāṇa 1-2 Cent.A.D.	Kshatrapa 2nd Cent.A.D.	Śātavāhana 2ndCent.A.D.	Amrāvatī and Jaggayyapeṭa 2-3 Cent.A.D.	Gupta 4 th Cent.A.D.	Kadamba 5-6 Cent.A.D.	W.Chālukya Nāgarī and Southern 6-7 Cent. A.D.	Pallava Nāgarī and Southern 7th Cent. A.D.	Rāshṭrakūṭa Nāgarī and Southern 7-9 Cent.A.D.	Palas 10-11 Cent.A.D.	Chandella 11-12 Cent.A.D.	Paramāras 13 th Cent.A.D.	Purushottama 15th Cent A.D.	Vijayanagar 15th Cent.A.D.	Modern Script
A	𑀅	𑀅	𑀅	𑀅	𑀅	𑀅	𑀅	𑀅	𑀅	𑀅	𑀅	𑀅	𑀅	𑀅	𑀅	𑀅	𑀅	𑀅	𑀅
I	𑀇	𑀇	𑀇	𑀇	𑀇	𑀇	𑀇	𑀇	𑀇	𑀇	𑀇	𑀇	𑀇	𑀇	𑀇	𑀇	𑀇	𑀇	𑀇
U	𑀉	𑀉	𑀉	𑀉	𑀉	𑀉	𑀉	𑀉	𑀉	𑀉	𑀉	𑀉	𑀉	𑀉	𑀉	𑀉	𑀉	𑀉	𑀉
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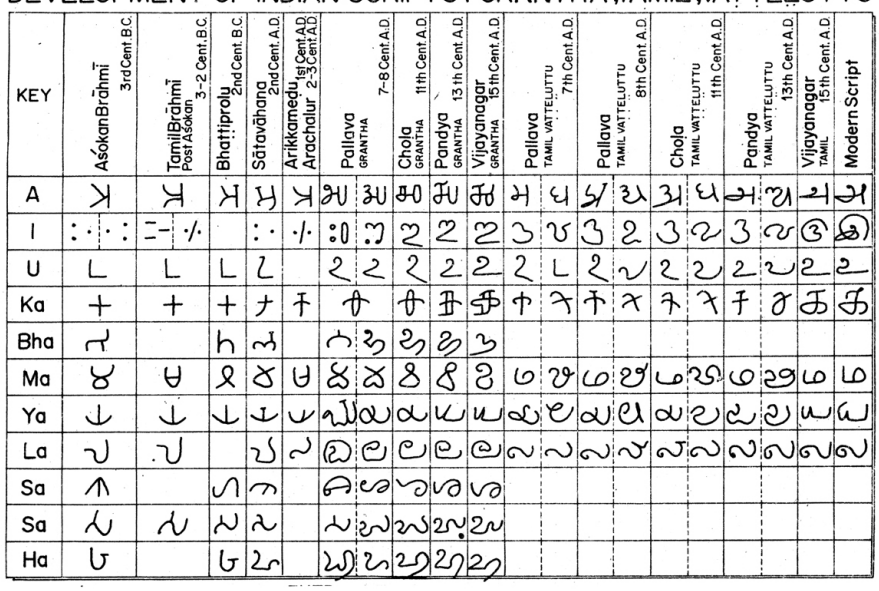
DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN SCRIPTS : GRANTHA, TAMIL, VATTELUTTU



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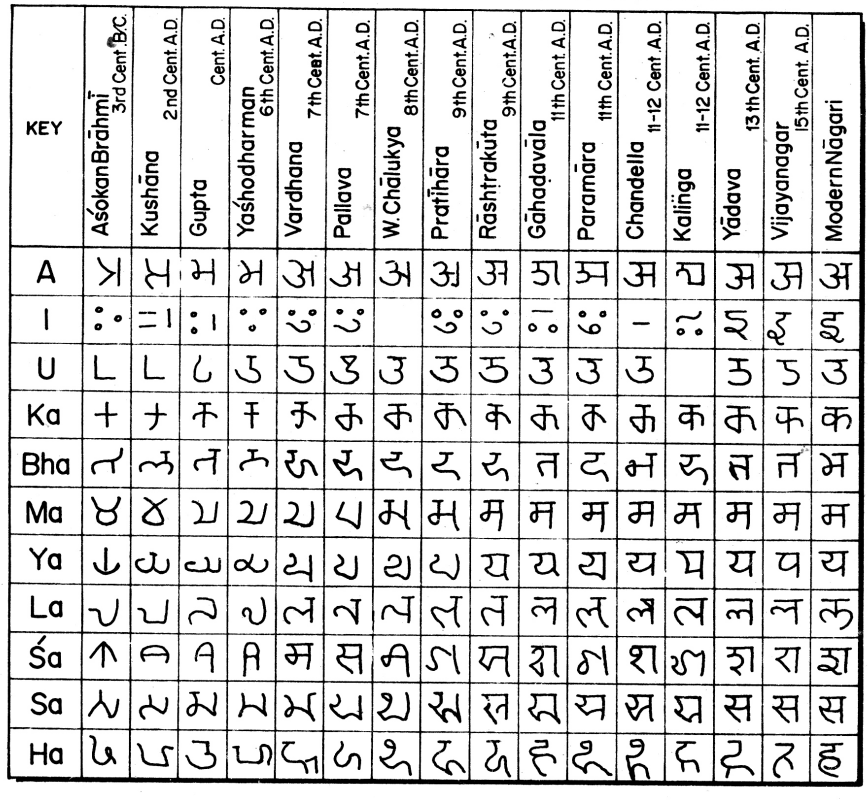

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Meaning and Significance of Epigraphic Records: Towards a Theory for Interpreting Inscriptions

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Abstract

Popular practice or lokavyavahara and the knowledge emanating from various texts are the two pramana-s or logical sources of meaning as perceived by the anumana school of Indian thought. Interestingly, the Anumana School gives ample chances for the play of individual genius by including knowledge acquired from Adhyatma, i.e., personal experiences. It is the adhyatma pramana which brings in basic changes in the existing knowledge. In studying inscriptions, an advantage of this theory is that it provides a specific method by which it becomes possible to arrive at specific connotations and denotations beyond the boundaries of glossaries and lexicons. Further it helps scholars to situate the epigraphic material in its socio-cultural context and also to open up new areas of exploration, thereby facilitating a dialogue between the past and the present. Rising above the level of paraphrasing the texts, the perspective can release several voices, suppressed in the discourses of the past and introduce new subject matter for fresh historical investigations.

***Keywords*:** Inscriptions, pramana, lokavyvahara, anumana school.

India is one of the richest civilizations that have left behind large number of written documents pertaining to various aspects of the past. The earliest phase of its documented history is attributed to the period of the Indus civilization, roughly dated to a period between 2300 to 1700 B.CE. Indus sites that are scattered over a vast area have yielded several thousands of inscribed seals albeit the fact that they are yet to be deciphered convincingly. The earliest datable and intelligible written documents of ancient India are in the form of the edicts of the Mauryan emperor Asoka, engraved on natural rocks and free-standing stone pillars of the third century CE. Following the Mauryan period several dynasties and kings have issued records of their own furnishing much valuable information about various aspects of their economy, society and culture. The total number of inscriptions published or noticed so far amounts to several hundreds of thousands. These immensely rich epigraphic documents are the main sources, especially for reconstruct-

ing the ancient and medieval periods of Indian History. In other words, it is almost impossible to write anything about Indian History without referring to this or that inscription of the past.

A recent theoretical position in the study of history may be characterized as a reciprocal concern with historicity of texts and textuality of history. The phrase 'historicity of texts' means the historical specificity of all modes of writing including the epigraphic records and their studies. This is on the basis of a linguistic view-point regarding relations between words and their meanings. According to this view, the meanings are produced from the context in which the word is uttered or situated. That is to say that the meaning is a social construct (Montrose,1989:18ff). By 'textuality of history' the exponents of this theory mean to suggest that the past is accessible only through linguistic mediation of texts. It has also to be stated that the texts of the past are themselves subjected to subsequent textual mediations when they are viewed as documents to reconstruct the past. These new developments in the areas of History and Linguistics have not been sufficiently recognized in the epigraphic circles due to several constraints including the importance given to problems of external features of palaeographic features, such as formation of letters, orthographic details and so on. It has been convincingly shown that formation of letters and the art of writing themselves are determined mainly by contextual pressures.

This is equally applicable to all written documents including inscriptions that belong to ancient and medieval epochs of History. Since the meaning is not textual, but contextual, it cannot be obtained by simply paraphrasing the record. This can be illustrated by an example from Kerala. The Tarisappalli copper plates issued in 849 AD, the fifth regnal year of Sthanu Ravi Perumal of Mahodayapura, are well known to scholars from the mid-nineteenth century. There are references in this record to various artisans, such as *taccar,* carpenters, *izhavas,* coconut pluckers and toddy tappers, *vannar,* washermen, *eruviyar,* salt panning people, and al, male and female serfs etc. The significance of the presence of these groups in an urban settlement like Kollam cannot be understood until the passages are placed in their right historical context of the formation of village communities in Kerala. Each rural settlement in a given locality is a unit of economic production and a bundle of socio-economic relations. Such a unit of production comes into existence with all the necessary artisans and service groups within it. When a new settlement emerges, the same pattern is followed in that unit also (Varier, 1994). Scholars have described this as 'localization

of goods and services' (Stein, 1999). Historians and scholars have observed after examining a number of various types of settlements that a rural-agrarian element was present in the medieval urban settlements in Europe as well as in the East (Pacione, 2009). Hence the presence of functionaries of an agrarian unit of production at Kollam. Various uses of land in the locality under consideration are also indicated in the relevant passages. In addition to this, the passage throws much welcome light on the nature of various duties and functions of the newly emerging urban settlements during the formative period of the rule of Perumals in Kerala.

There are innumerable examples to show that meanings of inscriptions are ephemeral and changing. At a primary level, epigraphic expressions have their lexical meanings, which are quite inadequate for understanding the social, economic and cultural significance, that is, the cultural milieu of those expressions. Sometimes, the meaning and significance of a text or a corpus of records are altogether missed in a certain intellectual context of historiography. Thus, Robert Sewell, the pioneering historian of the Vijayanagara Empire could not realize the import of the inscriptions of that dynasty. He dismissed them as 'documents, when viewed as state papers, seldom yield more than a few names and dates' (Sewell, 1966: 2). A reason for this attitude towards a particular kind of data is the nature of the prevailing practices in the writing of history. Writing in the last years of the nineteenth century Robert Sewell understood history, mainly as political history and for him state was formed by means of military action, i.e. through annexation of territories. This was the 'popular practice' which shaped Sewell's narrative, and his textual representation of the past had a specific function in the context in which it was circulated. It is interesting to note in this connection that two or three decade later, scholars and historians were heavily depending on the Vijayanagara epigraphs which yielded immensely rich information about the various aspects of South Indian History and polity during the Vijayanagara rule. Thus, B. A. Saletore detected a Karnataka Nationalism in the founding of the Vijayanagara kingdom, which was in all probability an influence of the strengthening Indian National movement (Saletore, 1934:39; Stein, 1994:6). At the same time Sewell saw a rivalry between 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' which had a validity in the context of the imperialist trends of Indian historiography . To put it in other words, in the linguistic mediation, the Vijayanagara epoch acquired different meaning in different textual representations.

Prevalent practices, on certain occasions can induce the formation of counter discourses against the existing views thereby implying that the popular practices can influence the meaning production in many ways. 'Oriental Despotism' was a blanket phrase to characterize any form of state in the oriental societies. It was in this intellectual context that the Uttaramerur inscriptions were brought to light. According to the records, the purport was to register some arrangements made in front of the King's representative to choose local members to constitute various *Variyam*-s, or Committees to carry out different functions of the local administration. In the context of the debates on the issues of the Indian local self-government, the Uttaramerur inscription readily produced a meaning of democracy to explain the village administration under the Cola regime (Sastri, 1966:205). This was a counter discourse against the theories of Oriental Despotism, Hydraulic Societies etc (Kosambi, 1957: 1417-19). The events which led to the formation of rules and regulations, for electing the members, not once but twice within a short span of time are accessible only through the mediation of the inscriptional texts and the textuality of the history of village administration is well represented in the case under discussion. The notes and comments, which are attached to the epigraphs, are historically specific to the age of the discovery and publication of the records.

Meaning is generated not by *vyavahara* the prevalent popular practice alone, as suggested by some Indian semantic Schools. Literary texts also supply meaning to inscriptional texts. Buddhist label inscriptions, scattered widely in the ancient Buddhist sites all over the sub-continent, bare testimony to this observation. The labeling records are intended primarily to register the offerings to the *Caitya*-s, and *Vihara*-s etc. Socio-economic and cultural significance of these label inscriptions was not fully recognized by scholars and epigraphists until recently. A careful look at the inscriptional texts indicates some pattern in recording the texts of the records. The practice was prevalent among Buddhists, and it had strong textual support. The *Mahayana* Buddhist texts prescribe certain rules for a gift to become valid in the religious sphere. A gift thus depends for its value on the factors such as the faith, learning, morality and intention of the giver, the manner and moment of the gift, and the qualities of the done (Varier, 1987). This idea of gift as a merit-acquiring act is different from the primitive reciprocal gift and these changing conceptions of a social act were the outcome of corresponding changes in the social order. The meritorious religious gift-giving is best explained and supported by the Mahayanist principle

of Bodhisattwa. According to the earlier belief in the *hinayana* Buddhism each individual had to strive for himself for attaining Nirvana, the eternal deliverance. Mahayana philosophy propounds that the merit acquired by somebody could be transferred to others and the transference of merit is known among the Mahayanist schools as *punyaparinamana*' (Ibid: 10).The Mahayana texts, which praise the new principle of gift, throw much welcome light on the changed concept of gift-giving and the popular practice of *dana* in the context of *caitya* worship. Thus the textual knowledge of an institution could charge meaning into a corpus of inscriptions. In the light of this 'new meaning' the gifts in the form of votive *stupas*, structural portions of *Caityas* and *Stupas* and at a later stage, landed property in the form of whole villages acquired new importance. It was this newly charged meaning and significance of the *dana* records of the *Satavahanas* and Guptas that was developed into a heated debate on Indian feudalism. In the historical context of the feudalism debate, a variety of texts including those pertaining to Indian and European history contributed much to generate meaning and to form a discourse with political overtone. Without entering into the details of the generated meaning what should be noted here is the part played by the textural knowledge in the meaning-production. The knowledge emanating from the texts is known to the semantic school referred to above as *veda,* a term derived from the root 'vid', meaning, 'to know'. It is worth noting here that the *veda* or the textual knowledge is thrown up by the entire body of texts produced and circulated in a given culture. This necessitates a consideration of relations between various texts.

An excellent example for illustrating this is the recurrent theme of nucleated families in the edicts of Asoka. Major rock edicts mention that tending of mother and father is right conduct- matari pitari sususa sadhu- while commenting on this passage R.K. Mukherjee opined that the edicts follow the upanishadic dictum *'Matr devo bhava; Pitr devo Bhava'* etc (Mukherjee, 1995: 208) . There are some Buddhist mythical stories which relate how the sons had suffered a lot for not obeying parents or hurting them. One such story describes how a merchant had to carry a burning wheel on his head for a long period of sixty four thousand years for leaving his mother in distress without lending ears to her request not to leave her alone. The canonical Buddhist texts have scanty references to nuclear family consisting of father, mother and their children with necessary servants and slaves (*dasa bhataka* groups).These references in the Mauryan edicts can be taken as an indi-

cation of the nuclear family system which was spreading and gathering momentum. Actually, it may not be incorrect to argue that Asoka was emphasizing on the family as the unit of social life which was essential for increasing the efficacy and manageability of commodity production in the villages. An inter-textual reading of the texts of the edicts is sure to generate new meaning and significance for the Mauryan inscriptions.

Popular practice or *lokavyavahara* and the knowledge or Veda emanating from various texts are the two *pramanas* or logical sources of meaning as perceived by the *anumana* school of Indian thought. Interestingly, the *anumana* school gives ample chances for the play of individual genius by including knowledge acquired from *Adhyatma*, i.e personal experiences. It is the *adhyatma pramana* which brings in basic changes in the existing knowledge. This seems to call for some elaboration. Let us take for example the National History perceptive. According to the current popular practice in the historical writing, almost all narratives are in the framework of Nation-state perspective. Nation is the central paradigm of the current historical consciousness. However, recently, the nation and its centrality and attributed glory have been seriously questioned and a local history perspective has started to become an accepted *vyavahara* in the historical writing. Journals exclusively devoted to local history such as The *Local Historian* are published regularly. The *Adhyatma pramana* becomes important in such an intellectual context. In the national history perspective, localities are considered as parts of a structural whole, i.e. the Nation. In the local history perspective locality is viewed as a unit of life, or more specifically, a unit of economic production with all functionaries and occupational and service groups which are necessary for community life (Karashima, 1984:40). Here, inscriptions supply some information which are supported and supplemented by other forms of texts including old manuscripts, family records etc., several Cola records provide information to reconstruct old villages which were units of economic production and community life. Instead of looking at these villages as divisions of some larger areas, they can be studied as units of community life, which merged together for various social economic and cultural purposes to form a larger unit of the *Nadu*. The importance of these *nadu* units of medieval times lies in the fact that they were spontaneous units of production and reproduction incorporating a number of basic village nuclei. This seems to explain why the local magnates and chieftains were becoming more and more powerful in spite of an overarching sovereignty existed at a supra-local level. Ideas should

come from the *adhyatma* supported by the data based on information from contemporary sources including inscriptions for participating in such debates on National–Local paradigms,

The *adhyatma pramana* is capable of releasing several unheard voices which were suppressed by popular *vyavahara*. Looking afresh at *Amarakosa* from a socio- historical perspective, D.D. Kosambi was able to bring out several valuable information regarding the lower strata of society in ancient India for which a thorough search in the contemporary epigraphic material was essential" (Kosambi, 1955: 57-9). We have seen that the meaning and significance of epigraphical records are generated when they are situated in their right historical contexts. The three *pramana*-s, which generate the meaning, are popular practices or *lokavyavahara* textual and intertextual knowledge, or *veda vyavahara* and the knowledge acquired form personal experience, *adhyatma*. This theory of meaning was formulated by Mahimabhatta, the author of the famous text *Vyaktiviveka* with a view to challenge the principles of *dhvani* which carried away the meaning from concrete materialism to idealism and to establish the *anumana* principle which attempts to fix the meaning firmly on the ground of material life-world (Pilla, 1988). In studying inscriptions, an advantage of this theory is that it provides a specific method by which it becomes possible to arrive at specific connotations and denotations beyond the boundaries of glossaries and lexicons. Further it helps scholars to situate the epigraphic material in its socio-cultural context and also to open up new areas of exploration, thereby facilitating a dialogue between the past and the present. Rising above the level of paraphrasing the texts, the perspective can release several voices, suppressed in the discourses of the past and introduce new subject matter for fresh historical investigations.

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'Deconstruct the Rotten Mud Form and Reconstruct Anew: Symbolic Curing in the *Mannayichu-Chattu* Ritual of Kanikkar

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Abstract

The body reconstruction ritual—mannayichuchattu—of the Kanikkar people living in the Kerala forests is a sparingly practised ritual, but it is an epitome of Kanikkar's heritage in health care. It tells us about the "traditional" health conceptualisations of Kanikkar in which the human body is made of earth. Injury to earth causes illness to the human body because the earth body and the human body are, to the Kanikkar, synonymous. Illness to the Kanikkar, thus becomes expressions of experiences of injustices, violence done to earth, to a way of life, a value system. It is not about an individualised experience of injury but a collective hurt. The paper highlights that the ritual of Mannayichuchattu symbolises for the Kanikkar an attempt to take control of their lives and their value system, despite the irrecoverable material losses that they have sustained.

Keywords: Kanikkar, *Mannayichu Chattu,* purificatory ritual, *vilakkoottam.*

The Kanikkar of Kerala, while a small community with only a little over one percent of the total population of the southern state of Kerala in India, is still the most predominant of the scheduled tribe peoples of Kerala. The inclusion of Kanikkar in the constitutional category scheduled tribe denotes an official recognition by the Government of India of the historical deprivation the Kanikkar had met with that stood in the way of their advancement. Originally known to have been shifting cultivators, they are now settled in the forest ranges of three administrative Forest Divisions: the Trivandrum Forest Division, the Thenmala Range of Thenmala Forest Division, and the Anchal Range of Punalur Division. Data for this paper was elicited from a Panchayat in Trivandrum Forest Division which had the largest number of Kanikkar settlements and families. The tribal settlements in this Panchayat were segregated geographically by a majestic river that flowed through the Panchayat with all fury in the monsoons and lay as a quiet but sig-

nificant presence the rest of the times. A passenger canoe owned by the Panchayat was the only mode of transport for ferrying people across the river. In the case of health emergencies, the river posed an additional problem to the tribal people in reaching the health care institution closest to them if not of their choice. Besides, the region being a wildlife sanctuary there were restrictions for outsiders from entering the settlements. In this context, existing medical anthropology theories and models were unable to provide explanation for the complex patterns of health seeking found among the Kanikkar. Classification approach of ethno-science (Frake, 1961), hierarchy of resort approach propounded by Romanucci-Ross (1969), correlation analysis that was popular in the seventies (De Walt 1977; McClain 1977; Press 1969; Woods 1977), all provided only partial understanding of Kanikkar's health scenario. The complexity of Kanikkar's health seeking behaviour in the forest habitat is best understood as an integral part of their "health culture". In my fieldwork interactions with Kanikkar I came to learn that while accessing modern health care facilities, one's faith can still be rooted in traditional cosmology and this faith could interfere with healing or could cause for healing when the most modern health care has given up a patient as terminally ill and beyond the scope of medical intervention, as was the case in the ritualised curing ceremony of "*Mannayichu Chattu"*. Concentration on cosmology need not be understood as a portrayal of these people as away from all modern institutions and as an excluded category. On the other hand, they have fallen for the "charm of medicine" and even go for self-medication asking from the local medical store the medicines that had been prescribed for them or for someone they knew by some medical practitioner, for a similar health problem sometime earlier. Kanikkar opt for all systems of medicines available in Kerala's plural medical system (Menon, 1996; 1997; 2002). They are also a part of the globalized world of pharmaceutical and corporate networks and caught up in the intricacies of intellectual property right issues (Menon, 2013). It is within this complexity of health care options that their health-seeking practices and beliefs underlying them should be contextualised and sought to be comprehended.

Ideas about death and the human body are intertwined in the mythology behind *Mannayichuchattu.* The term Mannayichuchattu is a combination of three words 'mannu', 'azhikkuka', and `chattu'. Chattu is a term used by Kanikkar to refer to all purification rituals that are performed to the rhythm of *chattupattu* or songs for chattu which are accompanied by the music produced by striking the iron instrument

known as *kokkara. Mannu* means earth and *azhikkuka* 'means undo. Together the three words refer to purificatory ritual for undoing the earthen body. This has reference to the Kanikkar's conceptualisation of the human body as made of earth and disease as the rotting or decay of the earth. The impure or rotten earth that makes the diseased human body is undone through the purificatory ritual of *mannayichuchattu* that invokes gods to intervene in reinvigorating the renewed earthen structure of the human body. Any individual who is seriously ill has to get his earthen body symbolically deconstructed and rebuilt anew with invocations to God; Every injury to earthis believed to cause illness in human body as a human being in Kani perception is earth body moulded in human form and infused with life.An informant explained:

> When the Creator sent us down, he measured rice in a *nazhi* (measuring bowl for paddy) kept inside a *muram* (winnowing basket). When this measure of rice gets over, we humans die. To correct this, we have to do *mannayichuchattu.*

In this reference to the depletion of rice may be read the symbolic expression of the loss of Kanikkar's rice cultivation. This was a death knell to their social body. Human bodies suffer also due to distancing from the earth body, herbs and wildlife. Illness thus becomes an expression of an experience of injustice and violence to the earth, a way of life and the body collective.

In this context, one may recall Vandana Shiva (1994:3):

> "Environmental problems become health problems because there is a continuity between the earth body and the human body through the processes that maintain life...People, their environment and their society are not separable by rigid and insular boundaries".

Shiva defines environment as everything that affects peoples' lives. In a similar vein, environmental problems of the Kanikkar and their health problems become one and the same. In many of the illness narratives of the Kanikkar that I have recorded, health is unattainable when the quality of the environment –which is not separable from the quality of life—is deteriorated. To regain lost health, one has to regain the quality of the environment, the quality of life. This is what the Kanikkar aspire to achieve in the ritual of "*Mannayichu Chattu*".

The procedures involved in the ritual described to me by an informant will exemplify the belief system and the symbolism in the ritual:

Bathe a *nazhi* (paddy measuring bowl) and place it upright inside a *muram* (winnowing pan), fill it with rice, decorate with flowers,

draw lines around it with lime, and put flowers on all four sides. Then invoke Lord Siva, the one who created us: "Oh Lord, let the rice you measured brim over like this". That is *Mannayichu Chattu.* Our body is created by Lord Siva out of earth. With magic, that earthen structure is demolished and constructed again, that is *Mannayichu Chattu*. Our life is secured within a cage woven by parrot. (That is why parrots don't have beaks!) The parrot flies to *vadakkumthirikkotta* (a Fort) and from a palm tree there, bites out a palm leaf and brings it to Lord Siva. He cures the palm leaf by drying it in the sun and then mellowing it in the mist. On this palm leaf he writes our destiny with a *narayam* (stiletto for writing on palm leaf). If this palm leaf rots or is destroyed, we die. With *Mannayichu Chattu,* a person's life can be extended to seven more years, but a *plathi* (ritual practitioner) can do this no more than seven times for fear of endangering his own life.

Shortage of rice and rotting of the palm leaf are symbolic expressions of destruction of the earth and thus, of health. My informant who sung parts of the invocation from the very long *chattupattu* (song for chattu) gave me a summary and his interpretation of the worldview of Kanikkar that finds expression in the song. There was emphasis on the idea that Kanikkaran was the first human created and sent to earth together with his female partner. Birds and beast had been created and sent to earth ahead of this human couple. The Kanikkar were intellectually superior and blessed with speech. They were sent to earth to control all other species created and sent to earth before them and to look after the welfare of all the species on earth, he explained.

In the ordinary day-to-day living, these myths may not mean much to the Kanikkar. But in the case of exigencies as in the case of a life-threatening illness of oneself or one's loved ones, they recall the anecdotes passed on by ancestors. The secret knowledge of *Mannayichu Chattu* that only the Kanikkar possess, and only a great Kani ritual specialist can perform, is too elaborate a ritual to be performed for all ailments. It is the ultimate life-saving attempt when all else fails. It remains in the Kani repository of traditions alongside all other beliefs about cosmology that are at the root of many of their health care practices, as a legacy from their gods and ancestors. It is a legacy to be taken out and embellished and collectively recanted in times of crises in health. In one sense, it conveys a message across cultural cleavages to "others" about the uniqueness and superiority of the Kanikkar, a pride in their heritage and faith in their "traditions" (Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, 1983). Even when western pharmaceuticals are used and

hospitalisation is resorted to, the belief in this ultimate life-saving ritual that only a great Kani *plathi* can perform preserves Kani traditions in health care and provides the Kanikkar with a sense of the ultimate control over their own bodies and health. In the ritual of *Mannayichu Chattu,* one could see expressions of the Kanikkar's senses of identity—an attempt to demolish a deteriorating body and reconstruct a new rejuvenated one, but also of an attempt to recapture life's quality that was taken from them.

In the year 1911, the Rules for the Treatment and Management of Hillmen brought all tribal people under the control of the Forest Department. The Rules defined the hillmen as those tribes who have been living in the hills from time immemorial. The list of tribes appended to the Rules had the name of Kanikkar on the top of fifteen "hillmen". These rules enforced a kind of social control over the Kanikkar. One form of that enforced social control was made explicit in clause 3 of the Rules:

> Each settlement will have a headman, who has attained that position either by hereditary right or by selection or election by the members of the settlement, in conformity with the existing practice.
>
> Provided that when a headman fails to carry out any of the duties, (....) the Divisional Forest Officer may call upon the adult male members to depose him and elect another competent man to take his place.

The forms of social control that existed among the Kanikkar revolved round two major roles of authority: the headman known as *moottukani* and the spiritual leader known as *plathi.* The kanikkar were organised into a hamlet known as Vila with reference to crops and cultivation. Each vila was a single socio-political and religious unit under the authority of *moottukani* who decided on matters of importance to the hamlet in gatherings known as *vilakkoottam*. All heads of households formed the *vilakkoottam* which was presided over by the *moottukani.* The office of the *moottukani* was hereditary and the oldest of the sons of the sisters of headman succeeded him. Settling internal disputes, punishing offenders who violated communal norms and customary practices, settling matters of marriage, propitiating ancestral spirits and other deities, fixing the time for clearing the jungle, sowing seeds and reaping the harvest, all formed part of the authority of a *moottukani.* (Thurston, 1906:169; Iyer, 1937:32).

That social organisation which Thurston and Iyer described, the one centred on *moottukani,* is long gone. Of the eleven settlements I collected data from, only three had *moottukani.* And they exerted very

little authority in socio-political affairs of the community. The waning of the traditional authority of these headmen began with the restructuring of the authority of tribal headmen under the Hillmen Settlement Rules. Under these rules there was provision for the State to depose a headman who failed to carry out the prescribed duties and replace him with a "competent" headman.

Through these Rules, the State restricted the movement of these tribal people and confined them to fixed spaces, curtailing their nomadism. Even temporary moves in times of water scarcity or epidemics like smallpox needed written permission from the Divisional Forest Officer.They were also required to register their numbers annually with the Forest Department. Such registration was one of the new duties of the headmen. No Kanikkaran could leave his settlement and migrate to another place without the permission of the headman of his settlement who is an agent of the Divisional Forest Officer and could exercise no independent agency.

There were other restrictions that the new Rules put on the Kanikkar. Although they could cultivate in the forest land, they could not have ownership of the land that a patta or title deed could give. They could own their crops but not the valuable food grains and tobacco which could not be removed from the Government Forest or Reserve without written permission from the Divisional Forest Officer. The rules also made it binding on the Kanikkar to supply to the Forest Department any produce they might be asked to collect at a price fixed by the government while forest land was being leased out for food crop cultivation and for plantations. Iyer (1935) has recorded that the nomadic Kanikkar were driven to more uncongenial lands that did not give them enough yield to feed their families for the whole year. Combine with this, there was restriction on outsiders from entering the Reserve and from having financial dealings with the Kanikkar or purchasing the crops in the settlements. In effect, the lives of these once-nomadic people had dramatically changed with forced settlement, restricted social interactions and monitored economic transactions with outsiders.

Forced settlement had destroyed their socio-political organisation and subsistence pattern.It had also affected their dietary habits. The variety of greens, fruits and meat protein reduced substantially with the enforced settlement. Early accounts of Kanikkar (Iyer, 1937; Thurston, 1909) have documented that the Kanikkar produced different varieties of rice, cereals, pulses. Millet, ragi, sugarcane, sweet potato, tapioca and garden vegetables such as cucumber, pumpkin, beans,eggplant,

plantain etc. were no longer to bepart their diet once. My own fieldwork showed no trace of such dietary diversity. The main food crops I found the Kanikkar cultivating during my fieldwork were only plantains and tapioca. Cash crops like rubber, pepper, areca palms and fruit trees such as cashew, jack fruit and tamarind were seen widely planted in the settlements. While jack fruit was eaten by them, cashew nuts and tamarind were being sold in the local market. The dietary variety that Iyer and Thurston noted was part of their narrative as a memory of their by-gone days and traditions.

Even after independence the relationship of the Kanikkar with the State remains somewhat strained despite the policy of protective discrimination. Inclusion in citizenship has not made the ideal of *Mannayichu Chattu* fade away. Communal rituals are becoming more and more a thing of the past with a disrupted social organisation but traditions are often invoked if not invented; memory is a great aid in this selective invocation to the Kanikkar. By and large, they access the plural medical system and its benefits but the symbolic meanings of *Mannayichu Chattu* keeps traditions intact and the ultimate control of their healing with themselves although herbs and forests have gone and crops dwindled and *plathis* and *maruthuvathis* are becoming a memory.

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Recasting the Body: Thinking, Writing, Painting*

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Abstract

Thinking has conventionally been understood as a disembodied activity, that is, an activity devoid of any necessary connection to body. In the mainstream history of philosophy, thinking is being understood primarily as a mental act of contemplation where body is not necessarily implicated. That is, while thinking deeply, we suspend the body, withdrawing our senses to a point where only our mind is awake in the strict sense. Alertness of the mind is the primary point of initiation of the act of thinking, and writing, according to this perspective, is secondary and derivative. Accordingly, writing is a kind of translation; while writing we translate the ideas which precedes it. Why do we consider writing as translation? In the backdrop of the contemporary discussions on writing, the present paper addresses the question of the nature of thinking in painting. Painting, as we see, is an act where the corporeality of the body is irreducibly implicated. The painted images are not the translations of the pure mental images; they come into being by the very bodily act of painting. Painters think by way of painting. This perspective needs to be anchored on a radical recasting of the question of embodiment, and the paper attempts to do this by making use of the observations made by some well known painters like Paul Klee and Paul Cezanne and the phenomenological insights provided by Merleau-Ponty.

Keywords: Embodiment, Self, Touch, Painting, Reversibility.

I

"A line is a dot that went for a walk.

A drawing is simply a line going for a walk: An active line on a walk, moving freely, without goal, a walk for a walk's sake".

These are some of the startling observations made by the Swiss-German artist, Paul Klee (Klee, 1961: 105), who is best known for his large body of paintings and drawings influenced by various

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movements such as cubism, expressionism and surrealism. These statements, to my mind, offer a very different perspective to look at the artistic endeavor of drawing and painting, and also, more importantly, to rethink the very activity of thinking. In the present paper, an attempt is made to analyze some of its implications especially to have a critique of the conventional understanding of thinking.

Where is a painting actually born? Is it the case that an image is first born in the mind of the artist and then is getting reproduced through the bodily act of drawing or painting? If so, then the act of painting is to be considered as an act of translation; a mental image is getting translated into a canvas. But what if it is through the act of painting that the image is born? If, as Paul Klee stated, drawing is a line on a walk then it will mean the image has no past in the mind of the artist. It comes into being through the very act of drawing/painting. In other words, the act of painting will have to be essentially considered as a bodily act. Painting does not translate something which precedes it. Painters do not first think the images then paint, but rather they think by way of painting.

According to the Cartesian tradition, thinking is being understood as a disembodied activity, that is, an activity devoid of any necessary connection to body. While thinking, we suspend our body, withdrawing our senses to a point where only our mind is awake in the strict sense. Writing, according to this perspective, is secondary and derivative. Only when we engage in writing does the body get implicated. Accordingly, everything written has an earlier mental existence, an existence 'inside', where it has not yet been turned impure by the intervention of the body. All writing, by this logic, is impure.

Auguste Rodin's sculpture 'The thinker' is often considered as an image representing philosophy. The sculpture depicts the image of nude male figure of over life-size. He is sitting alone on a rock with his chin resting on one hand as though deep in contemplation. His mood is pensive, as he sits with his eyes withdrawn from the surroundings. The body of the thinker slips into deep thought, and this posture helps in showing the intensity of his act of thinking. It indicates that the process of thinking can be easily distracted by the sensory perception. The withdrawal of the senses from the world around is supposed to be a necessary precondition for the mind to engage in deep thought. In other words, for thought to progress, the body needs to be suspended.

Philosophical thinking is often understood as a deep level contemplation where body is a possible obstruction, something to be tran-

scended. According to Socrates, life of a true philosopher is a *practice of dying*. Since to philosophize one has to distance oneself from the worldly life and its sensory appeal, he asserts that philosophers practice death while alive. As we know, the main theme of conversation between him and his disciples before his execution was death, where he says a true philosopher should not worry about death because he is already dead while engaged in philosophizing.

The philosophers, who are critical of the foundations of the Socratic or the Platonic tradition of philosophizing, often take art as their model for rethinking the very act of thinking. Art, for them, can be seen as the articulation of the body. The body that performs art, whether it is in painting, dance, and so on, is not one that is lost in meditation and distanced from the sensory world. Friedrich Nietzsche embraces the image of a body that dances rather than the image of the thinker to characterize his own way of philosophizing. (See, Nietzsche, 2001: 381). This image becomes important when we think about thinking in the context of drawing or painting. When read Nietzsche's image together with the earlier quote of Paul Klee, it can be said that a drawing is a line on an ecstatic dance.

What is the relation between thinking and writing? Is it the case that writing is a mere translation of speech, which is, in turn, is a translation of thought? Many attempts have been done in the recent history, especially in the domain of the so called Continental philosophy, to have a fresh look at this question. Edmund Husserl, in his essay on *The Origin of Geometry* (Derrida, 1989), examines this and arrives at the view that practice of writing is essential to both the history of geometry and more importantly to the constitution of its objectivity. Husserl says it is not when the geometry is conceived in the mind but only when it is born into the world or written down and becomes part of an intersubjective world, that it attains its objectivity. The argument is built on the premise that before it was drawn the geometric figures must have had an ideal past life in the mind.

In Husserl's view, all knowledge even in the empirical sciences derives certain of its factors from the mind but what is specific in the case of geometry is its purity. Geometrical truths are derived by deduction. We do not discover 'right angles', 'straight lines', for example, rather they are concepts that the human mind has invented. They are derived from the mind and not availed through the sensory experience. As ideas they have a kind of immunity. The possibility of a curve, for example, cannot be attributed to a straight line. Only when a straight

line is drawn can we consider the possibility of a curve in it. Once it is written down the geometric truth gets freed from the mind. Thus freed from the human mind, geometry enters the world of human transactions and becomes objective, but through this process it loses their purity. That which is written can always be interpreted in multiple ways. It can be understood in varied and distorted ways. It is into this world of uncertainties that geometry is born. Thus, it can be said that for the sins of writing, geometry finally gets banned from its original heaven.

Why does Husserl treat writing as secondary and derivative? Is writing a mere translation of thought? Is it actually the copy of the pre-existent idea or thought? These are some of the fundamental questions raised by Derrida and these questions bring out the tensions within Husserl's arguments. Writing, for Derrida, is not translation but an original and constitutive order in its own right. It is an activity which brings the phenomena it writes about into being. In the case of Geometry, it has no existence prior to writing. It is to be understood as a product of the practice of writing. Derrida's reflections move further touching upon the questions of opacity and contingency of the text, and finally to demonstrate the impossibility of the transcendental signified. We shall not discuss these reflections as they are slightly out of our central concerns in this paper. What is important for us is Derrida's point that the thesis of the primacy of writing is not true in Geometry alone. This could be true for any kind of writing. What is written comes into being through the process of writing.

II

It is true that we cannot easily compare painting and geometry, since painting is essentially an artistic endeavor. What is it that happens in the case of painting? Does the painter think first with her mind and then draw with her hands? Does every painting include a process by which colors are filled in into a pre-existing image in the mind of the painter? More than the question of what comes first the important question here is whether the images have a hidden residence outside the lines and colors that make a painting.

A painting involves paints, brushes and canvases; and they all are connected to the corporeality of the body. In the context of painting, it is just impossible to conceive a moment where the body is not implicated. The brush, the paint and the canvas do not just act as tools to bring out the image in the mind, but constitute the image in a significant sense. Paul Cezanne once remarked: "I select colors, tones and

shades; I set them down, I bring them together...They make lines, they become objects – rocks, trees – without my thinking about them..." (Cezanne, 1991: 148)

The thinking, in the context of painting, is not of the nature of a disembodied contemplation. Rather, it involves the alertness of the body as an essential condition. In Sanskrit, thinking is *Chinta* (derived from the root *chiti*) that implies the meaning of cheta, the alertness. In painting, it is the body that is alert; the body here is not something that is withdrawn from the world but invariably open towards the sensible world. In other words, it is the body that thinks. If the act of painting is not the translation of the pre-existing mental image, then the first moment of creation can be rightly credited to that of a line and not an idea. *The beginning was the line, not the word.* And for the same reason, a painting doesn't have a hidden past life to claim. Similarly, to admire a painting we don't have to look for its hidden meanings; there is nothing hidden in a painting. What a painting does is to speak to our body and what is expected from the spectator is to keep her eyes/senses open to the visible. Paul Cezanne had once so remarked about the fruits that he drew: "They come to you with all their odors, they tell you about the fields they have left, about the rains that nourished them, about the dawns that they searchingly watched". (Benedetti, 1995:31)

The experience of seeing is not to be understood as an ahistorical act; it is mediated through different historical processes and as such cannot be divorced from the history of knowing. Those scientific interventions that have revolutionized the world around us have also significantly altered the experience of seeing. They have altered the fundamentals of the relationship between the subject and the object of knowing and consequently the very nature of visual knowledge. The Cartesian project also entails a serious attempt to re-define the relationship between the seer and the seen. Descartes' writings on optics can be taken as an example in this regard.

Descartes' reflections on optics, on a closer observation, reveal a very loosely held argument. He believes that we should not consider the experience of seeing as just a sensory exercise. It is not the case that our visual apparatus simply captures the image of what is presented before our eyes. Rather, we have an ability to project things (*pro-jection*), that is, to posit the being of what is presented to our eyes in advance. Obviously, the external eye is not the source of this projection. There is an inner eye, the eye of reason, which is to be taken as the primary source of vision. What Descartes and other rationalists attempted was

to detach vision from the external eyes and to place it as a process originating from this 'inner eye'.

What does this 'inner eye' actually signify? For Descartes, it is not a physical constituent of our body, but simply 'the thing that thinks'. The inner eye that sees is identical with the 'I' that thinks. The point of origination of seeing, thinking and so on cannot be a part of the body because the body itself is something that is being projected from this point. I am able to see my body; the very fact that I can see my body means I am not my body. The point from which the body is seen or projected cannot be a part of the body.

As we know, Descartes had formulated most of his arguments by engaging himself in a peculiar kind of experiment, that is, of staring at his own body. This was clearly an unusual and strange experimentation, as we do not usually observe our body in a detached manner, especially when it is involved in its usual chores. It is only when there is a problem that interrupts this sense of normality that we start to look at the body as if it is an object 'out there'. For example, when an unusual lump appears on my body I would start looking at it as something alien, outside of myself. Descartes looks at his own body in a similar manner, that, body becomes something outside, an object like any other objects of perception. In the perspective of the inner eye, the world is 'out there'; it is something to be observed, analyzed in an objective manner.

How do the painters engage the visible world? If, as we have seen earlier, a painter experiences the world through his or her body and not from the disembodied perspective of an inner eye, then what would be the nature of this experience? Obviously, it would not be of the nature of a subject-object encounter as in the Cartesian perspective. Visual engagement here would be radically of a different kind where body is not just a means; it is the body that sees.

III

In the Cartesian framework, the world is 'out there' in front of me, as something fundamentally detached from 'me'. For Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, it is to be understood necessarily as a space where I live, a fundamental dimension of my embodied existence. "I am my body, at least wholly to the extent that I possess experience, and yet at the same time my body is as it were a 'natural' subject, a provisional sketch of my total being" (Ponty, 1996:198). I am always already embodied; body and the world are of the same stuff. In his later writ-

ings, Merleau-Ponty used the notion of flesh as part of his attempt of rethinking the materiality of the world in a manner which transcends the conventional understanding, especially of the Cartesian tradition. What is important, in all these formulations, is the view that world is not to be understood as being composed of dead matter. It is essentially a lived space. "I do not see (space) according to its interior envelop; I live in it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all around me, not in front of me" (Ponty. M, 1968:178).

Being immersed in the world, I am always already being touched by the surroundings. It is not the case that I am a seer, a detached spectator, and the world is an object of seeing standing in front of my eyes. There cannot be any hard line of demarcation between the world and myself when their relation is being captured through the image of touching. The lived body or the body-subject does not have a clear-cut boundary of its own, since it is constantly being touched, getting affected, by the surroundings, or penetrated by the world in multiple directions. In other words, the world is disclosed through the body, and in the context of painting, the painted images refer to the way the world reveals itself in and through the body of the painter.

What Merleau-Ponty wishes to articulate here is the thesis of the reversibility of the subject-object relation, and this is obviously in direct contrast to the Cartesian thesis of dualism. As we have seen earlier. Descartes arrives at the dualism of the inner and the outer on the basis of the primacy that he has accorded to the sight in capturing the fundamental nature of man's relationship with the world. What if instead of sight we consider touch? As Merleau-Ponty says, when 'I touch', it is my body that is doing the touching. Only a body can touch. We cannot imagine a disembodied agency behind the act of touching. Also, more importantly, in the experience of touch there is a reversibility of subject-object relation, that, when the body touches something, it implies that it is being touched. What is being a touched touch back at the same time.

In his later writings, Merleau-Ponty extends this analysis to the problem of intersubjectivity, where he claims the self and the other are closely related like 'two hands touching', the intertwining of a chiasmus. It is on the basis of the reversibility of the experience of the toucher-touched that he reformulates a relation to the visible world irreducible to the subject-object distinction in a more convincing manner than that of his own earlier analysis of *The Phenomenology of Perception.* For Merleau-Ponty, the intersubjective relation, envisioned on

analogy with the chiasmic relation to the visible, is one where the self and the other 'are like organs of one single intercorporeality' (Ponty, 1968:168).

The reason, why seeing was assumed to be different from touching, is that the former was considered to be an experience originating from a disembodied eye. What if like how the body touches, the body also sees? What if in seeing it is the body that sees, as in the case of touching? Merleau-Ponty says, "The enigma is that my body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the "other side" of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself..." (Ponty, 1968:162) Obviously, the attempt here is to recognize the reversibility of the 'toucher-touched' relation in the experience of seeing; the experience of seeing implies being seen. A painter might feel that the world opens its eyes through his/her body. Merleau-Ponty invites our attention to the words of the French painter, Andre Marchand who said that, 'when in forest I don't look at the trees, they look at me.' (See Ponty, 1993: 121) This is not to be understood as a fantasy, but the very fact of embodiment or our being-in-the-world.

'Color and I are one; I am a painter'. This is another significant statement pronounced by Paul Klee. He made this statement in continuation of his observation that, 'Color possesses me. I do not have to pursue it. It will always possess me.' (Klee, 1968) Interestingly, this provides a powerful challenge to one of the most celebrated traditions of philosophy where 'I' is being conceived as a substance whose essence consists only in thinking. To reframe the above statement as a pun for the Cartesian assertion, 'I think, therefore I exist', would be to say: I draw, therefore 'I' do not exist. Line exists; when the line goes for a walk it becomes a drawing.

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Medieval Structural Remains From St. Hormis Church, Angamaly

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Abstract

The central purpose of this paper is to analyse the structural remains found at the church of St. Hormis in Angamaly in central Kerala and its association with late sixteenth century church architecture in Kerala. This late 16th century building is closely associated with Mar Abraham, the last Chaldean bishop sent by the Patriarchs of Babylon to Malabar. Angamaly was often mentioned in contemporary documents as the seat of Mar Abraham from 1568 to 1597. The Synod of Angamaly was convened by Mar Abraham in 1583. He died at Angamaly in 1597 and was buried in this church. Though these facts were well known and comprehensively studied based on missionary letters, travellers accounts, native accounts and the letters written by Mar Abraham, the recent archaeological discoveries have given a new insight into the medieval religious conditions in Kerala and the role of Christians in it.

Keywords: Angamaly, St. Hormis church, Mar Abraham, tombstone.

Early History of Angamaly

Angamaly is a town in Periyar basin in Kerala. The earliest archaeological evidence from Periyar basin includes polished stone axes of the Neolithic culture. Continuous settlement began during the Iron Age with the Megalithic culture. Many sites with Urn burials and Cist burials dated between 500 BCE and CE 500 were found along the Manjaly River and the palaeochannels of the River Periyar (Chedambath, 1988, Peter 2002, Varghese & Jomon, 2002:127-8). A Dolmenoid Cist burial with iron chisels, and models of a plough and two animals were found at Kidangoor near Angamaly (Chedambath, 1988, Gurukkal & Varier, 1999:114).

Gradually, Angamaly emerged as a trading town during the early historic period. The active trade during first and second centuries CE can be attested from the find of silver punch marked coins from Kodussery near Angamaly (Varghese & Jomon, 2002:128). This formed the backdrop for the emergence of Angamaly as one of the earliest

Christian settlements in Kerala. This fact is backed by a tradition that, the earliest group of Christian traders who settled in Angamaly migrated from Palayur (Varghese & Jomon, 2002: 130). The earliest church was near St. George church (Angamaly Valiya Palli) which is dated to 5th century CE, no structural evidence backing it could be found in explorations.

A structure of port-hierarchy was developing in coastal Kerala from the ninth to eighteenth centuries with new port settlements developing in the hinterland (Malekandathil in Sharma (Ed.), 2010:76). Angamaly was well connected through the inland waterways with the coastal settlements of Kodungallur, Palayur and Paravur. Thus, it seems more probable that, small groups of Christian traders migrated from Kodungallur to Angamaly from ninth century CE following the attack by Muhammedans that affected trade (Jomon, 2006:27). Since ninth century, the church in Malabar was also receiving bishops from Persia to various ports such as Kollam and Kodungallur. The Chaldean-Persian bishops Mar Joseph, Mar Abdisho, Mar Jacob and Mar Abraham visited at Angamaly in fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Between 9thand 12th centuries, Kodungallur was active in trade. Grants were issued by the Cheraman Perumal rulers and local chieftains to the newly built churches and synagogues.

Since 1540s, the Jesuit missionaries were setting up their spheres of influence in Malabar largely with support from the Portuguese. Christian missionaries of the Society of Jesus (Jesuit) reached India in 1541 itself (Mathew in Mathew (Ed) 2016: xxiv). The Jesuits had a seminary at Vaipikotta in Chendamangalam from 1584-1663 to train priests in Syrian rite (*Ibid*). Jesuit presence in Angamaly, a settlement of St. Thomas Christians, was to assume significance much later. Mar Abraham gave permission to Jesuit missionaries to work among the St. Thomas Christians in and around Angamaly (*Ibid*).

Medieval remains from St. Hormis church

In 2015 as the St. Hormis church was being renovated, archaeological evidence of a late 16th century building and a tomb like structure were unearthed. As the church was being renovated, there was no possibility for a systematic excavation. Within the limited time and space available, efforts were made to look for structural remains of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A scientific clearance of the debris was done in the area of the *madubaha* or sanctum sanctorum of the present church. All the finds were documented and recorded systemati-

cally and was compared with other contemporary sites in Kerala. It was then corroborated using data from historical sources.

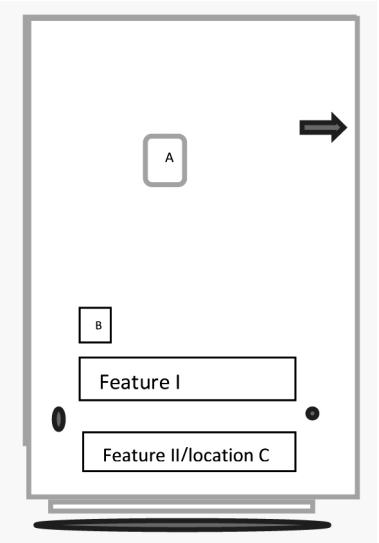

Figure 1: Ground plan of St. Hormis Church[1]

The objectives of the work were as follows:

a. To identify archaeological remains dating to 16th and 17th centuries at St. Hormis Church at Angamaly.
b. To identify the different structural phases in the site and different modes of construction.
c. To locate the tomb of Mar Abraham.
d. To collect sepulchral remains if any
e. To conduct chemical analysis and scientific dating.

Trial Trenches

One of the objectives was to locate the burial of Mar Abraham for which trial trenches were laid. Feature II may be identified as a tomb on the basis of architectural features, locational features and on the basis of archival documents. The grave fill was carefully removed and samples were taken. The fill was sieved for recovering small finds. A unique number was given to each dig and as the soil texture and colour changed. The entire operation was done manually. Vertical photo of the trenches was taken before, during and after the clearance. The samples were collected and recorded with site code, context number and sample number.

Tomb of Mar Abraham

Mar Abraham was the last Chaldean bishop of Malabar. He reached Angamaly in 1556-57 but was sent back by the Portuguese. Later he became a Nestorian reconciled with Catholic Church. He was ordained as a priest in Rome and then came to Goa and subsequently to Angamaly. He served as the Archbishop of Angamaly for twenty-nine years from 1569 till his death in 1597.

Three possible locations of the tomb were identified on the basis of archival documents:

a. Location A: In front of the sanctuary in the middle of the aisle
b. Location B: Right side of the sanctuary near the steps towards the aisle
c. Location C: Right side of the sanctuary close to the altar wall in the eastern end of the sanctuary (*Figure 1*)

Scientific clearance at locations A and B were not rewarding. But, in location C foundation wall of an old building was unearthed (Feature I) at a depth of 3.1 feet. At the depth of 6.3 feet, towards east of the wall, a tomb like feature (Feature I) was found. The distance between Feature I and II was 1.25 metres and both appeared to be contemporary (*Figure 1*).

Feature I

The church now in the name of St. Hormis and in the name of Rabban Hormisda in sixteenth century has been in continuous use for the past 450 years. In Location C, foundation of an old structure was unearthed at a depth of 3.1 feet. The structure is not of dry masonry. Within this Feature two laterite bricks were joined with mud mortar. But the most common mortar used in its construction is lime mortar. A fine paste of lime was applied as top coat or putty. The size of the laterite blocks (average dimensions: 40x28x20 cm) is similar to those excavated at Kottapuram fort. On account of similarities in architecture at St. Hormis church and Kottapuram fort, Feature I can be dated between c. AD 1550 and AD 1650. Detailed investigations are required to substantiate this.

Feature II

Feature II is a rectangular pit running parallel to Feature I with a dimension of 7 feet length x 1.25 feet width x 6.3 feet depth (*Figure.1*). During the work in the sanctuary for renovation, the tomb of Mar Abraham measuring 1.25 meter in breadth, 2 meters in length and

1.5-2 meters in depth was discovered on 18 September 2015 (Mathew in Mathew (Ed) 2016: 211)

Lime plaster

Its base and three walls (east, west and south) were plastered with lime putty having an average thickness of approximately 10 mm. This pit runs parallel to Feature I and is aligned north-south.

Partition wall

Four courses of smaller laterite bricks joined with mud mortar partitions this pit in the middle. The nature of plaster and size of bricks in the partition wall is different from the side walls. The eastern wall is plastered only till this partition. The lime plastering over the western wall continues parallel to Feature I (*Figure. 1*).

Western and southern walls of Feature II

Walls on the western and southern sides are fairly intact. The wall is made of seven to eight courses of laterite bricks placed horizontally. Only two courses of laterite blocks remain on the northern side.

Eastern wall of Feature II

There is evidence for post-construction disturbance. The eastern wall which is the outer wall is most damaged. On the eastern side, the upper courses are disturbed.

Floor of Feature II

The floor of Feature II is paved with four laterite bricks each laid horizontally. It is then plastered with a layer of fine lime putty probably to seal it. Beneath this layer, natural soil is found.

Headstone

The associated features within tombs provide vital clues to interpret the function of the Feature II as a tomb. One such defining aspect is the presence of a stone on the southern end probably as a headstone. The headstone is a laterite brick measuring 2 feet in length and 1 foot in width placed horizontally. This brick is smaller in size and not plastered. Its alignment is also different from the rest of the structure. The dimension of the headstone is similar to the bricks in the partition wall on north and both were perhaps part of a burial. The headstone is finely chiselled and carefully placed on the southern end of the rectangular pit. Based on contextual evidence, we can understand that the orientation of the tomb was south-north with head placed on the southern side.

Sepulchral or Non-Sepulchral Burial?

Though a tomb can be identified in the site was a corpse ever

interred here? No human remains were found in the tomb. The tomb could have been a ceremonial burial though such an occurrence does not match with the documentary evidence. There is a dominant belief that Mar Abraham was indeed buried here. This was evident in the enthusiasm the discovery of the tomb evoked in the public and clergy. Various sects among the St. Thomas Christians supported the fact that Mar Abraham was buried here in 1597 and that the tomb has been at last found.

We do not possess any detailed account of Mar Abraham's burial (Thevarmannil 2016: 211). The earliest testimony to Abraham's burial in the church of St. Hormis which was built by Mar Abraham himself is by Fr. Raulin (Hough 1845 C.fr Thevarmannil 2016: 211). Hough adds that, Mar Abraham was buried in the church as per his wish. He was ailing for almost two years according to contemporary Jesuit priests and a papal document was issued soon after the death of Mar Abraham in 1600 (Thevarmannil in Mathew (Ed) 2016: 208).

Tombstone

Tombstones are not regular features of burials in medieval Kerala. However, tombs of prominent personalities such as Mar Abraham are likely to be 'signified' by a tombstone. Cyriac Thevarmannil in his comprehensive study of Mar Abraham as part of his doctoral dissertation observed that, the tomb marked at the entrance to the sanctuary is only 'alleged' to be the one of Mar Abraham. The tomb was not opened and the slab over the tomb bore no inscription (Thevarmannil 1965Cfr. Mathew Ed: 2010). During interviews while the tomb and structural remains were being unearthed during the renovation of the church of St. Hormis in 2016, the local residents testified to 'seeing a slab with some writing till 1960s'.

Following the death of Mar Abraham, Archdeacon continued to administer from St. Hormis church. Through the Synod of Daimper two years later, the Goan Archbishop wished to end the Chaldean jurisdiction of Babylonian patriarchs in Malabar. Under these circumstances, Mar Abraham's Nestorian origins and his acceptance of catholic faith were being questioned in the documents sent by the Jesuit priests. The possibility of the mortal remains of Mar Abraham, the last Chaldean Persian bishop of Malabar being removed from Angamaly also cannot be ruled out. There is evidence of heavy disturbance in later layers in the site which could have destroyed the tomb.

Evidence for Disturbance in Features I and II

There have been at least two phases of construction at St. Hormis church after its construction in late 16th century. There was a brief phase of destruction of the church by Tipu Sultan in late eighteenth century. The roof had burnt down and the façade of the church was damaged.

There was a phase of reconstruction afterwards in early nineteenth century. The façade and roof were rebuilt. An inscription on the *seelanthi* (one of the axial timbers in the roof frame) of St. Hormis church gives the year 1803 CE for this reconstruction. The inscription in *Arya Ezhuthu/ Grantha* script mentions that the church was reconstructed thirteen years after it was damaged during Tipu Sultan's attack on Angamaly. The names of the carpenter, and two trustees (*kaikkaran*) with their family names (*Mundadan* and *Nedungadan*) are also mentioned (Payyapilly 2016: 180, Mundadan 2016: pers. comm)

Inscriptions are also found on the roof frame (*utharam* and *kazhukol*) of the churches at Kanjoor, Meloor (Payyapilly 2016: 179, Padayatty 2003: 36-7) and Akaparambu (Thomas 2016: Personal information). The reconstruction of St. Sebastian's church at Kanjoor in Ernakulam district was also in 1802 CE. Interestingly, this church has a mural painting showing native army fighting the army of Tipu Sultan (Peter and Gopi 2009:45). Another early nineteenth century find from this church is a bronze lamp donated by Sakthan Thampuran, the king of Kochi along with a land grant as provision for oil.

Structural remains at Kottapuram Fort: A Comparison

Eight burial features were found in the excavations at Kottapuram Fort in Trissur district from 2010-13 (Hemachandran 2015 pers. comm, Reema M.S 2015: Pers. Comm). These are dated between mid-16th and mid-17th centuries and can be classified into two types.

a. Burial without tombstone or covering slab
b. Burial marked by tombstone or covering slab

Three extended burials without tombs were found in the trenches A2, D1 and XB1. In trenchesA2 and A3, five tombstones were found within an area of 20 m^2. Tombstones were confined to this area and are closely spaced suggesting this could have been a cemetery or burial ground in use between mid-16th and mid-17th centuries.

Certain broad similarities can be noticed between the tombs at St. Hormis church, Angamaly and Kottapuram fort as both are contemporary. In both sites, laterite blocks were used in building structures as

well as tombs. Mud mortar was used in joining the coping stones of the tomb in Kottapuram and in the partition wall of the tomb in St. Hormis church, Angamaly. Lime mortar was used for the rest of the construction. The chemical composition of the lime mortar used in masonry and lime putty used in plastering in both sites is similar. This suggests contemporaneity and use of similar building technology.

However, the relation between burial without tombstone and burial with tombstone is not clear at Kottapuram. One tomb in Kottapuram fort was empty. It is presumed that, this tomb was either disturbed later or may have been a commemorative burial (Reema, 2015. Pers. comm). The rest two tombs had extended human burials with covering slabs. The tomb at Angamaly did not have any burial remains and may have been a commemorative burial. It was empty except for a few broken iron and bronze objects.

Site	Tomb in A3 Kottapuram Fort	Feature II St. Hormis church
length	200	213
breadth	70	38
Width	150	97

Table 1:
Dimensions of the tombs at Kottapuram fort and St. Hormis Church (in metric scale)

Ancient human remains from archaeological contexts can be dated using various methods and by DNA mapping. Soil samples are tested for presence of humic acid, nitrogen and PH is measured. The soil samples from the tomb in Angamaly Kizhakkepally are being analysed and results will be compared with sites like Sambaloor and Kottapuram.

Structural Remains of sixteenth century Church

The structural remains of the foundation wall of a church was found at a depth of around two metres from the present surface. Based on the orientation of the structure, lime masonry and lime plaster, it can be dated to late 16th century. Two pillar bases or post-holes were found above the foundation wall. Eight courses of laterite blocks remain intact in the wall. The wall was built of laterite blocks set in lime mortar and then plastered with lime putty. From a section exposed on the western wall, three structural phases can be noticed. The walls of the church are one metre thick and built of laterite bricks. The wall is

plastered using fine lime plaster. It has been lime washed and many layers can still be seen.

On the northern side of the madubaha, there is an arched doorway built of granite. It has prominent chisel marks and two circular holes for fixing the massive wooden door. The base of the granite doorway has a vatteluthu inscription but little is known about its content (Varghese & Jomon, 2002: 69). It is possible to date the church of St. Hormis, Angamaly on palaeographic grounds. The following were found in the site.

a. Foundation wall
b. Debris
c. Laterite bricks
d. Lime plaster
e. Lime masonry
f. Pillar base/ posthole
g. Flat roof tiles
h. Arched granite doorway with a vatteluthu inscription

Structural Phases	Features
I	Foundation and courses of laterite wall of the church built in late 16th century (c.1569-83)
II	Restored in early 19th century (c.1803-04)
III	Renovated using rcc and rubble foundation (c.1955)
IV	Restored in 2014-16

Table 2: Structural phases at St. Hormis Church, Angamaly

Flat roof tiles

Roof tiles are the most common and widespread structural evidence found in medieval sites in Kerala. The flat roof tile or marodu is found in many medieval sites in Kerala. Much evidence in these sites has been overlooked and, the tiles (roof tiles and floor tiles) can be analysed to fix the chronology of a site (Peter 2016).

Flat roof tiles are usually found on surface near medieval structures. For the first time, it has been found in a structural context at St. Hormis church. Since it was found in along the foundation debris of Feature I the tiles can be dated to late sixteenth century and belong to the first structural phase. Each tile is approximately 10 mm thick and 8-10 cm wide but were broken radially. The tile has a curved tip at the top end to fix it on the planks of the roof frame and a triangular tip at the bottom.

Same tiles were also found in the land filling that toom place before construction in 1950s in the third structural phase. Since the earliest construction here is only in late sixteenth century the flat roof tiles can be thus dated to this period. Previously, marodu were dated between c. 900-1200 CE. A large number of flat roof tiles many in fresh condition and intact formed a part of the wall of the temple atop a hill at Rayiranellur which is associated with Naranathu Bhranthan and the myth of Parayipetta Panthirukulam. From the in-situ find of flat roof tiles from the church of St. Hormis, Angamaly we may presume that, flat roof tiles were in use as late as sixteenth century.

Summary and Discussion

Based on oral, written and archaeological evidence, Feature II at St. Hormis Church can be identified as a tomb. There is historical evidence for it being the tomb of Mar Abraham. Bishops are usually buried in the madubaha or sanctuary of the church and this tomb was found in the sanctuary. Hence, Feature II seems to be the tomb of Mar Abraham. There is no evidence for any other burial in this church though there is evidence for continuity of St. Hormis church. There are indications of post-depositional disturbance in the tomb.

From excavated remains and exposed burials in Kottapuram fort, Sambaloor church and St. Hormis church we can understand that at least till seventeenth century, coffin burial was uncommon. Bishops and priests were usually buried inside the church and in the sanctuary. Others were buried in and around the church.

We can also infer the following factors from recent archaeological finds. St. Hormis church was the cathedral church of Mar Abraham and was built sometime between 1569-1583. A tomb was found at a depth of 4.5 feet from its floor level. The careful lime plastering of the walls and north- south orientation.[3] The associated features with the tomb include a head stone and artefacts including a brass/bronze ritualistic chain. There is ample documentary evidence for the construction of a church and for the burial of Mar Abraham in the church of St. Hormis. Oral testimonies testify the subsequent destruction and disturbance in the site. There is archaeological evidence for repeated disturbances at the site due to attacks and later construction.

The structural remains such as tiles and burials found in the churches in Kerala need to be recovered more carefully and studied more systematically by integrating various categories of evidence. The burial contexts provide vital clues in identifying past individuals. The structural remains of ancient churches and associated artefacts are the best evidence for understanding the origin and growth of church in

Kerala. A database of tombs and burials covering dimensions, inscriptions, nature of burials, materials used, soil samples, orientation, bone samples and list of grave goods have to be prepared. Each burial or tomb has to be photographed and cemeteries have to be mapped. The churches with inscriptions in Vatteluthu, Koleluthu, Grantha, Garzoni, Syriac, Latin, Portuguese, Dutch and English have to mapped and systematically examined to see the religious interactions in pre-Modern period.

After the death of Mar Abraham, Archdeacon was appointed as the Vicar Apostolic along with two Jesuit consulters. During this period, the tensions between Goan archbishop and St. Thomas Christians increased. The Synod of Diamper in 1599 put an end to the Chaldean jurisdiction of the Babylonian Patriarchs in Malabar. The church of St. Hormis at Angamaly witnessed these historic events.

Notes

1. Area in black indicate structural features such as altar in the madubaha and two circles indicate the pillars. The elongated structure in front of altar is the tomb feature. Location A is where a tomb was marked on the floor of the church. The arrow indicates north.
2. P.V Sreenivasan, Department of Chemistry, Union Christian College, Aluva.
3. During the 16th and 17th centuries the Persian influence over the church in Malabar was waning. The European domination in church matters was articulated through the Synod of Diamper in 1599. Before that the burials were oriented south-north or north-south. At present, the bishops of the East Syriac rite are buried in seated position in Antiochian tradition which was introduced in 18th century (Abraham, 2015).

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Inheritance of Loss: Dowry among the Syrian Christians

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the inheritance rights of the community with special emphasis on the women and the system of dowry as practiced. The paper tries to trace this custom through historical sources from the time of the Synod of Diamper to the present. The paper is divided into two parts. The first part will trace the historical roots of the inheritance laws and dowry practices of the community. It is here that the Decrees of the Synod of Diamper and the Hudaya Cannon will be discussed. In the second part the palm leaves of the Kuruppampady Church and the Nadama Church will help map the practices of dowry in the 19th century. The Kalpanakalum Niyamangalum of 1879 will further throw light on this. The argument here being that as far as the women were concerned, the practices of dowry and inheritance that was crystallized in the 19th century and which continues in the community is an inheritance of loss. The paper concludes by looking at the contemporary scenario along with the famous case of Mrs. Mary Roy. Though a protracted legal fight for equality was waged, dowry still continues to be practiced as a mode of dis-inheritance.

***Keywords**:* Dowry, Synod of Diamper, Hudaya Cannon, Wedding Gift, Bridal Gift, Disinheritance.

Introduction

The Syrian Christian community of Kerala dates back to the early centuries of the Christian era. The community by the end of the medieval period had increased in size and spread to the hinterlands from the coast and slowly by the 19th century had become an agrarian community. The community by this time had got moulded into the political, social, economic and cultural fabric of Kerala society. The community though integrated to the local was at the same time part of the Syrian ecclesiastical structure. It was with the coming of the Portuguese that tumultuous changes occurred within the community.

This paper focuses on the inheritance rights of the community with special emphasis on the women and the system of dowry as practiced.

The paper tries to trace this custom through historical sources from the time of the Synod of Diamper to the present. The primary sources used include the palm leaf manuscripts from the St. Thomas Jacobite Church Parur, St. Mary's Jacobite Syrian Church, Kuruppampady and St. Mary's Jacobite Church, Nadama. To understand the provisions of the Hudaya Cannon secondary sources have been used as also in the case of the Decrees of the Synod of Diamper. The paper is divided into two parts. The first part will trace the historical roots of the inheritance laws and dowry practices of the community. It is here that the Decrees of the Synod of Diamper and the *Hudaya* Cannon will be discussed. In the second part the palm leaves of the Parur Church, Kuruppampady Church and the Nadama Church will help map the practices of dowry in the 19th century. The *Kalpanakalum Niyamangalum* of 1879 will further throw light on this. The argument here being that it was in the 19th century the crystallization of the present day inheritance and dowry practices happened within the community. The paper concludes by looking at the contemporary scenario along with the famous case of Mrs. Mary Roy.

I. Dowry, Bridal Gift, Marriage Portion and Wedding Gifts

The practice of 'Dowry' or *'Stridhanam'* is a practice that can be traced throughout India. It was also found in Europe from the ancient period. In fact it will not be wrong to say that dowry was the method by which the women were given their inheritance from her natal family among the followers of the patrilineal system of descent and inheritance. In Europe and the western world this system went out of practice by the end of the 20th century as a result of the industrialization and drastic changes in the socio-cultural sphere. But in the case of India, the system continues to be prevalent in various guises even today.

In Kerala the system was prevalent only among the upper caste patrilineal societies like the *Nambutiris* but as the major sections of the society including the *Nairs,* some of the *Tiyyas* and the *Moppilas* followed the matrilineal system of descent and inheritance this system was not practiced. As we see from historical sources the practice seems to have been prevalent among the Nazaranis or the Christians of Kerala. Inheritance and the practice of dowry is inextricably intertwined with each other among the Syrian Christians even now though terms like 'share' is being used.

One of the earlier references of this practice is from,

> Penteado, a Portuguese, when he visited the Christians for the first time learned that generally the parents of both bride and bridegroom contented themselves by giving their children in marriage together with dowries and by each giving a feast for one day. (Mundadan, 1970: 175)

Synodal Decrees on Dowry and Inheritance

The Decrees of the Synod of Diamper is another major source of information in this regard. The Synod which started on 20th June 1599 saw the enactment of Decrees of varying nature. It was on the eight day that Decrees regarding the Reformation of customs took place. (Zacharia,1994: 31-2) The Decree XIV of Session IX approved, "of the laudable custom of this diocese of men's giving tenth part of their wives' portion, when married to the church as also making a repartition of the said alms betwixt the fabric of the church and the priest thereof…. custom does not obtain all over the diocese, and especially the southern parts… command all people to confirm themselves to the same… no reason …why it should not be established all over." (*Ibid*, 208-9) Thus it is clear that on marriage, the women were given a portion of wealth from her natal household to her husband's household. And a part of it was given to the church. But it has to be noted that this custom was followed only in the southern parts. The Portuguese who found this to be profitable for the church urged not only its the continuation, but also it extension to the entire community. Going by records of the later period one can see that this soon came to be practiced by the community as a whole.

As regards laws of inheritance are concerned, Decree XX of Session IX talks of an "unreasonable custom… that the males only inherit their fathers' goods, the females having no share at all thereof; and that not only when there are sons, but when there are daughters only, and they unmarried, and many times infants, by which means great number of them perish and others ruin themselves for the want of necessaries, the fathers' goods falling to the males next in blood….Synod declare this custom as unjust and that the next to kin have no right when there are daughters to inherit … neither is it lawful for the males to divide the estate among them, without giving an equal portion to the females; …Synod …commanding all… as law being a son deny to give portion to his sisters… the prelates …shall compel by penalties, censure and excommunication until such time as they shall pay an effectual obedience and shall make a restitution." (*Ibid*, 211-2.) Thus we see that the general practice among the Syrian Christians was in keeping with

the patriarchal societies where inheritance was being handed down through the sons while the daughter was given only a portion at the time of marriage. This was carried to the extent that even in the absence of sons, the daughters had no right to inherit her ancestral property.

The Syrian Codes

This brings us to the question of inheritance rights in the Syrian tradition. It is not accidental that the first translation of the chapter on inheritance rights of the Hudaya Canon that was translated by Rev Konattu Mathan Kathanar came out in the *Jeeva Nikshepam* magazine in 1908. (Report of the Travancore Christian Committee, henceforth RTCC, 1912:8) Litigations had started coming to the courts of the land after 1860's (*Idem.*) on various issues reflecting the fact that by then the community had become landed and they were looking out for opportunities to increase their landed wealth. The amount brought in as dowry thus assumed much importance.

On looking at the *Nomocannon,* one finds that the daughter and wife always inherited lesser amounts than the son. In the case of the husband's death, if there are no issues the wife gets half of the husband's property as, 'the woman was created as a helper to the man' and the other reason given being was that even in the case of offerings half the amount was fixed for the woman when compared to the man. (Konnat, 2000: 156.)These reflect the influence of the Judaic tradition. Again the cannon also mentions that in case of the man left behind children, then wife gets half and 1/8th of each of the child of her husband but if there were no son then her share would be 1/4th. If she was childless then she would only get 1/4th of the property the rest will go to the husband's relatives on the paternal and maternal side. If there were no relatives, then 2/3rds would go to the church and 1/3rd to the wife. (*Idem.*)With regards to the right of inheritance of the children, the Roman Law seems to have been the basis of inheritance devolving on the paternal side. In the case where the man left behind wife and sons, then the division of property would be 1/9th to the wife and rest to the sons. In case he had daughters only, then the wife would get 1/5th of the property while the rest of the four parts would devolve on the daughters. In the case of wife assets on her death the husband would get 1/5th and the sons 1/4th each if they had only sons. In case they had only daughters, the husband got1/3rd and 2/3rds of the share will be divided among the daughters. What is significant is that the daughter would inherit the whole property if there were no sons. (*Ibid:* 157-8.)

The cannon talks not just about dowry (*parnitho*) at the time of marriage but also of bridal gift (*dorea*), marriage portions (*zabde*) and wedding gifts (*shdke*). Dowry was defined as "whatever the women brings to her husband's house from her paternal home with written proof." (*Ibid*: 122, Varghese, 2014: 157.) "Bridal gift means whatever the husband offers to his wife as gifts or promised (to give) her in writing. Marriage portion means the ornaments and dresses that her parents give (her) without any proof. Similarly wedding gifts (means) ornaments, dresses, food or drinks sent without proof through those who go for betrothal."(Varghese, *Ibid*.) Thus we see two types of gifts one recorded another unrecorded. These it was assumed became the wealth or possessions of the women in her new home. These two types of gifts had come into being from both the Judaic and the gentile customary practices as the gentiles were not on the habit of recording the gifts given. Food items exchanged were outside the pale of gifts that were reckoned later. It also mentions that gifts and dowry could be also in the form of servants, cattle, wages of servants instead of servants, amount of mule work instead of mules, rent for a house, income from the orchid etc. Though some authorities like Timothy and Yeshu Bar Nun do not permit land or houses with deeds as dowry or gifts but the *Namocannon* permits them. (*Ibid*: 157-8.) The cannon also fixed the maximum amount of dowry that was to be given by each class according to what was fixed by the Blessed Patriarch Cyriacus. The ratio of the dowry and bridal gift too was fixed. *(Ibid: 158-9.)*[1] It also had to be noted that the women had no right to alienate it during her lifetime without her husband's permission though she could write a will without his order. Thus the husband is the steward of his wives assets over which in actuality she had little control. Thus one can see that the influence of patriarchal norms in both in the Pre-Diamper practices and in the Syrian code but it is possible that the Syrian Christians had evolved their own customs and practices in Kerala within a patriarchal frame. Only dowry seems to have been present while the custom of bridal gift seems to be conspicuously absent.

II. Dowry in the 19th and 20th Centuries

By the time of the 19th century the community had got divided into the *Puthankuru* and the *Pazhayakuru* factions. The economy of Kerala was by then in the throes of change from feudalism to capitalism. The colonial economy was being put in place. In the native states of Travancore and Cochin, land was now getting transferred from the traditional land holders and tenants to new ones. Christians were now

increasingly acquiring land by the closing decades of the 19th and the early 20th century. This meant that the community was increasingly becoming agrarian and was trying to corner as much land as possible. The dowry and inheritance too was being tailor made to optimize their hold on land. The palm leaf manuscripts available will help us to trace the dowry exchanges of the period.

Leaves of the Past

The first leaf is dated to the month of *Vrikshikam* 1018 KE i.e., 1843AD. It records the grant of a slave Kunjan, a *Pulayan* along with 300 *Puthans* as dowry or *stridhanam*. It says: "To let my son-in-law know: Kurumba, a *Pulaya* woman and Kunjan, a Pulayan whom I bought by *'theeru'* (written deed) from Vellattummel Chinmar by paying the price… I give Kunjan, a Pulayan to you as part of *stridhanam* together with 300 Puthan and I give a *theeru* and agree that hereafter me or my descendants will not have any right over him." (Palm Leaf from St. Thomas Jacobite Church, Parur.) Thus we see that dowry was not only paid as money but also as a slave servant for her daughter. But one needs to note that land or any other form of immovable property was not given.

The second set of leaves studied here are from the St. Mary's Jacobite Church, Kurppampady. These records show that dowry was given for all the marriages that were conducted and it was recorded in the accounts of the church as the church was to be given a share from it. This share was a percentage of the dowry that was calculated and given to the church as *pasaram*.[2] The day book income entries or *Panavakavaravu for Makaram* 24th and 28th K.E 1068 (1893 A.D) of the St. Mary's Jacobite Syrian Church Kuruppampady are thus:

> *Munnethumpady Varkeyyude makal Mariathine Koiparambil Varkeyyude makan Ouseph kettunnathinnu stridhanam Puthen 1800rum, Thettikkottu Moolathu Mathaiyude makal Cheruchye Chattanattu Pathrosinte makan Ouseph kettunnattinnu stridhanam Puthen 500 rum……Aake stridhana kalyanam 20 ku Puthen 10,200 Chakram 1,200 koodipasaram Puthen 765 Chakram 90il pattakarude upakari onnu pakuthi kodutittu neekivarendum Puthen 382 ½ Chakram 45…. Thuruttummali Yacob Kattanarude makal Annathinne Kidangattu Varkeyude makan Varkey kuriprakaram kettunnatinnu nadavazhakkam Roopa 1num Stridhanakalyanam 20ku ottanalatte varendum Puthen 40… tee kalyanam 20kum nadavazhakkakalyanam 1kku koodivach (kumbittum) varavu Chakram 42.* (Palm leaf from St. Mary's Jacobite Church, Kuruppampady)

From the above it can be seen that the *pasaram* in this case was around 7%. In the case of the marriage of the daughter of the priest, *pasaram* was waived off and instead nadavazhakkam or offering to the church was given. Out of the pasaram half went to the priest as *Pattakarude Upakari.* One should also note that the amount given as dowry was not small amounts they ranged from 300 *Puthens* to 3000 *Puthens* depending on the status of the family. For the church and the clergy it was a major source of income. The church also must have insisted on knowing the exact amount as it also had a stake in it.

Unfortunately the women rarely had any control or even say in the amount she bought to her husband's home as dowry. In times of need after the death of her husband she often had a tough time eking out her living and fending for her children. This can be seen from the palm leaves of St. Mary's Church. The palm leaf was written in the month of *Makaram* in the year 1863 by Varkey Cheruchy to the *yogam* of the church. The leaf was a plea for the restitution of her sacraments which had been debarred for adultery. She says she was living with her husband Varkey, daughter Cheruchy and her husband's brother Chacko in her husband's taravad, but after the death of her husband brother-in-law Chacko did not look after them and they found it difficult to make ends meet, could not give dues to the church. At that juncture, Late Varkey of Karingachira Parish helped her and soon this led to Cheruchy to her giving birth to his children - a boy and a girl who were baptized at Pallikara church and Karingachira Church. After the death of Varkey, the *Yogam* summoned her before it and tried her and meted out punishments. (Palm leaf from St. Mary's Church Nadama.) Leaves written by Ealli a widow in *Meenam* 1874 and *Medam* 1883 shows how she had to work in Iype's house to take care of herself. In most cases of the trial for adultery it is not coincidental that it was the widows who were involved. In the case of the palm leaves of St Mary's Forane Church, Muttam, Cherthala we find many instances of remarriage probably signifying the fact that people did not prefer to keep the widow in the house due to the fear of claims on property.[3]

By the 19th century dowry had become a well-established part of the weddings among the community as it was in lieu of the inheritance rights of the women. While narrating the Syrian Christian marriage, Samuel Mateer observes:

> Much useless expenditure is incurred on weddings for the hire of conveyances, jewels, umbrellas and musicians and feasting for days. The marriage expenses are roughly estimated at half the dowry. Both par-

> ties meet in the bride's house to arrange the dowry and date of marriage. The dowry may consist of ornaments, lands, or money. Eight days before the wedding the parents of the girl send a deputation to the house of the boy's father with the money for the dowry; it is contained in a purse carefully tied and received without counting, but should the contents prove, in the meantime, to be less than the sum agreed on, they do not come to the church. (Mateer, 1883: 162)

The prevalence of the practice of dowry by the community was echoed by the others writers of the period.

Church and the Regulation of Dowry Contestations

By the mid 1800's, as said before, the litigations regarding dowry and inheritance increased considerably. In the palm leaves of Kuruppampady the day book for the year 1848 mentions a dispute that had arisen regarding the dowry of Fr. Veliyattu Korathu who was promised 500 *pannamida* gold for his wife Kunja Mariam. His father, then gave a complaint to the Parur Zilla court that only 400 was given and as proof cited the church records. The courts then directed the *Mandapathuvathikal* and which in turn directed the *Pravurthi* to go and inspect the records and report the same. The trustees were then called for by the *Pravarthiyar* and they said that they would do the needful after placing the issue in front of the *Yogam* of the church. After the *Yogam* granted the permission, the records of 1812 were scrutinized and taken to the court. (Palm leaves of Kuruppampady Church) It is interesting to note that the dispute in this case occurred almost 36 years after the wedding and it was the father-in-law who had filed the suit. Thus church records were used by the litigants in cases of dowry to prove claims. It must be cases like this that led the Catholic Church to ask their members to execute written agreements regarding dowry details. The fact that there was no uniformity or definitiveness only increased the confusion. This must have led the Catholic Church which was by then regulating a lot of issues within the community to act on the matter in its Codes and Regulations. The *Kalpanakalum Niyamangalum* of 1879 issued by the Arch Bishop Leonardo of St. Louise, the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly Archdiocese, acted on it. The preface of the Regulation states that though many of the provisions were declared by his predecessors from time to time, these along with others were now issued as a body of Cannons and codes together now for more clarity. So probably this was in practice before but was now laid down once again. Clause 3 of Section 6 reads thus, "Due to nonpayment of dowry, there is an increase in the quarrels between families of the brides and grooms;

to lessen such quarrels, it is hereby ordered that the *karanavan* of the bride should give a *kacheetu* to the *karanavan* of the groom specifying the amount and the time of the dowry to be given signed by two witness. The priests were to verify this *kacheetu* before reading the bans for the marriage." (*Kalpanakalum Niyamangalum* of 1879, 64) In the case of quarrels that arose this was what was referred to by the church to settle the disputes among the Catholics.

Thus dowry had by this time also become a bone of contention if unpaid and a main reason for this could due to the fact that the amount of dowry that was exchanged was no small amount and was seen as the legitimate share given to the daughters. But to raise that amount might have been difficult for them and hence the default in payment. Occasionally it was a result of the elders trying to marry off the girls by giving bare minimum or even lesser as the attitude was to give the maximum to the sons who looked after them and continued the family name. Christians who were becoming a landed class did not want to give their daughters their landed property as they believed that it would lead to its fragmentation and loss of property from their control. This is very clearly stated by Francis Day in the 19th century, when he said that attempts to change the custom was unsuccessful because the "Syrians refused to agree to, as they said it had been established, in order to obviate the sub-division of estates into small portions" (Day, 1863: 261) This practice was well established by the 19th century as part of the marriage rituals.

As regards inheritance, Section 7 Clause 5 of *Kalpanakalum Niyamangalum* says that to avoid quarrels among sons the property to be divided equally among them after giving *legitima* to the daughters. But what amount or percentage of the property comprised of this *legitima* was never mentioned. While Clause 8 says the in case of intestacy, and the man has only daughters, then it was to be equally divided among them. If anyone else tried to get a share then they shall be punished. This shows that old customs had not completely been wiped off. Clause 7 of Section 8 states that if the wife does not have a means to maintain herself then the husbands had to provide for their maintenance in their wills. While clause 9 made it clear that in case the mother dies intestate then her property was to be equally divide among both sons and daughters. (*Ibid*.) In August 1900 the then Arch Bishop of Verapoly again issued a circular to all the Vicars of his Archdiocese to elicit from his flock what the daughter's share would be. After

considering the responses it was decided that the daughters were entitled only to *legitime* including the dowry. This decision was reprinted in the organ of the Archdiocese – *Satyanadam* on October 27th 1911. (RTCC, 1912:37) Thus it becomes very clear that what was considered as the inheritance of the daughter was not fixed but differed according to families and situations. The church was interested in it not just because it was causing frictions within the community but also because it received a percentage of the dowry and it was one of the major sources of its income.

Towards Legislations

Such written laws and regulations and unwritten customs and practices were followed by the community till the 20th century, when these were legalized both in Travancore and Cochin with the passage of legislations to the effect.The demand for the legislations must have been felt as a result of contestations between the two parties involved and the slow rise of this class as a landed one. Land by then had become the most importance means of economic prosperity for this community who was investing in land. It was only in 1911 a six member committee was appointed by the Maharaja of Travancore to look into the matters of dowry and inheritance. It is to be noted that the committee in its report says that the witnesses examined by them were selected by the Bishops and Missionaries. (RTCC,1912: 2) This would be due to the fact that by doing so the Report and its suggestions would be acceptable to the different factions as the witnesses were suggested by them. Thus the church was able to influence the outcome of the Report by selecting witnesses for the Committee. The Travancore Christian Succession Act of 1916 laid down that daughters had only the right to dowry which could be either equal to the value of one fourth of the property or Rs. 5000/ whichever was less. Her share in intestate property was only in the absence of male heirs. The Cochin Christian Succession Act of 1921 laid down that the share of the daughter was one third of that of the son. These acts legalized the already existing practices of the community and so women had no recourse to any relief from the judiciary until the land mark judgment that literally jolted the community that is the now famous case Mary Roy Vs the State of Kerala case judgment. This judgment of the Supreme Court of India in 1986 overturned the inheritance provisions that governed the community. Mary Roy had moved the court claiming that the provisions of the Travancore Christian Succession Act 1916 and the Cochin Christian Succession Act of 1921 were discriminatory as it violated the funda-

mental right of equality. But the court struck down the two acts by stating that these acts ceased to exist with the coming of the Indian Union as they were passed by the native states of Travancore and Cochin.

Circumventing Equality

This judgment of the Supreme Court of India created disquiet within the community and soon the community created ways to circumvent this judgment which would give equal right to the women in her natal property if the father died intestate. The community started writing wills to prevent this eventuality. A study of the wills and codicil exemplify this. In case of intestate properties brothers started getting the power of attorney from the married sisters. Many who had written wills earlier at times wrote a codicil to clarify as can be seen in the following case of Thomas Avaran of Cochin.[4] The first will registered as, Will No. 43 of 1981 was written bestowing all the landed properties to his sons. But on 12-5-1989, he registered a codicil, to further clarify the division of his properties among his sons and in his own words **"to avoid quarrels and misunderstandings among my children."** (*emphasis mine*) In the codicil he specified that dowry and ornaments were given to all his three daughters at the time of marriage thereby ending all their rights to their natal property. In the case of the daughter who had joined the nunnery, he said that her patrimony was given at the time of her joining the nunnery thereby ending all her rights too. Thus the community started writing wills in which it was specifically written down that the daughter at the time of marriage was given her share as dowry and ornaments and thereby ending all her rights to her father's property. All Christian wills are now written in this format thereby specifically and clearly giving no scope for further litigations.[5] The women too do not ask for further share as she is conditioned by patriarchal set up to accept this pattern of inheritance. Further she does not want to break the mutuality by asking for an equal share. In such cases the women feel that the brothers will help her at times of her need if they can.

Conclusion

Thus we see that dowry as sociologist argue is what secures the entrance of a women to the household of her husband and at the same time it disinherits her with respect to the property of her natal home. (Visvanathan, 1993: 1342.) The church one can see played a crucial role in this exchange. As it was one of the main sources of income for the church in the form of *Pasarm, Nadavazhakkam, kaimuttuvaravu,* and other dues. The percentage of this is still given by the people to

the church but percentage differs from parish to parish. In the Synodal Decrees, one sees that church tried to give a right to the daughter who otherwise was not given a share in her paternal property. Thus a tone of moral indignation can be heard from it as the upholder of equality. It also pleads for the women by asking her brothers to give her equal rights. At the same time it also extends a custom of giving a portion of dowry to the church to the community as a whole. Though the former attempts at reform were not very successful the later extension helped towards being a steady and sizeable income to its coffers. The discussions on the provisions of the *Nomocannon* and the Hudaya Canon also can be seen during this period through the discussions of it in the public sphere by the members of the community. This was because the community was very conscious of its historical roots from the Middle East which they had always upheld. But these cannons were never followed in toto by the community which had its own customary practices. In keeping with these codes and the usages of the community were neither uniform nor rigid. It was at best vague and dictated by circumstances. The discussions amongst the community from the latter half of the 19th century were instrumental in shaping the dowry and inheritance practices of the community. By the time of the 19th century, in the laws of 1879 we see that the church had given up the rhetoric of equality and talks of only the '*legitima*' that is to be given to the daughters after which the rest of the property was to be equally divided among the sons. This *legitima* was soon specified and legalized by the native states when they passed The Travancore Christian Succession Act of 1916 and The Cochin Christian Succession Act of 1921. Thus these acts legally made possible the disinheritance of women from ancestral property of her natal house. It was with the Supreme Court judgment of 1986 that the Syrian Christian women attained equality in matters of inheritance in case of intestacy. The community as seen above still continues in majority of the cases to use dowry as a mode of disinheritance even today.

Notes

1. In East (Antiochan) jurisdiction dowry was double the bridal gift.
2. Pasaram meaning tithe or pathavaram of the amount received as dowry that was given to the church. Though it is said to be 1/10th of the amount the amount varied from parish to parish and also between the different sects.
3. Based on discussions with Fr. Ignatius Payyappilli, who has researched the palm leaves of both these churches.

4. Here the details of one of the many wills registered with Adv. A V Thomas is being cited.
5. Based on discussions with advocates A V Thomas and Saju Thomas practitioners at the High Court of Ernakulam. Now a days the trend is changing with parents giving a small amount in cash or jewellery of the mother to the daughters or any self-earned property of the father is also given but the chunk of the wealth and the ancestral property still is given to the sons.

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Emancipation as Repentance and Recasting: Swami Ananda Tirtha's 'Harijan' Reform

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Abstract

Swami Ananda Tirtha (1905-87) was a radical social reformer of Kerala, who worked among the Dalit-Pulaya community. He was inspired by Sri Narayana Guru's call for social justice but was influenced more by the anti-untouchability movement started by Gandhi. He campaigned for modern education among the Pulayas and fought for their temple-entry. His activity had a wide impact all over Malabar, even the whole of Kerala and some parts of South India, but had its base in the Chirakkal region where the Christian missionaries were extremely triumphant; hence he is often presented as a Gandhian/Hindu crusader against Christian evangelism. In this paper my attempt is to place Ananda Tirtha in the annals of the history of south India and to examine his ideology and modes of social activism from a dalit point of view against the dominant Gandhian reading in which his whole work is presented as a repentance for the past deeds of the caste-Hindus.

Keywords: Ananda Tirtha, Pulayas, Harijan, Dalit, Chirakkal Mission, Sri Narayana Vidyalaya, Brahmanism, Communism.

Introduction

'Harijan' welfare and removal of untouchability were important programmes of the nationalist movement under Gandhi and several reform measures inspired by his ideology took roots in various parts of India from the early 1920s. The Brahmin-born Gandhian-social activist Swami Ananda Tirtha was a radical champion of dalit rights in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, but students of modern history would get surprised for his absence in the annals of the renaissance movement; it is equally remarkable to note that he failed to create a sustainable movement, which died out with him, and the recent dalit politics do not acknowledge his contributions towards their emancipation either. The Gandhian ashram and the home for dalit students founded by him at Payyannur still function under a trust, constituted of upper caste men and a few dalits, which he had formed in 1984[1]. His was certainly a lone and

exceptional path of social activism which did not have any parallel among Gandhians of his times or later. Most of the existing works on him, mainly biographical sketches, fail to place him on a critical footing or against the contours of dalit activism and ideology. An objective investigation into his life and activities, in the context of the scope and limits of Gandhian measures towards dalit emancipation, would reveal the nature of his engagements, which had often transcended even the Gandhian frontiers, and would perhaps explain why the dalit narratives do not consider Ananda Tirtha as a part of their collective self.

Caste, Emancipation and Agency: Representing the Other

Ananda Tirtha's social activism was mainly concentrated in the Chirakkal taluk of erstwhile British Malabar i.e., the present day Kannur and Kasargod districts of Kerala state, South India. In pre-British times the land was called *Kolaswaroopam*, under the control of powerful chieftains called Kolathiris, or Chirakkal rajas, who, like the several small lineages under them, were passionate guardians of caste and varnasrama *dharma* (Varma, 2012). Two of the 32 earliest and northernmost Nambutiri-Brahmin settlements in Kerala, said to be founded by the legendary Parasurama, were located here (Menon, 1953). Non-Nambutiri Brahmins from Tulunad migrated to various parts of the land in later times who slowly settled down around temples to form the priesthood. In the aftermath of the Mysorean invasions and the subsequent British takeover of administration in Malabar, at the end of the nineteenth century, earlier local chieftains lost power and influence; but the region continued to be a bastion of the caste-Hindus, as landlordism and temple-centred ritual traditions continued. Miller, who surveyed the whole of Malabar from 1947 to 49, gives a fairly good description of the social composition, which fits well to north Malabar:

> About one per cent of Hindus are Nambudiri Brahmans, the highest caste. Until recently their influence has been disproportionate to their number. Besides being the Hindu religious heads, many were wealthy landlords with numerous lower-caste retainers. Nambudiris are patrilineal; the small ruling castes (Samantans, Kshattriyas) are matrilineal. So also are the Nayars, who form the Hindu "middle class" and comprise about twenty per cent of the Hindu population. Traditionally, the Nambudiris promulgated and interpreted the moral and ritual laws of the society at large, while the Nayars were responsible for maintaining the social order and the moral code in each local community. Nearly all Nayars were concerned in agriculture, and the upper subcastes were soldiers in the service of the Rajas. All these, from Nayars upwards, are "caste-Hindus."

> Almost two thirds of the Hindus are members of the polluting castes. High among these and larger than any other Hindu caste (about thirty-five per cent of the total) are the matrilineal Tiyyans of North Malabar and the patrilineal Tiyyans and Iravans of South Malabar and Cochin. Some of them are small tenant cultivators; many are labourers. The artisan castes (blacksmiths, carpenters, etc.) are roughly equal in rank to this group, and several others, including astrologers, physicians, and launderers, fall into this same category of "upper polluting castes."
>
> Below them are the Depressed Castes, who form about fifteen per cent of the Hindu population. Until the end of the last century, many were serfs, tied to the land they worked; they were debarred from using the public roads.
>
> These then are the main Hindu groupings in Malabar: Nambudiri Brahmans; small chieftain castes; "military" Nayars; inferior or "nonmilitary" Nayars; upper polluting castes; and Depressed Castes. In addition there are various small castes of temple servants and some immigrants of castes from other parts of southern India. (Miller, 1954: 411)

Miller also identifies the role of the sharply divergent lineage systems among the caste Hindus as having had a unifying effect. He writes:

> Nambudiri Brahmans are … patrilineal (makkathayam) … (but) various chieftain castes who are marumakkathayam, reckoning descent through the female line… All of them, separately and together, are normally exogamous, giving their women in marriage to Nambudiris while their men take wives from Nayars… All these are caste-Hindus, and from the chieftain castes down all are Sudras. This latter group shares what is in many respects a common culture, made the more uniform by the system of hypergamy, by which men of the higher castes and subcastes took wives from groups below them a practice now being superseded by a greater degree of endogamous marriage. The marriage links of the chieftain castes (and sometimes of the superior Nayars) with the Nambudiris forged some kind of unity among all caste-Hindus. (Miller, 1952: 159).

Ananda Tirtha addressed the lowest stratum of castes who are referred to as 'depressed castes'/'scheduled castes' in the colonial writings, 'harijan' in the Gandhian vocabulary and 'dalits' in the more representative literature. In north Malabar they were constituted of several castes like the Pulayar, Parayar, Malayar, Chakliyar, Nayadis, etc of whom the vast majority consisted of Pulayas who were agrestic slaves till the end of the 20th century (Pokkudan, 2013: 33-4; Saradamoni, 1980: 44-70). In the official colonial (Logan, 1887: 147-8; Innes, 1997: 133-4) and missionary (Taffarel, 1950; 1978) writings their condition

is described as deplorable, conforming to serfdom, despite slavery being officially banned according to the Slavery Abolition Act of 1843 (Logan: 150). In Colonial ethnographic accounts they appear as slaves and, as their men, women and children were usually sold out, they did not have any organized family structure (Thurston, 1987, II: 45-91; VI: 77-139). The novel *Saraswativijayam* written in 1892 by Potheri Kunhambu imagines a dialogue between a Nambutiri landlord and the Malabar collector in which the former takes pride in having 'owned' thousands of 'saleable' Pulayas by him without knowing that slavery was outlawed long ago by the colonial state (2013: 61-2)[2]. The novel also gives very interesting information that the Europeans, and the projects they started, had been agents of emancipation for them. For instance, it refers to the spice farm owned by one Joseph at Anjarakkandy[3] where Pulaya young men were employed and were treated fairly well; Europeans even appointed them as servants at home and taught them to read and write (*Ibid*: 41, 70, 104).

Various strands of Christian missions active in north Malabar helped in implanting self respect among the lower castes. But their work had a slow progress; by 1871 the total number of native Christians amounted to a mere 1750 (Census, 1871) of whom 1500 lived in colonial urban centres of Kozhikode, Thalassery and Kannur. The protestant Basel German Evangelical Mission (BGEM) had two stations in north Malabar – Thalassery and Kannur – but as they focused heavily on the influential communities of Malabar, especially Tiyyas, and as the Tiyyas were subjected to heavy *sanskritization* under the influence of Sri Narayana Guru by the late 19th century, and the Brahma, Arya and Theosophical movements in Malabar offered a reformed and purified Hinduism, they could proceed only slowly. Even among the lower caste people, like the Pulayas, evangelism did not succeed as they were afraid of losing caste, and of the fury of the caste Hindus, and the Mission then- had 'neither houses nor gardens' to offer to 'those who forsake their ancestral caste and customs' (Ismael, 2013: 64-8).

Catholic missions were more successful in the process of evangelization in north Malabar. Though several individual missionaries were active among the lower castes, the establishment of the Chirakkal mission by Fr. Peter Caironi S.J, an Italian Jesuit missionary, in 1937, gave a fillip to evangelical activism (Taffarel, 1978) and between 1937 and 1977 the Chirakkal Mission succeeded in converting around 10,000 Pulayas into their religious fold (Taffarel, 1978: 145). The success of the Chirakkal mission is often attributed to fairly different methods

from that of BGEM[4] and the removal of untouchability on becoming a Christian". (Pallath, 1999: 53). Fr. Caironi insisted on families joining the faith, not mere individuals which would be like "catching a bee from the bee-hive. It cannot live alone". For him, "either the whole caste, or no one", which was a departure from the strategy of the BGEM . Fr. Taffarel, the biographer of Fr. Caironi, writes:

> He would never accept individuals but only individual families. He would settle in life young people properly married. He would never tolerate the so called mixed marriages, for they weaken the faith, compromise the Christian way of life and split a family into different compartments so that its unity and beauty, and happiness are destroyed (Taffarel, 1978: 51).

Missionary accounts (Taffarel, 1950, 1978) and pro-missionary academics (Dhaneesh, 2012; Shajimon, 2013) claim that mass conversion and the subsequent engagement with the cultural milieu of Christianity opened before the Pulaya converts experiences of a new social identity, a new Dalit life-world. There are scholars who also argue that the missionary encounter with slave castes and the subsequent experiences shaped their collective self, forged the notion of equality and helped to the emergence of dalit consciousness in Kerala (Mohan, 2015). The European missionary fathers started a radical mission of 'civilizing' them which greatly altered the everyday life of the converts from modes of religious worship to social behaviour and relationships. They were taught the [Christian] values of liturgy, literacy, family, morality, discipline, cleanliness and hygiene. Their pre-conversion cultural milieu, including practices of food, clothing, sanitation, medicine, dwelling, rituals, everything, which were described as 'primitive', received a facelift. The institution of Church and religious canons regulated their life world. From the material point of view conversion certainly benefitted the Pulayas – it provided them unity and strength to resist social bondage (freedom from Hindu and Muslim lords); their standard of living improved and they attained social mobility and freedom of labour; they could enjoy the avenues of modernity and capitalist economy and could become 'public'; as Christians, they were symbolically liberated from the clutches of untouchability – though the practice of pollution did not altogether disappear (Taffarel, 1978: 88). Education, medical care and social security measures (like cooperative societies) improved their material conditions while the new project of granting plots to individual families and financial aid to build houses catered to sustain prosperity. Notwithstanding the missionary testimo-

ny of the Pulayas as if being transformed from savagery to civilization and the role of the Church as an agency to represent them, they acquired a fractured identity of Dalit Christians or Depressed Christians; within the Christian world dominated by the elite and orthodox Syrians migrated from southern Kerala, they however remained marginal.

The 1920s witnessed a powerful political debate, over the future of the untouchables, between Ambedkar and Gandhi (Hardtmann, 2009: 59, 63-9). Gandhi wanted to keep the Hindu community integrated and was opposed to religious conversion. But his political stand was not free from contradictions. While steadfastly representing a united Hindu community, he vehemently justified the caste system – though it vertically split the Hindus and sustained inequality – in the name of tradition and for its "social utility". He suggested measures to reform it from within – and placed it as the bounden duty of the caste-Hindus to fight against all the evident symbols of untouchability as an 'act of penance' by combining the programmes of eradication of untouchability and temple-entry for all – but only with the consent of the caste-Hindus and through a gradual process of 'change of heart'. Nevertheless, Gandhian mode of mobilization, with strong parallels with religious symbolism and entrenched moral language made his politics insular and metaphysical (Gudavarthy, 2008: 88).

Ambedkar, on the other hand, sought a political solution to the deprivation of the untouchables for which he sought the possibilities of religious conversion and demanded separate electorates from the colonial government. He argued that the emancipatory politics opened by the Congress, through a reinterpretation of the Hindu value system, was not effective in bringing about social equality. Caste can be eliminated only if Hinduism is renounced and dalits shift to any other religion which rejected caste, preferably Buddhism (Ambedkar, 2004, 2007), and sought the possibilities of forging political solidarity among the dalits. Through his speeches and writings he systematically exposed the ant-dalit character of Hinduism and declared he would not die as a Hindu. In the Round Table Conferences he vehemently stood for separate representation of the dalits in the legislatures which led the British Indian government to declare the [in]famous Macdonald Award. Gandhi went on a hunger strike against it and in the succeeding Poona Pact signed between the two in 1932, Ambedkar withdrew from his demand.

From the1920s the Congress started several movements and programmes for the 'upliftment' of the 'harijan', a term coined by Gan-

dhi to represent the untouchable castes of India. In 1933, in the aftermath of the Poona Pact, Gandhi renamed his journal *Young India* into *Harijan* and formed the All India Anti-Untouchability League to work among the untouchables which was renamed as Harijan sevak Sangh[5]. The Congress organization in Kerala under the leadership of Kelappan started several programmes to 'uplift' the 'harijan' people. The Vaikom and Guruvayur Satyagrahas were started to seek the possibilities of bringing the untouchables closer to the temples and several active workers/sympathisers opened ashram-type boarding homes/schools to extend education to children from the lower castes – of which the Sabari ashram (by T.R. Krishnaswami Ayyar at Olavakkode), Shraddanandashram (by K. Kelappan at Payyoli) and Anadashram or Sri Narayana Vidyalaya (by Swami Ananda Tirtha at Payyanur) were the most prominent.

Indifference, Eulogy and Tribute: Preceding Studies

A striking aspect of the history of Kerala's social reform process is an undue focus accorded to certain iconic reformers and an evident disregard of movements and leaders from the margins (see Menon, 1997). P. Govinda Pilla's elaborate three volume work on Kerala Renaissance gives a very long list of reformers but missed several important personalities (2003, 2009). The practice of promoting certain movements and a few individuals began to change with the rise of strong identity politics in recent times which led the incorporation of several leaders hitherto unnoticed (Mohan, 1999). However, in any of the 'standard' works on the 'renaissance' of Kerala, Ananda Tirtha's name is not recorded[6]. Indifference apart, the few and available works by and large present him as immune to any sort of criticism – as if the reform process involved great burden and a great amount of sacrifice.

The existing studies on Ananda Tirtha can be grouped into three broad categories. First of these is a collection of hagiographical sketches consisting of a few biographies and one souvenir, all of which placed him as a Mahatma, a true Hindu and true saint, a great Gandhian-nationalist, and as having sacrificed the rare fortunes of Brahminical privileges and a safe family/social life for the well-being of the 'depressed classes' (Kunhiraman, 1971; Elayavur, 2006; Ashraf, 2011[7]; Chentharassery ; 2012)[8]. All these works, along with missionary literature (Taffarel, 1950, 1978), shared a common ideology of the reformer/subject binary in which the innocent and helpless untouchables needed/awaited an external agency, an agency from above, to 'reform' them. Chentharassery's work however differed from all others in that it placed

the life and activities of Ananda Tirtha in the wider context of recent Ambedkarite-Dalit politics and boldly pointed to the limitations of his emancipatory schemes. The writings of the friends and contemporaries of Ananda Tirtha also uncritically glorified his person and activities (*Souvenir*, 1965)[9]. The second category consists of missionary appraisal of which the work of Abraham Ayarookuzhiyil is the most celebrated (1987)[10]. Being a comprehensive biography of Ananda Tirtha, loaded with rich details of his personal and public lives, Fr. Ayarookuzhiyil but focused on exploring the outmoded practices of Hinduism against which Ananda Tirtha quarrelled, evidently to justify evangelical agency; while he exposes the futility of Ananda Tirtha's Gandhian reform of 'harijan' welfare to validate his theory of "Ambedkar vindicated". The third category is the reminiscences of the students/inmates of the Sri Narayana Vidyalaya, founded by Ananda Tirtha, which are lay scattered in the souvenir mentioned above as well as in a notebook kept in the *Anandashram*, of which the latter are written/rewritten by a single person; they are of doubtful value as they keep a single style of language and writing. They certainly do share a great sense of gratitude towards Ananda Tirtha for the progress and prosperity they were able to achieve in their lives; but the account of their everyday experience in the Ashram seems to reveal the scope and limits of Ananda Tirtha's ideology and practice of 'harijan' emancipation.

From the point of view of primary sources, the absence of enough writings from the part of Ananda Tirtha is certainly striking – he has written very little and on very few matters which interrupts efforts to figure out his attitude towards various issues of his times. We have a very small, 42-paged, pamphlet-sized autobiographical sketch in which he narrates his entire career, as a crusade against caste, untouchability and the institutional structure of Hinduism (Tirtha, 1980). Though the work was published during his lifetime, it was not directly written by him.[11] We have a few of his diaries but they belong to a later phase of his life and contain only routine activities of a day; and some files of court cases, petitions to authorities, complaints written by ordinary people and a few personal letters. Therefore we have to depend heavily on his brief autobiography to unravel a profile of his person and career.

As life history narratives, no M. Phil or Ph.D Dissertations have appeared on Ananda Tirtha but his social activism has become a part of some research works which have subjected social reform, missionary history or the history of the Pulaya community of North Malabar for enquiry (Ismael, 2013: 200-08; Madhavan, 2013: 175-231; Shajimon, 2013: 105).

Changing World but Diehard Visions: The Birth of a Rebel

Born in 1905, in a rich family of orthodox, migrant-settler, Gowda Saraswat Brahmin community of Thalassery, Ananda Shenoy had the good fortunes of modern education. His biographers give an almost similar kind of narration of his early life as they depended heavily on his *Memoirs* as well as the articles in the *Souvenir*. He was the first in Xth standard and had won the 'Grig Memorial Scholarship' from the Malabar Collector. After a brilliant school career at Thalassery he joined the Madras Presidency College for B.A. (Hons) in Physics which he passed with second rank. After college education he refused to enter government service and decided to take up social service. As a college student he was attracted to Gandhism and the national movement and used to wear khadi and read *Young India*. As Thalassery (colonial Tellicherry) was the seat of British administration and a centre of nationalist politics, young Ananda had the opportunity to experience both colonialism and nationalism from his early life. He took part in all nationalist meetings as a volunteer[12]. At Madras he came to know about Vaikom Satyagraha which 'informed' him of the custom of untouchability and of how it denied civil rights to the lower caste people (Tirtha, 1980: 16). He was getting attracted to the struggle against untouchability but he couldn't identify his proper site of activity; he wrote a letter to Rajagopalachari seeking permission to join the Sabarmati Ashram and spend his remaining life as a Gandhian social worker. But Rajaji directed him to serve the Sabari Ashram at Olavakode run by T.R. Krishna Swami Ayyar (which looked to achieve national unity and civic equality by bringing castes and communities together through Gandhian ashram life); accordingly he joined the Ashram in 1926 (Tirtha: 17). It was here that Ananda personally experienced the horrors of caste-based pollution – he got an opportunity to associate himself with the struggle led by the Arya Samajists at the Brahmin village of Kalpathi in Palakkad where the untouchables were not allowed to walk through public roads (Tirtha: 17). He also took the untouchable boys of Sabari Ashram to public places like the market, temple and bathing tanks for which he had to face severe resistance and even physical attack from the part of the caste-Hindus. As a true Gandhian, he patiently received all the blows (Tirtha: 17). But in the Sabari Ashram Brahmin and 'harijan' children were treated separately – food and shelter were served separately for the former – which Ananda opposed strongly and brought to the notice of Gandhi when he visited the Ashram. On Gandhi's advice T.R stopped the practice but by sending away the Brahmin

boys and giving charge of the ashram to Ananda (Arookuzhiyl: 25-6). Ananda stayed some time in 1929 at the Sraddhananda Vidyalaya started by the prominent Gandhian nationalist K. Kelappan at Payyoli for the 'upliftment' of the 'harijan' children. There too he had a bitter experience: when he took a 'harijan' child along with him to a Chaliya street, the Chaliyas attacked him *en masse* and beat him cruelly (Tirtha: 18)[13].

He had several other personal experiences on the practice of untouchability which taught him how it was practiced/experienced by the caste Hindus and the untouchables. In 1928, at the age of 21, he had a journey to Sabarmati Ashram on foot and had an astonishing experience *en route*. Near Ratnagiri he sought drinking water from a village of the 'harijans' but they declined him as it was against custom to offer water to a savarna. Later he approached the savarna people who rebuked him for polluting them as he had visited a 'harijan' home earlier. Finally he got water, and food too, from the house of an old Muslim. Ananda writes that he found caste and pollution as the most dangerous aspects of Hinduism and was surprised by the role of Islam as a site of refuge (Tirtha: 12-13). In 1930, during the salt satyagraha, he got the opportunity to lead a jatha as 'standard bearer' through the streets of the depressed castes along with C. Rajagopalachari at Vedaranyam (Tirtha: 19). In the meetings organized *en route*, he noticed untouchable people keeping distance from the main audience and when enquired why they should not be seated together, Rajaji told him that it would turn out to be harmful to themselves and willing volunteers could go and sit aside them. At many places 'harijan' children were taken to bath in public tanks but they were not only not allowed but were unwilling to accompany the volunteers. While as a college student he had a visit to Guruvayur temple. When he asked for sugar-jaggery the shopkeeper enquired about his caste. Later, while he approached the temple tank, with no sacred thread, upper caste people asked about his caste identity and when he refused to disclose it, he was brutally beaten up by them. It was then that he knew tiyyas were forbidden from entering the area (Tirtha: 19-20). These experiences taught him of the binary experience of ritual pollution, the hardships borne by the lower caste people in their everyday life and the villain role of the caste system in sustaining such regressive practices.

Following the salt satyagraha he was arrested and was imprisoned in the Vellore jail where he had the rare opportunity to meet several Congress leaders from all over south India including Malabar. He dis-

cussed the problem of untouchability with them, especially Kelappan, and requested him to open a temple-entry satyagraha at Guruvayur (Tirtha: 19-20). When the satyagraha at Guruvayur was started he busied himself to recruit volunteers for it and followed the satyagraha jatha led by A.K. Gopalan to Guruvayur (Tirtha: 20-1).

A decisive event in the life of Ananda was his meeting with Sri Narayana Guru and his conversion to a life-long Guru-disciple. As a Brahmin he had failed to understand the revolutionary potential of the Guru and during his school days when the Guru visited Thalassery he was reluctant to see him – the Guru was none but a communal or religious leader. Only later could he recognize his relationship with Gandhi and identify him as a crusader against untouchability. Ananda met the Guru two times before he was chosen as a disciple – both the events took place in 1927 when he was an inmate of the Sabari Ashram and just before the death of the guru in the next year[14]. Ananda was formally honoured by the Guru as his last disciple, by according him sanyasa with a new name, Swami Ananda Tirtha, and enrolled him as a member of the *Dharmasangham*[15], at Sivagiri on 3 August 1928[16]. Throughout his life Ananda Tirtha maintained his dual identity as the disciple of Sri Narayana Guru and Mahatma Gandhi and tried to combine the two identities together.

Sites of Reform: Education, Temple Entry and Citizenship

The reform activities of Ananda Tirtha, which aimed at providing the 'harijans' upward mobility, and which broadly corresponded to the activities of the Jesuit missionaries, had its focus on two areas: 1) education, enlightenment and placement and 2) empowerment through civil rights. He wanted to destroy caste inequality which was expressed through social symbols such as the denial of service in tea shops and barber shops, and restriction imposed on entering public roads and temples (*Souvenir*, 1965: 49). There are people for whom he is like an apostle for, he used to visit harijan homes, dine with them and engage in their everyday issues – such as selecting poor children, accommodating them in his hostel, providing medical facilities for the sick, resisting eviction of harijans by the landlords, etc., etc. (*Souvenir*, 1965: 70-1; Letters, *Anandashram*).

1. Education and Emancipation: Sri Narayana Vidyalaya

In 1931 Ananda Tirtha started a school for 'harijan' boys[17], named Sri Narayana Vidyalaya, or Anandashram as it was known later, at Payyannur – a place where the Gandhian tradition was very strong as it

was the only centre of salt satyagraha in Malabar and where the practice of untouchability and upper caste domination was exceptionally strong. During the salt satyagraha and civil disobedience movement, Congressmen A.K. Gopalan and K.A. Keraleeyan organized an anti-untouchability march leading 'harijan' people and when it passed beside a thiyya shrine, the thiyya elites brutally attacked the jatha and its leaders[18]. Ananda Tirtha writes that this was for him an eye opener and which served as the major reason for selecting Payyanur as the centre of his social activities (Tirtha: 21).

In those days 'harijan' children were not used to get admission in public schools or even in the Basel Mission School. The government had opened Labour Schools[19] to accommodate them but Ananda Tirtha argued that isolating them in separate schools would perpetuate their seclusion and insularity. He decided to start a free boarding home called Sri Narayana Vidyalaya, as a shelter for 'harijan' children and admitted them in schools of various affiliations like the Labour, Mission or private schools (Tirtha: 21). A small pamphlet published by the School in 1944 stated the relevance of the vidyalaya in the following words:

> ... It was felt that the removal of untouchability which could be achieved through temple entry, alone would help the Depressed Classes who stood in great need of economical and educational facilities. It was therefore proposed to maintain an educational institution – a Boarding Home for students – and to carry on general propaganda among the Harijans. Our goal has been the allround advancement of the Harijan community. We have ever been keeping in view the ideals of Sree Narayana Guru, the great saint of Kerala, whose long life was a holy dedication to the service of the oppressed and suppressed in society. (*Sree Narayana Vidyalaya*, 1944: 2).

The document pointed out the mission of the institution as fourfold: propaganda, general education, vocational training and removal of disabilities (*Ibid*: 2-3).

In fact, the Sri Narayana Vidyalaya was not a school, but a hostel, where children were given a true ashram experience (*Souvenir*: 67). The pamphlet summarised the routine of the ashram as:

> The Home is supervised by an honorary residential warden who is a teacher in the Board High School. The boys conduct Bhajan early morning and in the evening. Cleanliness is insisted on in everything. Early morning bath is compulsory while the boys usually bathe in the evening also after their play and garden work. All the work in the Ashram like sweeping, washing of clothes, cleaning of vessels, smearing

> of ground with cowdung, spade work, etc., are attended to, by the boys themselves under the guidance of the warden. There is a paid cook, who is assisted by the boys occasionally. Thus they are made to feel the dignity of labour and to realise that a free social life does not imply negligence of honest work. We try to inculcate in them a spirit of service, a regard for all religions and a reverence for the national saints and heroes (*Sree Narayana Vidyalaya*, 1944: 4-5).

The reminiscences of the student-inmates of the ashram (*Souvenir*, 1965: 78-80; Ananda Krishnan, Unpublished Memoir) add a few more details to the structure and everyday life of the ashram. It certainly betrayed the *sanskritization* project of Ananda Tirtha, though some people present it as a conscious step to challenge Brahminical privileges or as a move to make sacred rituals popular and universal (Ashraf: 35-6; Ayarookuzhiyil: 43). M. Swaminath, an early inmate of the ashram, writes:

> Upon joining, children were taught about the need of cleanliness and strict daily routine. At 4 in the morning we had to wake up, clean up the ashram premises, take bath, and join for prayer. Swami himself led the Morning Prayer in which Gita and Gayatri hymns were recited. Afterwards, they practised yoga. 7 to 8.30 am was the time for study and at 8.30, when the bell rings, we moved for breakfast. Cooking was done by a batch of students consisting of 2 seniors and 2 juniors; while cleaning was done by another batch of students. Reading continued after breakfast. Swamiji was very particular that books should be properly maintained and insisted on improving the handwriting. On holidays he engaged special classes from 9 to 12 in the morning which helped the ashram students to perform best in the schools. He gave us physical training – played football with us. He practiced a very strange exercise – satyagraha struggle – in which we played as satyagrahis and police. Police attacked the satyagrahis who were supposed to patiently bear the blows without resistance – which was aimed at teaching the lessons of non-violence – which had helped us to suffer hardships during times of picketing for freedom of worship at several temples [20] (*Souvenir*: 79-80).

While he tried to replace dalit patterns of social and personal behaviour with the brahmanical, Ananda Tirtha promoted a work culture ensuring the dignity of labour. On holidays children had to clean their clothes, plaster the floor with cowdung, till the land and cultivate vegetables. They were given training in spinning, carpentry, basket making, metal work, etc. To avoid passion for fashion they were asked to use only khadi cloth and that too without ironing. To eliminate the stigma associated with caste, they were asked to speak only standard Malay-

alam. They were also given Hindi classes. But there was no reading room or library attached to the hostel. (Kunhiraman, 1960: 28-9). Children were renamed with caste Hindu names (like Prabhakara Sarma, Kasi Viswanathan, Anada Krishnan, Parthan, Bala Gopalan) or upper caste surnames were suffixed with their original names (like Sarma, Shenoy, Nambutiri, Nambiar, Marar, Rao). Sometimes non-Hindu names like George, Rahim etc were given (but not many) to 'point out the futility of caste and religion'. (*Souvenir*: 80; Kannan, 2015: 394). The revolt in renaming was given up later as they created technical difficulties in the way of boys getting the benefit of scholarships and reservations in jobs from the government (Ayarookuzhiyil, 1987: 43).

Ananda Tirtha adopted several methods to face the caste-Hindu opposition towards the education of the 'harijan' children – such as submitting written complaints to superior authorities or petitioning the police for help. At times he had to accompany students to their schools since orthodox people used to place obstacles in their way and when Ananda Tirtha could encourage them to break the barriers, they physically attacked them – but he did not allow his children suffer assault but rather received it by himself and entirely on his own body. Two bold students were repeatedly shifted from one school to another simply to establish their right to education in public schools (Kasinathan, unpublished memoir). He greatly acknowledges the moral and material support the then Thalassery sub-collector Carlstone extended towards his efforts for 'harijan' 'upliftment' (Tirtha: 22-3). Carlstone's words in the visitors' Book of the Vidyalaya stand testimony to his attitude. He wrote on 17 March 1933:

> I have just paid a brief but pleasant visit to the Sri Narayana Vidyalaya. There are at present six boys and four girls, all from depressed classes who looked very neat and very happy. They go to the high school in Payyannur and apparently do very well. It is a very good idea on the part of Swami Ananda Thirth and well carried out, and much can be done in this way to remove the disabilities of the depressed classes and improve their condition. I wish the institution every success.

Branches of the school were started at several places near Payyanur like Kannur, Kalliasseri, Pazhayangadi, Thulicherry, etc. (*Souvenir*, 1965: 76) but could not be continued because of financial strain. Ayarookuzhiyil (40) writes:

> The financial burden of running several hostels was far beyond the capacity of Swamiji and his young enthusiastic friends … Swamiji wrote his friends and acquaintances requesting them to become patrons of

> the Vidyalaya by contributing Rs. 25 per annum. The Gandhi Ashram, Tiruchengode, in the initial stages, and later the Harijan Seva Sangh used to send small amounts. The labour department also contributed Rs. 60 per month. These small contributions were too little to meet the needs of the hostels and in the end all the hostels except the one in Payyanur had to be closed. The local support was so meagre that all he could collect from Cannanore, Tellicherry and Calicut amounted to Rs.10 to 12 a month.

The pamphlet *Sree Narayana Vidyalaya* (1944: 5-6), which is evidently prepared for seeking funds from external sources, reads:

> Our main source of income at present are (1) collection from the public (2) Boarding grants and scholarships to some of the boys from the Labour Department and (3) a grant (of Rs.100/- per year) from the Dt. Board… Our expenses come to Rs.3000/- a year and we have to raise Rs.1500/- from the public towards the recurring expenditure… We appeal to our sympathisers to help us … by making donation…

Several prominent individuals like Rajendra Prasad, Kaka Kalelkar, Takar Bapa, C. Rajagopalachari, V.V. Giri, Jayaprakash Narayan, G. Ramachandran and K. Kelappan, visited the ashram (Visitors' Book). In 1934 when Mahatma Gandhi visited the ashram, he planted a mango tree in the compound, which is still there and is known as 'Gandhi Mavu' today (Tirtha: 27). He wrote in the visitors' book: "I hope this institution will carry out harijan service and produce earnest harijan sevaks". But contrary to Gandhi's expectation, the inmates of the ashram failed to emerge as active 'harijan' sevaks nor as public figures but turned out to be complaisant people most of whom ended up their lives in government service/other professions (*Souvenir*: 77, 92-4). Moreover, discontinuance and even running away from the hostel were not infrequent happenings. The demands of study, discipline and perhaps vegetarian food, proved too much for some boys who grew up in all freedom (Ayarookuzhiyil: 44).

2. Temples and Tea Shops: The Civil Rights Movement

More radical of Ananda Tirtha's social activity was the eradication of *ayitham* (ritual pollution) from public places and temples and was aimed at achieving civil liberties and citizen rights for the 'harijans'. This was a many-pronged programme which included protecting their right to equality by ensuring them service from barber shops, tea shops, police stations and law courts and winning the freedom of worship in temples owned and managed by the upper castes. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, 'harijans' and tribal people were

not supposed to possess civil rights/liberties and were never treated as 'public' people. 'Public' places were taboo for them; they could not experience the benefits of modernity. Though the spirit of renaissance had a slow progress among the 'harijans' of Malabar, the movements started by organic dalit intellectuals like Ayyankali or Poykayil Yohannan in Travancore seems to have their impact in Malabar. The voice of sympathy expressed in the novel *Saraswativijayam* (1892) from a Tiyya barrister of Kannur named Potheri Kunhambu and, reference to several Pulaya activists (Tirtha: 24-5; Kannan: 394-5), pointed to the rise of an organic movement from within. As a 'reformer', the Basel Evangelical Mission had failed to make recruits from the 'harijans' for its savarna bias; the Gandhians took up the challenge in the 1920s and had laid its impact felt through Ananda Tirtha; and the Jesuit missions in the late 1930s undertook the evangelical movement vigorously.

Except the brahmanical temples, where the untouchables were denied not only freedom of worship but the freedom to use the roads/pathways surrounding them, the non-brahmanical shrines of north Malabar had accommodated all the castes including 'harijans' under the ritual complex – they either performed the *teyyam* ritual in the shrines/sacred groves called *kavu* or had some other subservient ritual roles within the limits of untouchability. While under costumes of the *teyyam* an untouchable got a symbolic commanding authority over all the people gathered (including the caste-Hindus) but it ceased to exist when he undressed the *teyyam* costumes and in the overall theyyam pantheon they were never given any governing roles. Thus their physical presence and ritual roles were strictly regulated, as is clear from the *Maritheyyam* performed by the untouchable Pulayas at the 'Aryanized' Madayikavu, where they were denied worship inside the sacred zone. *Maritheyyam* was enacted to exorcise the elements which caused *mari* or small pox, for the well-being of one and all (Nair, 2000: 69-70), but was staged some 300 meters away from the temple complex for fear of pollution.

Ananda Tirtha never did question the power relations integral to the caste system; instead, his struggles were directed against its cultural manifestations like ritual pollution. Ezhom, near Pazhayangadi, was a strong centre of landlordism and Hindu orthodoxy where hundreds of Pulaya families led their lives of extreme poverty and servitude. Every year on the auspicious day of Thulam 10, the Pulayas used to cede bundles of paddy as offering to the shrines and received some liquor as blessing – but the ritual was performed at a safe distance from the

temple premises. Progressive men requested the temple authorities to conduct the ritual at the temple and threatened to otherwise boycott it but the demand was rejected and the infuriated Pulayas moved back to their own shrine and performed the ritual there. What followed was an episode of violence and terror; the caste Hindus indiscriminately attacked the Pulayas and their homes. (Pokkudan: 52-3). In fact the Ezhom uprising contained several features of the Perinad strike led by Ayyankali (cited in Nisar & Kanthaswamy: 80-1), in which dalit participation and leadership was openly visible (Pokkudan: 52-3). K. Kelappan, the editor of *Mathrubhumi* daily, wrote an editorial condemning the incident. On the basis of this report, Ananda Tirtha visited the site and, seeing that the police refused to take action against the offenders,met the Malabar collector Mr. Thorne who soon visited the village on horseback. Only then did the police actively engage the issue and file a case against the culprits (Tirtha: 23; Kannan, 2015: 394-5).

We have several such issues in which Ananda Tirtha actively intervened in favour of 'harijans' and to get them a fair treatment under civil law. He led the Pulayas to temples and violated the customary rules of pollution. At several places he suffered attack on his body which he received with no signs of resistance (Tirtha: 23-4). He spent some time in Travancore and associated with the activities of the Harijan Sevak Sangh to get the temples opened for the untouchables, and after the temple entry proclamation of 1936, he joined a campaign to popularise the idea among the people (Tirtha: 31). But it had very little impact on Malabar as several of the temples continued to keep their doors closed before the untouchables and only after 1947 when a similar act was introduced in Malabar that Ananda Tirtha could utilize civil law to end this discrimination. In fact, the sudden interest shown by the Gandhians in temple-entry, and the radical intervention which followed, had its own politics: it was seen as an effective medium to integrate the various castes and communities within the Hindu fold; temple could rally diverse sections together without dislodging the existing power relations and a symbolic unity could pacify lower caste radicalism – thus it searched for a moral solution to repair inequalities to recast the nation but without dislodging the basic social structure (Manmathan, 2013:64-5).

Ananda Tirtha also took special interest in dealing with issues associated with discriminating 'harijans' at public places like tea shops, barber shops, schools, etc. They were served tea outside the shops and in separate glasses and plates; barbers refused to serve them at

their shops; and even in schools 'harijan' children were served mid-day meal apart. Ananda Tirtha procured special permission from the government to inspect whether any open discrimination was shown at the schools; he came to note that in a few Labour Schools, which had started admitting caste Hindu children, instead of the usual practice of keeping 'harijan' children away, upper caste children were allowed to keep distance from them. With his visit, however, such practices slowly came to an end (Tirtha: 25-7; 34-42). The methods that Ananda Tirtha adopted to handle such cases was varied – he either complained the police/authorities or filed cases in the law court. On strict instruction from Rajaji he used to visit places where persecution of 'harijans' in any form is reported such as eviction cases, physical torture or murder (Tirtha: 29-30).

During the 1950s Ananda Tirtha was active among the 'harijans' of Tamil Nadu. He was appointed as the Regional Officer of Harijan Sevak Sangh, and was directed to work with Melur as headquarters (Elayavur, 2006: 114-32; Ashraf, 2011: 58-64). He was asked to report cases of discrimination and violence on caste grounds. He was astonished to see the varied dimensions of caste-based discrimination and the depth of the suffering of the 'harijans' in the Tamil country. They were not allowed to use public wells and tanks, hotels, tea shops and barber shops refused to serve them, and government offices were generally antagonistic towards them. Dalit activism was strong in these regions and the presence of Christian missions added fuel to the fire. Still, the caste Hindus were unyielding; those who dared to question the convention, or helped the dalits to do so, were severely punished through the *Chavadi* courts[21] and the local state machinery either overlooked them or joined hands with the oppressors. Their wrath did have no bounds: dalits were physically tortured, false cases were filed against them, and they were denied jobs and even provisions from the shops (Tirtha: 33-36). Ananda Tirtha refused to share the general attitude of the HSS – that changes would take place gradually, that activists should wait for a 'change of heart' among the high-born and no emancipation measures should antagonize the caste Hindus or victimize them (Ashraf: 2011: 63). He explored the possibilities of direct action like 'capturing' the rights denied and violating taboos forcefully. He soon became a rebel within the HSS and complaints were sent against him to the headquarters. The communication between K.S. Sivam, the General Secretary of All India HSS on the one side and Ananda Tirtha on the other, reveals the radical proportions of the latter and the limits of the emanci-

pation programmes of the organization (Ayarookuzhiyil, 1987: 51-90). The leadership of the HSS insisted on confining emancipatory work to the namesake level, and attributed the present problems to his intolerant and hot tempered nature. They also argued that Ananda Tirtha was taking 'harijans' to temples not for worship but to establish their right of entry into temples and to test temples for the existence of untouchability. Ananda Tirtha held it as the bounden duty of the HSS, and as its moral obligation to Gandhi, to fight for it – through petitions, legal suits or with the use of force. At last, before the HSS dismissed him, he resigned from its cadre in 1959 (Elayavur, 131-2; Ashraf: 64).

In 1933 Ananda Tirtha cooperated with K. Kelappan and others to form at Kannur the *Jatinasini sabha* (Caste Elimination Forum) – with Kelappan as president and Ananda Tirtha as secretary. Its members had to abjure their caste before joining the association. Inter-dining and inter-caste marriage also were promoted as a means to 'destroy' caste. A leaflet titled "Jati Nasanam: Navayuga Dharmam" (Elimination of Caste: the Need of the Age) was circulated at public meetings. It declared: age-old religious beliefs should be modified according to the demands of modern times; that a social revolution is imperative to build a modern India; that people had to be liberated from caste mentality; that a national ethos based upon love for the country had to be built up to avoid disunity among Hindus (Reprint dated 15 April 1936, cited in Ayarookuzhiyil: 45). In the nationalist thinking caste was divisive to the identities of the nation which explains why prominent Gandhian leaders cooperated with the sabha. Though it undertook some propaganda campaign and a few inter-caste marriages took place under it (Elayavur: 86; Ashraf: 60), its role was meagre in bringing about a radical social transformation. Ananda Tirtha's nature of social intervention, as also his individual projects [like founding the sabha], seemingly reveals his limitations to understand the basic ideology which sustained the caste system.

Radicalism and Orthodoxy: Binaries Merged Together

Ananda Tirtha was an ultra radical in the contemporary nationalist/Gandhian/caste-Hindu perspectives which in turn made him an unwelcome presence in these circles. He was radical for his dalit activism– a Brahmin worked among the dalits, lived with them, dined with them and, more importantly, infuriated the caste-Hindus by violating custom. He ignored the Gandhian ideal of 'moral force' and 'change of heart' as tools of social transformation. He defied the fundamentals of Gandhian policy of non-violence and believed in direct action as a

mechanism of social change – but perfectly keeping away from physical violence which gained for him the epithet *thallukolli swami* (blow-borne swami). While Gandhi perceived colonial law and institutions as an instrument of subordination, which needs to be abjured, he utilized the possibilities of criminal law and law courts to achieve social justice. All these made him a rebel among Gandhians and within the HSS. Sebastian Kappen, in his preface to Ananda Tirtha's biography written by Fr. Ayarookuzhiyil, observed:

> Anand Thirth thought and worked for one great idea – removal of untouchability. In translating this idea into practice, he had the courage to differ even with a towering personality like Gandhi. Gandhi too was staunchly opposed to the practice of untouchability. But he entertained the naïve hope that the evil can be eradicated through change of heart on the part of caste Hindus. In contrast Swamiji was convinced that the solution lies in the struggles of the untouchables themselves. And history has proved him right (Ayarookkuzhiyil: 9-10).

Radicalism notwithstanding, Ananda Tirtha's mode of social dealings contained strong tendencies towards keeping the *status quo* of things. His activism was marked by a striking absence of references to Ambedkarite, missionary or communist politics which he had confronted during his struggle for dalit reform. He was a contemporary of Ayyankali (1863-1941), the dynamic champion of the Pulaya people of southern Kerala, who led the radical and organic movement to bring them up in the 'public' sphere and to establish dalit rights, through an aggressive path of activism – he entered in public places very imposingly – he came in a *villuvandi* (a furnished bullock cart) dressed like a Nair – and contested all forms of caste discrimination with physical force (if necessary) for which he recruited a group of trained men called *Ayyankali Pada* (Nizar & Kandaswamy, 2007: 69-70). Despite having a common purpose, field of activity and strategy of struggle, Ananda Tirtha bypassed references to the presence or ideology of Ayyankali in any of his writings.

This indifference was not accidental: the historic role of Ananda Tirtha was far removed from that of Ayyankali. Being a Gandhian he stood to prevent the rise of dalit radicalism, the growth of organic leadership from within and a drain of dalit cadres to Christianity. It is observed that dalit liberation movements were opposed to Hinduism and looked beyond the socio-religious reform framework (Patankar & Omvedt, 1979: 415-6); conversions were seen as a threat to the very existence of Hinduism – which led many to work for dalit 'upliftment'

within the Hindu framework. The ideological frame of the HSS was evidently anti-missionary with which Ananda Tirtha collaborated for long years. The statement that "the entire Pulaya community was poised to become Catholics" (Pallath, 1999: 53) justifies Ananda Tirtha's radicalism and account for his vigorous project of *sanskritization*. Viewed against the exceptional militancy of Ayyankali and the miraculous success of the Chirakkal Mission, and attested by Ananda Tirtha's radical intervention in at least two issues concerning dalit rights, this premise is inferential and evidential. Firstly, he had started a crusade against Labour Schools when he was appointed as Honorary Inspector of Labour Schools in 1947 by Kelappan, who was the President of the District Board of Education in Malabar, on the ground that they had ceased to cater the needs of the 'harijan' children (as they started admitting non-'harijans', funds were being misused by the managements and 'harijan' students were only a minority: Tirtha, 1939). The discourse on the future of Labour Schools initiated by Ananda Tirtha and the manifold responses to it (see Ismael: 204-6; Ayarookuzhiyil: 46-8; Elayavur: 97-8) substantiates the following argument:

> The conversion of depressed classes to Christianity and the growing influence of missionaries among this section provoked the orthodox Hindu nationalists, particularly the Harijan Sevak Sangh, to campaign against extending the benefits given to the Harijans to the Pulaya converts (Ismael:88).

The consistent campaign of Ananda Tirtha ultimately resulted in severing the management of the 'harijan' schools from the labour department and led to bringing them under the department of education; the new custom of granting scholarships to individual students for their maintenance was also started (Elayavur: 98). Equally notable was the second site of struggle which Ananda Tirtha opened in the 1950s. The Scheduled Castes and Tribes List (Modification) Order, 1956 had put the Pulayas of Malabar and Marattis of Kasargod Taluk in the list of Scheduled Tribes in Kerala state. Ananda Tirtha took the initiative to send petition on his own as the Regional Officer, HSS, Kozhikode, and through the MPs from Kerala (signed by 10 of them)[22], requesting the Government of India to put them back in the previous list on the ground that 1) they were scheduled castes earlier and 2) they did not possess any characteristics of the tribes[23]. The various government departments responded quickly and informed that the matter was under consideration and in a personal letter sent to Ananda Tirtha by N.C. Sekhar, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha (dated 21.5.1957: *Anandashram*),

he stated that the government had admitted the decision an 'error' but any rectification required a further amendment to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Act which will be done "at the earliest opportunity next time" and offered to move an amendment "before or after the November session" of the parliament 'myself'. But the amendment could not be effected till 1976 and was done during the time of the National Emergency (Patrick, 2014: 145). J.J. Pallath, a [former] priest fighting for social justice within the Christian church, examined the impact of the decision as:

> Today there are about twenty five thousand Pulaya Christians in this [Chirakkal] area … It is also unique because while they became Christians they were tribes and now they are treated as Schedule Caste and as a result they lost the government reservations and privileges. According to Government records the Pulayas of North Malabar were considered to be tribals until they were officially declared a caste … during the time of National Emergency for the obvious reason of discouraging their further conversions to Christianity (Pallath, 1999: 52).

Though Pallath was wrong in tracing the tribal ancestry of the Pulayas back to the colonial times (See Thurston, II: 45-91), the view of the HSS as well as of Ananda Tirtha on religious conversion was perfectly clear. K.S. Sivam, in a letter to Ananda Tirtha wrote:

> We do not encourage the conversion of Harijans to other religions… harmful to the Hindu society in the long run…Inform harijans that, if converted, all their privileges will be stopped (5 May 1954, cited in Ayarookuzhiyil: 128-9)

And, in one of his accounts on the condition of 'harijans' of the Tamil country, as the Regional Officer of H.S.S. (Tirtha in Ambedkar, 2000: 151), Ananda Tirtha inferred:

> It was Mahatma Gandhi who convinced us of the injustice in treating the harijans of village India as menial castes and slaves. In his absence the harijans of various parts of India *would separate from the Hindu society* for the hardships they had to suffer under the caste-Hindus. (Italics mine)[24]

Ananda Tirtha's earlier attitude on conversion was not as hostile which led some people to believe that he was indifferent to conversions and hence was a true disciple of the Guru (Ayarookuzhiyil: 133). For instance he wrote in 1935:

> Of late, in Malabar there have been a few conversions from Hinduism to Islam. The Hindus in general appear to be much perturbed over these conversions. There is also a tendency to ridicule the converts by imputing to them the motives such as greed of money. But very few

> seem to realize that so far as the hraijans are concerned these conversions are mostly genuine, being borne of a real despair of obtaining social inequality in the Hindu fold. It is no doubt unfortunate that they should disown their ancestral religion for the seemingly advantageous position of enjoying few social privileges. But when we remember the day-to-day humiliations they have to undergo in the name of Hinduism, we shall have nothing but sympathy for them. The onus lies on the savarnas who are responsible for driving the poor helpless Harijans out of their ancestral faith by denying them the elementary privileges of social life ("The Problem of Harijans", cited in Ayarookuzhiyil: 113)

During this time, it is to be noted, the Chirakkal mission was yet to be founded but, as Ayarookuzhiyil himself testifies, Ananda Tirtha had begun to express concern over Christian missionary activity. In a number of letters written in the 1930s and 40s he voiced his unhappiness with the missionary work especially under Caironi (*Ibid*). Equally significant is the case of Kelappan, his life-time associate and in fact his true guru, who too was active in 'harijan' welfare, who was even more critical on the question of religious conversion. In an article written four years before his death in 1971, he presented Hindu social reform integral to the nationalist movement and argued both as having radical proportions. For him entry into the Congress was truly a rebirth and had a cleansing effect (from all the impurities of tradition); his 'harijan' reform measures were an 'act of penance' for the atrocities shown by 'all of us' towards the 'harijans'. Having realized Hinduism as a great religion, founded on the sayings of prophets and saints, just like all other religions, he judged conversion as sheer haughtiness and arrogance. Stressing the non-missionary character of Hinduism he felt some 'trouble' in people undertaking missionary work and warned against religious conversion as leading to conflict among communities (1972: 140).

Meanwhile, the educational experiments of Ananda Tirtha exposed his penchant for tradition which therefore puts his crusade for social equality under shadow. He tried to integrate Gandhi with Guru both of whom stood for *sanskritization*, which laid the base for a pan-Hindu cultural matrix, but his cognitive world was dominated by the vision of Gandhi which was buttressed by the ideology of Gita and Hindu dharma. Prayer and Gita recitation were essential to the daily routine of his ashram. An inmate remembers that Ananda Tirtha was very particular that they should recite Gita and Gayatri hymn loudly and clearly. (Swaminath, *Souvenir*: 79). Meera Nanda remarks that Ambedkar (in his *Annihilation of caste*) called Gita "Manusmriti in a nutshell" as both

justified social inequalities; performance of one's varna duties is the alpha and omega of the Gita: it begins with the injunction to do ones "own duty, though void of merit, than do another's well" and stresses the guna-karma-rebirth philosophy. There is tolerance and pluralism in the Gita, but it is hierarchical and assimilationist. (Nanda, 2016: 39-43). Attempts towards assimilation is also visible in the structure and content of the Sri Narayana vidyalaya – the ashram atmosphere, early morning bath and prayer, pooja, yoga, vegetarianism, fasting, celibacy – all were perfectly brahmanical and were designed to mould absolute and obedient dalit-Hindus. It is not surprising that the ashram failed to contribute anything for dalit enlightenment, to nurture confidence in their own culture/tradition or to mould any single intellectual of merit[25]. Nothing was done to build self-respect, to acknowledge their 'lived experience' or to search for the historical roots of their cultural identity. They were taught to feel shy for their 'primitive' cultural practices which were seen 'unfit' to engage the civil society and which needed to be replaced by 'superior' traditions, i.e., brahmanical, which was being imagined as truly 'national' and perfectly scientific. M.S.S. Pandian explores the interesting process of how the brahmanical practices such as ritual pollution and caste were presented as scientific in the name of 'pure habits' and 'division of labour', how the corrupt brahmanical practices were restored to their ancient purity through religious reform embracing modernity, how the Orientalists and Theosophists popularized authentic Brahmin as authentic Hindu, and how brahmanical Hinduism was asserted as the essence of India marginalizing various other forms of being Hindu. (2015: 37-59)

Conclusion

The very institution of caste has undergone fundamental changes in modern times but several of its features still survive – especially its hierarchical structure and the concept of purity-pollution – the debris of which is almost entirely borne by the dalit people. Neither modernity nor nationality has extended them respectable space in the emerging civil society as they were supposed to represent inferior traditions and menial systems of knowledge. The Gandhian idea treated them as dumb millions who do not know their own interests – and it was necessary to "save them from themselves" (Gudavarthy: 89). With the retreat of colonialism and with the introduction of the system of reservation (in education, jobs and legislatures) even the namesake reform ethic began to fade out. Other agencies also, who offered to emancipate them, such as the missionaries, disappointed them as they treated the dalits more

as objects of reform. In the context of rising identity politics the new generation dalit youth abjure the role of external agents in engendering social change among them. Rejecting the [Gandhian] politics based on an "integrated experience" dalits have started celebrating the centrality of "lived experience" and "organic bonds" in articulating their alternative politics (*Ibid*: 83). And in this search for self-reflection and non-hegemonic solidarities they have identified earlier emancipatory movements, like those under Swami Ananda Tirtha, as purely hegemonic and short of challenging tradition or hierarchy in any serious and sustained manner.

Notes

1. With T.V. Vasumitran as President, A Kunhambu as Secretary and T. Kunhambu as Treasurer (See A. Kunhambu in Ashraf: 119)
2. Written in 1892, this is one of the earliest Malayali novels to meditate on questions of caste, conversion and the possibilities for emancipation afforded to lower castes by colonial modernity. "Saraswativijayam begins with the attempted killing of a Pulayan for daring to sing in the vicinity of a proud Nambudiri landlord. Although believed to be dead, the Pulayan survives, and the rest of the novel follows the two protagonists - the master and the slave - as each of them seeks out his particular salvation. The Brahmin goes to Kashi and cleanses himself of pride and ignorance, the Pulayan, through the space opened up by colonial education and Christianity, becomes a judge. At the end of the novel, the Pulayan presides over the trial of the Nambudiri and also marries his granddaughter Saraswati. The novel has the epigraph: Education is the greatest of all wealth". See Dilip Menon, "Saraswati Vijayam", http://www.thehindu.com/2000/05/07/stories/1307067p.htm.
3. Opened in 1797 by the East India Company, the Anjarakandy plantation was leased out to the French industrialist Mardoch Brown for a period of 99 years. Brown developed it into a big plantation of 3000 acres with the help of the police and judicial support of the British. After 1817 it became a private property of Brown's family till the term of its original lease expired in 1901. See Varghese, 2009: 22.
4. Samuel Aaron (1971: 56), one of the Tiyya converts to Basel Mission, speaks about his father's close contacts, even after his conversion, with Sri Narayana Guru when he used to visit Kannur; he even contributed financially to the construction of the Sundareswara temple at Kannur.
5. In his *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*, Ambedkar alleged that it was aimed at the integration of the depressed classes into Hindu community. He wrote: There were three motives which lay behind the organisation of the Sangh. First was to prove that Hindus had enough charitable spirit towards the Untouchables and that they would show it by

their generous contributions towards their uplift. The second motive was to serve the Untouchables by helping them in the many difficulties with which they were faced in their daily life. The third motive was to create in the minds of the Untouchables a sense of confidence in the Hindus from whom they were estranged in matters political. None of the three objects has been realized.

6. Gopakumar (2015) gives a brief history of several social reformers hitherto unnoticed, including Ananda Tirtha (243-48), but the overall paltry structure of the work as well as poor scholarship makes the volume very weak.
7. It was first published in 2003 with a different title – *Swami Ananda Teerthar*. Kannur: Author.
8. Ullattil Govindan Kutty Nair (Souvenir, 1965:43) writes that he was a true symbol of Indian Rishi tradition. G. Ramachandran (*Ibid*: 64) identified him worthy for the Nobel Prize.
9. Some of these articles of this volume are added in Ashraf, 2011: 93-120.
10. Also see Pallath, 1999.
11. T.V. Vasumitran (president, Swami Ananda Tirtha Trust) told me that it was written by Champadan Vijayan, but in consultation with 'Swamiji'.
12. C.H. Kunhappa (Souvenir: 15) fondly remembers his association with young Ananda as a volunteer in the Congress meeting in Tellicherry in 1925.
13. Kelappan is reported to have asked with fury: "how could the leftovers-eating Chaliyas beat a Brahmin". ("Swami Ananda Tirthar" in *Mathrubhumi* Weekly, 7-1-1978, no author)
14. In his Memoirs, Ananda Tirtha gives a very passionate account of these meetings.
15. The congregation of sanyasis at Sivagiri Mutt, Varkala, founded by Sri Narayana Guru.
16. In 1940s and 50s Ananda Tirtha entered into a long and protracted legal battle with a faction of the SNDP to establish his claim as the head of the *dharmasangham* as he was the Guru's last disciple. The battle ended in his victory and he became the President of the trust newly formed to administer the property of the Sangham. But he could not continue in the new post; he was physically attacked and forced to resign. (Kunhiraman: 42-5; Elayavur:55-6; Chentharasseri: 76-9; Ashraf: 61-2)
17. An 'old student' reminds that in the beginning the vidyalaya accommodated a few girls but they were shifted to Kozhikode when the HSS started a 'harijan' girls' hostel there (*Souvenir*: 77).
18. The episode is described in A.K. Gopalan's autobiography (2013: 36)
19. Labour Schools were established by the British government to cater specifically to the educational needs of the children of Scheduled Caste origin (see Ayarookuzhiyil: 46-7)

20. Own translation, not word by word.
21. *Chavadi* courts were village panchayats summoned under caste-Hindus which handled the 'heresy' of dalit people. (See Tirtha, "Harijanangalkkethire Kirathaniyamam" (Black Law against the Harijans). In Ambedkar, 2000: 147-52)
22. Including K. Kelappan, I. Eacharan, Nettur P. damodaran, M. Muthukrishnan, C.P. Matthen, K.T. Achuthan, C.R. Iyyunni, George Thomas Kottukappalli, A.M. Thomas and A.K. Gopalan.
23. Petitions were sent to The Minister of Home Affairs, Govt of India; to The Asst. Commissionaire for Scheduled Castes & Tribes, Madras; to The Commissionaire for the Advancement of Backward Classes, Kerala State, Trivandrum dated Feb. 1957; to The Commissionaire for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, New Delhi. (Courtesy: *Anandashram*).
24. See Ananda Tirtha in Ambedkar, 2000: 147-52.
25. Personal conversation, P. Anandan (Teacher, Govt. Girls High School, Kannur and the son of Kallen Pokkudan the celebrated environmentalist), Kannur, 08.05.2106.

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Malayali Hindu Patriarchy: Gender and Jati

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Abstract

This paper contextualizes the emergence of Malayali Hindu Patriarchy in Keralam during the period between the late decades of 18th c and early decades of 20th c. The works of the leaders of Socio- Religious Movements are subjected to revision, questioning the usual connotations like women emancipation. The paper attempts to view how the jati norms with respect to the marriage rules, family structure, family bonds etc. were altered.
Keywords: Patriarchy, *Malayali* Hinduism, *jati, swajativivaham, patrivratya.*

Introduction

Malayali Hinduism was shaped in the period between the last decades of the 18th century and early decades of the 20th century. It was a dual process, simultaneously from the upper strata of the society- in which the colonial State had an active role- and from the lower strata in which the socio- religious leaders and their followers actively participated. Though the intentions of both these segments were varied, one complemented the other in many ways.

Keralam was a conglomeration of diverse *jatis*, which were placed in different socio- economic- political situations. All these *jatis* had different sets of internal mechanisms with respect to gendering, familial relationships, marriage rules, etc. Thus there was no homogenous conceptualization of women, or universally accepted gender codes as far as traditional society of Keralam was concerned.

In this discussion we shall briefly analyse how the patriarchy in the society of Keralam was structurally adjusted so as to fit to the Hinduization processes of the society by focusing on three themes. This process was never homogenous and had diverse attires contextualized to diverse jati locations. Thus it was a complex process which had created great impacts in the jati societies. The process of restructuring the patriarchy was a subterfuge programme which was under pretense that it was emancipator (Bhattathirippad, 2010:3; Chandrika, 1998:11)

to the women and thus pro- women. Here lies the first theme of discussion- how far was the entire programme of women emancipation connected with the socio- religious movements was emancipatory? Secondly; how the familial relations and ritual content associated with various stages of 'womaning' and jati codes were reformulated so as to fit into the new socio- economic-political situations which emerged during that age. Finally, how these emancipatory masqueradings were designing the new women who was supposed to handle the micro- *jati* family.

As these themes are very much interconnected and at some points monitored and designed by the state interventions, these three themes will be verified at specimen sites where there were reformulations to fit women into the structures of patriarchy- which the present author proposes as Hindu patriarchy- under the pretense of emancipation.

Keeping the discussions generated around the processes of transformations in matriliny, the enactment of various bills, the pressures for such bills on behalf of various *jati* associations or communities, the construction of shame etc.,[1] in the background, that the present scholar is attempting the discussions on the formulation of *Malayali* Hindu patriarchy. It is to be noted that all these studies expose lived histories in specific contexts and locations. These studies are seen as the elucidations of multiple realities through which the society of modern Keralam was emerging.

In the attempt of formulating the approaches towards the emergence of *Malayali* Hindu Patriarchy, the present scholar has heavily depended on the concept of Brahmanical Patriarchy, Conceptualized by Uma Chakravarti (2003; 2006).

The umbilical relationship between caste and gender in Indian society is an accepted fact. The central factor of this relationship is the 'subordination of upper caste women' which was designed for the 'effective control over such women to maintain not only patriarchal succession, but also the purity of the caste, an institution unique to Hindu society.' (Chakravarti, 2006:138) Thus the central issue in Brahmanical Patriarchy according to Uma Chakravarti is the 'purity of women' belonging to the 'upper castes'. This is a result of the "anxiety about polluting the ritual order and the quality of the blood through women is best demonstrated in the horror of miscegeny" (Chakravarti, 2006:139). She observes that "the ideologues of the caste system had a particular horror of hypogamy- pratiloma… and reserved for it the severest condemnation and the highest punishments" (Chakravarti, 2006:140). Also, that the caste structure is safeguarded through the

'highly restricted movement of women or even through social seclusion'. This is because the women are considered as the 'gateways to caste system'. Hence the gendering within the Brahmanical patriarchy was a devise to check the 'lower caste male whose sexuality' is seen as a 'threat to women of higher castes'. The logic of the careful guarding of the women is to be seen in this milieu. The *pativrata* concept was the ideological tool used in the Brahmanical Patriarchy, which is used to tie up the women successfully, which demands and compels women to control their sexuality. The norms of *pativratya* acted as the tool to conceal the mechanisms and institutions which controlled the sexuality of women and thus subordinated them to the patriarchal system effortlessly. Uma Chakravarti sees pativratya as the devise through which "patriarchy was firmly established as an ideology, since it was naturalized'. (Chakravarti, 2006:147). *Patrivratya* was culturized as *streedharma*, which is 'clearly an ideological mechanism for socially controlling the biological aspect of women' (Chakravarti, 2006:148). This norm was strictly restricted to the women belonging to the jatis situated at the core centre of *jati* system. The women belonging to the rest of the jatis were devoid of the norm of *pativratya.*

This ideology was not exclusively pertinent to the *jatis* belonging to upper varnas alone. Those *jatis* aspiring to reach the upper status used to make shifts from their traditional gender norms and follow the Brahmanical codes and practices. This has been elucidated by Uma Chakravarti. She says:

> An important dimension of the caste mobilization and the attempt by lower castes to change their status was to create new norms for the gender practices of their respective castes. The high value to restrictive mobility and tight control over the sexuality of the women of the higher castes was regarded as crucial basis for being granted the right to high status for the uppermost castes whether brahmana, kshatriya or vaisya. The control over the female sexuality was in common even though other cultural practices might vary among these castes: meat eating for example, among kshatriya. It was to be expected therefore that upwardly mobile castes would adopt new practices for womenfolk… these developments were a reflection of the aspirations of the men of these castes and it is difficult to discern what women of these castes were thinking about these changes in their lives. (Chakravarti, 2003:129)

Conceptualising on Brahmanical Patriarchy as the foundation floor for approaching the processes of gendering, the present scholar is attempting to view the age under discussion- especially the decades of

late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the process, attempts will be made to detect how the norms pertaining to Brahmanical patriarchy were reframed so as to build a religious patriarchy in Keralam- the *Malayali* Hindu Patriarchy. Certain historical vantage points are traced and elucidations are made focusing on such vantage points. These are particularly focused on the reformist tendencies among the Namboothiri, Kshathriya, Nair, Ezhavas, Viswakarmas and Pulaya *jatis*.

Tatrikkutty Episode and After

Smarthavicharam of Thatrikkutty, which was held in 1905, was an episode which invited serious discussions in the Keralam society. This episode of *smarthavicharam* of Tatrikkutty was seen by the later generations of Namboothiris who took to the path of reformism as the beginning point of 'renaissance' among Namboothiris and Thatrikkutty as the protagonist of this renaissance. V.T. Bhattathiripad has pointed that episode as one of the main reasons for the establishment of Namboothiri Yogakshema Sabha. (Bhattathirippad, 2010:626) Eventhough V.T. Bhattathirippad had stated the Tatrikutty episode as igniting point of Namboothiri renaissance; it will be interesting to note how the episode and the resultant trauma over the Namboothiri males affected the women among the Namboothiris. Devaki Nilayangode has written about how the future generations had conceived Tatrikkutty. She writes:

> The name that most people of my generation would have heard repeated most often must be Kuriyedathu Thaatri. During my childhood I too had heard this name uttered in muted whispers. It was after my marriage, at my husband's house, that I came to know more about Thaatri.
>
> Thaatri's notorious Smaarthavichaaram (the namboodiri system of trial of a fallen woman) took place in 1905, 23 years before I was born. Vedic teachers, artists, Sanskrit scholars, the social elite – all were implicated in the case and ostracized. Even 25-30 years later, the storm raised in the namboodiri community by Thaatri's trial had not died down.
>
> I heard Thaatri's name for the first time from the gossip of the antharjanams who passed that way and stayed back at our illam. They would mention the name in fear and in low tones. And would keep repeating it too. (Nilayangode)

One of the main arenas which were concentrated in the afterdays of the Tatri episode was the spaces and mobility of the *Antharjanams* (women among Namboothiris). When we go through the documents regarding the smartavicharam[2] the striking feature we note in it is the freedom of mobility for *Antharjanams*. There was freedom to visit their

relatives' houses on occasion of festivals and temples; they had freedom to watch Kathakali or such performances in the temple premises or in the houses of other Namboothiris. They stayed in the houses of relatives or non- relatives belonging to their *jati* and were not restricted from staying overnight in these places. Devaki Nilayangode has written about this as follows:

Besides those who came regularly to the illam for their meals, there would be Namboodiri women, on their way to or from the Mookkuthala temple. Each would have a chaperone who would loudly announce their presence as they walked. They would stay on at the illam for three or four days. No one would ask them why they did not leave immediately. A large hall was always kept in readiness for them. A single huge rush mat covered the entire floor and it would be laid out by dusk. (*Nilayangode*)

Though these opportunities were not fully curtailed, strict monitoring on the movements of *Antherjanams* were affected. The traditional norm was giving liberty to the women independently without having the escort of the male members of the family. The escorting of an *Antharjanam* by the male members of the family- let him be her husband or her relatives- was considered as violation of the tradition and thus harming the normative structure. This was even treated as a sin for which ritual remedies were sought. (Namboothirippad, 1101ME) Mutthiringatt Bhavathrathan Namboothirippad, the firebrand among the reformers had ridiculed this norm and suggested strict escorting of women moving out for the reasons he observed:

> It is even unthinkable about the secret affairs of some women in the disguise of going for worship in the great temples like Guruvayur. Hence it should be affirmed that the married women should travel only with their husbands. (Namboothirippad, 1101ME)

From these words, it is evident that there was a tendency on the part of the Namboothiri reformists to curb the freedom of mobility and the independence of the women in their travel matters. It is seen that there was a tendency among these reformists to picture the independent mobility of women as something heinous. Here, one thing to be noted is that the reformists were eager to suppress the nominal freedom enjoyed by the women in that community by generating fear regarding female sexuality.

There were also attempts to raise examples of women who led 'aberrated lives' thus by demonizing those women. See for example how V.T. Bhattathirippad has portrayed such women whom he considered as aberrant. He writes:

> One day three girls belonging to Kambrath Mana of Pulamanthol left their home. They had already attained puberty. There after they used to earn their livelihood by maintaining sexual relations with prominent persons who would stay at rest houses situated at taluk and district headquarters. I personally know this matter.
>
> An Antharjanam belonging to Ashtath Illam situated at Chalavara established sexual relations with the servant in that illam and lived as his concubine. At last the husband of that Antharjanam died of physical torture from that servant. (Bhattathirippad, 2010:626)

Such stories are added to the existing narratives on Tatrikkutty about which Devaki Nilayangod has stated in her autobiography. There is an element of demonizing those women. These gossip stories were circulated through each family reaching the children also. Thus, along with of *Seelavaticharitham, Ramayanam, Rugmangadacharitham* and similar other narratives which portrayed positive women characters, who wholeheartedly submitted their lives to their husbands, and which were meant to instruct the girls about the significance of *pathivrathya* and *sthreedharma*, these negative characters in the gossip stories got negative popularity and served as lessons to be learnt lest one thought of transgressing. Thus through the narratives on demonized women-lived and living- from among the community, their fate in the society for the aberrative life they led, the same moral codes were being transacted. The element of compassion generated by the characters of the narratives of early family/ community curriculum was absent in the new demonized women. The desired results from these new set of characters were hate, fear, detestation and repulsiveness; not empathy.

Apart from the curricular goals of such stories, there were elements of voyeurism, of peeping into the personal lives of those women. Not only gazing and gossiping, the narrators as V.T. Bhattathirippad took the freedom to publicize them as if that was their right. This attitude sprouted from the obsession that the women have no freedom in their private life and no decision over their sexuality apart from the privacy they were accorded at their respective homes and in their divinized marital lives. When V. T. Bhattathiripad declares, 'I personally know this matter', he was assuming the chair of witness and judge. Elements of 'moral policing' clad in new attire and the penalties declared for the moral aberrant were emerging in the society. In the past, the culmination of this moral policing was *smarthavicharam*, whereas, the hands of reformers as V.T.Bhattathirippad, it was publicizing the identity of women and demonizing them.

True that some of the Namboothiri women were gaining social positions and were considered as agents of change. One of the person whom we can take as an example is Parvathi Nenminimangalam. She got representation as a member in the select committee of Namboothiri Bill. (Kesari, 1932 June 8) This has been viewed as the evidence of women agency in the law making and has been attributed as a reflection of the victory of the reformers upon the traditionalists among the Namboothiris. This is because, the berth in this select committee was given to Parvathi Nenminimangalam discarding the protests and objections raised by traditionalists. The traditionalists had earlier made a representation before the authorities that they would not be attending the Select Committee if it accommodates Parvathi Nenmininmangalam, as she was a woman who has given up the traditional practice of *ghosha*. (*Kesari*, 1932 June 8) While praising such incidents in public demonstration, it is very important to verify how these reformists reacted to the women who had taken the agency of their lives denying the instituted social norms and conventions. Let us take the historical life of Uma Antharjanam who lived in the 20th century. The following details about Uma Antharjanam are from *umādé étatténnam*- article by V.T.Bhattathirippad:

> Uma was born in Naripatta Mana. She was married to Cholayil Mana as the wife of Parameshvaean Namboothiri. They had a daughter and a son. In course of time, Parameshvaran Namboothiri had his second marriage. But this second marriage did not pull her position in that family. She was beloved to the family members (emphasis added). One fine morning, the family members found Uma and her children missing. Later they came to know that she is in her ancestral house. The reason for her quitting Cholayil Mana was the tussle broke there on the issue of her stealing habit (emphasis added). As an act of repentance she was asked to observe a tough sacrament. This lady who lacked any kind of regret in her action was not ready to observe that. As a person who was devoid of the thought regarding virtue and sin and who lacked the capacity to respect the words of elders, Uma was suffocating within the walls of that building. As a kindled kid who was born and brought up in a wealthy family, she couldn't cop- up with the strictness of a priestly family (emphasis added). The act of Uma had a natural reaction- Uma was thrown out from the family of her husband. In course of time, Uma stranded her morality in the paths of life. She had lots of lovers. If she is here today, tomorrow she will be somewhere else (emphasis added). When they found she could not be rectified, her family members and in laws decided to break the ties of relationship with her

completely (emphasis added). Settlement was done at the registrar office. There as per agreement, she handed over the male child (emphasis added) into the hands of an elder lady of the house of her husband. It was during these days that Devaki Narikkattiri, the renowned social activist, returned from North India. With her, Uma and her daughter was sent to Wardha Ashram. But her stay at Wardha didn't last long. She returned after one year. There was a saying that she fell ill and was under treatment at Madras. Some others were talking that one of her old lovers went to Wardha and there she became pregnant from him and that at Madras she got aborted off that pregnancy (emphasis added). Even though nothing else was earned from her life at Wardha, she got a name- Uma Behn. After returning from Wardha, she was living near the house of her former husband- in the property which she got as her share from that family. She was helped there by a teacher belonging to the Ezhuthachan jati. Soon it became evident that she was not maintaining the property, but was selling it in installments (emphasis added). One morning, a group of people reached in front of the house of V. T. Among them were Uma and the Ezhuthachan [his name was not mentioned]. They had approached V.T. seeking his help for register marriage. V.T. exploded and asked the proposer: 'Why are you marrying Uma Behn? She is a mother who has delivered twice. She doesn't have an attractive figure. I am sure that you are proposing her by keeping an eye on the properties she had received through partition. I won't stand with this. Legally, a Namboothiri woman has no right for divorce' (emphasis added). Later, Uma Behn and her daughter accepted Islam faith and lived with a man named Muhammad, who a driver-was popularly known in the region as Idon. They were living in a hut situated in the property of mosque. Uma had a son from Idon. But fate was against Uma Behn. Idon was previously married. He had family and children. Uma Behn is mother to two children and a prostitute for her lovers (emphasis added). The intention of Idon in marrying Uma was to grab the properties she got from her husband's family. But most of the properties were lost prior to that relationship. Idon grabbed the rest of her properties including her jewelry and household utensils and later physically assaulted her and left her. Later Uma Behn decided to leave the region. She left the region with Rishiram from Ponnani and Buddha Singh from Kozhikkod. They were members of Arya Samaj. They reached Lahore in a week. There she and her children were converted into Hindu religion (emphasis added). Without any delay she married a Punjabi Brahman. Later during the communal riots of 1946, she was forced to flee from Lahore. Later she was settled at Savithri Nagar in Delhi. (Bhattathirippad, 2010:322- 328)

This article by V.T.Bhattathirippad gives a clear view on how the Namboothiri reformists (not generalizing- but V.T is considered as the spear head among these reformers along with Muthiringott and others) viewed the matter of agency by women when it comes to the matter of their personal life. Historically speaking, Uma Antharjanam had created history by challenging the caste codes; violating the rule of obedience; demanding and possessing her share from the husband's family; travelling to and settling at Wardha; coming back and committing to a relation with a man positioned in outer circles of jati system and willing to get married to him; embracing the faith of Islam and getting married to a man belonging to Islam religion; getting converted into Hindu religion at Lahore through Arya Samaj; pulled into the ruthlessness of the communal riot; so on and so forth.

But the historical value of this life of Uma Antharjanam was never a matter of concern for V.T. Bhattathirippad. Instead he was making notorious comments on her- even copying gossips which had spread about her- and was paraphrasing the accounts on her by the family of her husband. Not only these, see the abusive language used by him while talking about her: 1. this lady who lacked any kind of regret in her action was not ready to observe that. As a person who was devoid of the thought regarding virtue and sin and who lacked the capacity to respect the words of elders, Uma was suffocating within the walls of that building. As a kindled kid who was born and brought up in a wealthy family, she could not cope- up with the strictness of a priestly family. 2. In course of time, Uma stranded her morality in the paths of life. She had lots of lovers. If she is here today, tomorrow she will be somewhere else 3. There was a saying that she fell ill and was under treatment at Madras. Some others were talking that one of his old lovers went to Wardha and there she became pregnant from him and that at Madras she got aborted off that pregnancy 4. Uma Behn is mother to two children and a prostitute for her lovers.

V.T. Bhattathirippad- who valourised and hailed Tatrikkuty as the initiator of the 'renaissance' among Namboothiris- was demonizing the lives and persona of women who independently took the decisions with respect to their lives. It was the same V.T who contributed the inspiring slogan- *adukkalayil ninnu arangatthekk* (From the kitchen to the centre stage) - through the title of his drama, was attempting to malign, demonize and marginalize a woman who broke all the restrictions inflicted by the caste codes of Namboothiris and thus was creating history. V.T. Bhattathirippad was not a person who stood against *mishravivaham*. V.T was the person who stood with Raghavappanikkar for getting

his sister Ittipapthi (Parvathi) married to him. Raghavappanikkar was a Nair by jati. Still V. T. managed to get permission from his father for that marriage. (Bhattathirippad, 2010:307- 311) In the case of Uma Antharjanam, she was also seeking his support for her marriage with the 'Ezhuthachan' who supported her. But that was denied by V.T.

In the case of remarriage of Nangema- widowed sister of V.T.'s wife- too, the desire for remarriage was raised by her in a conversation with her sister- V.T.'s wife. (Bhattathirippad, 2010:299) But, she was as if a tool to fulfill the dreams of social reforms of V.T and his fellowmen. Thus in this case, the total agency- that of decision and execution- was shifted to the male, keeping the woman as a mere consent giver for her remarriage. The historical decision she took breaking age old norms of widowhood thus became a plot for the male protagonist to ensure his role in any occasion of the lives of women- whether it be the maintenance of tradition or the wrecking of it.

Keeping all these in mind, if one searched for the reason why V.T. was venomously critical to Uma Antharjanam, we may strike on the problem of agency, in the questions on who decided, and who executed will leave a total absence of male recognition in the case of Uma. Thus one can recognize that her total life was controlled and guided by her own decisions and executions. Even when she approached V.T seeking help for her marriage, she was asking him to stand with her and extend help to enact her decision in her life. Here lies the problem with Uma Antharjanam. She, through her life was spreading light into the nature and content of the Namboothiri reformation and the patriarchal aspects latent in the programmes and mentor attitudes subscribed by the reformers. When viewed through the life of Uma Antharjanam, both the traditionalists and the reformers stand as the twin sides of the same coin. Both these groups were representing the same values displayed/ enacted differently. Both were valourising same patriarchal mentality where every decision upon the women and their sexuality were to be sanctioned and carried over by the male members of the society. In case, if any of the women violated this privilege, there would be relaxations in the positions of the reformists towards the activities of traditionalists, sometimes going to the extent of legitimating it and neglecting/ erasing many cruel incidents associated with such activities. Uma Antharjanam's life gives us ample evidences for such extensions of relaxations, legitimation and erasing.

Take for example how V.T pictured the second marriage of Parameswaran Naboothirippad and the effect of the same on Uma Antharjanam. He writes: 'In course of time, Parameshvaran Namboothiri had

his second marriage. But this second marriage did not pull her position in that family. She was such a beloved to the family members'. V.T., a person who had spent his entire youth in popularizing the atrocities involved in the polygamous system among Namboothiris and the nauseating situations faced by the women in such families, made a simple comment 'this second marriage didn't pull her position in that family' and that 'it was a common feature in those days and nobody cared for it that much'. There upon, the family version from the Cholayil Mana for her leaving the family was retold. Thus for V.T., without any further clarifications, the hearsay that she was caught for theft and asked for repentance- which she denied and for that reason she left home- became valid reason to dump statements of character assassination on her, about whom V.T. himself has commented as 'such a beloved to the family members'. The cruelty of maintaining the silence is seen in the case of the daughter of Uma Antharjanam. She was legal child born in the marital relationship between Uma Antharjanam and Parameshvaran Namboothiri. V.T., the reformer, who furiously reiterated the traditional logic that the Namboothiri woman has no state of divorcee when Uma and 'Ezhuthachan' approached him seeking help for their register marriage left a lacuna regarding the rights of a legal daughter and about the cruelty of pushing out her too, along with her mother, taking away the son alone. V. T., the emancipator of the womenfolk among Namboothiris, was also less considerate about the motherly feelings of Uma Antharjanam when she was compelled to hand over her son into the family of her husband knowing that she was actually losing him from entire life. This irony is classic, so is the narrative on Uma Antharajanam by V.T. as a lens to look into the entire work aimed at emancipation of women among Naboothiris by him and other comrades lauded as reformers.

Reforms and Penile Anxieties

It is also necessary to look into the internal dimensions of the reforms and the designing of programmes to that effect. Muthiringatt had suggested what he saw as relevant as the agenda of reforms. He says:

> Once it is settled that the traditional practices are of no value and that the aspirations of the old generation and that of the new are different, we should state what is to be done for the general good of the community. The thrust areas in which reforms are to be brought are the following: the mobility of Antharjanams, the present style of dressing, the present form of family, the schooling of Namboothiri girls, ghosha system and the notorious priestly power. (Namboothirippad, 1101ME)

Thus the agenda of the reforms as suggested by Muthiringatt

which were to be undertaken by the Namboothiri Yuvajana Samgham had four fold goals to be achieved: (1) modernizing the women and through that the modernization of the households (2) curbing the power of the traditionalists by curbing the power of the elderly and dominant priestly class (3) achieving these two thus targeting the third- to get into the marriage circles within the jati (4) reforming the financial norms within the community. The historical situations which made the Namboothiri youngsters to assemble and raise these demands have to be verified.

The movements and the reformist tendencies among the *jatis* which maintained conjugal relationships within the Brahmins had a profound impact upon the Namboothiri youth. The changes within the Nair community were evident. With the striking interference of Chattampi Swamikal, the superiority claims of the Brahmins stood questioned. *Āçārapaddhati adhavā Malayakshatriya Nāyaka Samayapaddhati (Theerthapadaswami, 1915)* a treatise on the rituals prescribed to the Nairs written by Neelakanta Theerthapadaswami, who was an important disciple of Chattampi Swami (Theerthapadaswami, 1915: 35) is to be mentioned with special reference. Theerthapada Paramahamsaswami has commented on the goals of writing this book. He says:

> The book was written with an aim to bring acceptable scientific religious- ritual rules for Nayars. Many well known persons belonging to Nayar jati were seeking somebody to compile such a work. It was in this juncture, renowned scholar Neelakanta Theerthapadaswami wrote the valuable work, açārapaddhati. This work brought in the much needed authority to the religious rituals of the Nairs. (Theerthapadaswami, 1915: 31)

It has also been noted that this prescription for the rituals in this work was accepted in many parts of Travancore. Mannam Padmanabhan, Rayingan Shankaranashan and Arambil Govindan Unnithan were the reformist leaders who popularized the text far and wide. (Theerthapadaswami, 1915: 31) The text was designed in such a manner that it would aid the people belonging to Nair *jatis* to rule out the opportunities for the priestly class in their everyday lives. This was important- any person who could read and understand the book could sit in the role of the person to officiate the ritual. Neelakanta Swami himself has given direction about this as follows:

> There is no rule prescribed in the text for a particular officiator. There is also a call in the foreword to remove such persons from such occasions. If there is any difficulty for any person to learn mantras and

tantras it is enough to hear such portions read by somebody. (Theerthapadaswami, 1915: 34)

This text has in it discussions regarding marriage rules too. The text prescribes *kanyadana* with rituals in which the bride is handed over to the bridegroom. It prescribes permanent marriages, not the temporary ones. It says:

> The marriage rituals prescribed here is for permanent marriages, which will be counted as a matter of pride in the future life. For marriages too, there should be uniform rituals. The practice of seeking temporary partners from among others should be stopped and there should be tendencies to seek husbands for marriages. Even if it takes ages to get such a husband of one's choice, it is better to stick on to waiting for such marriages… here is no sin in marrying a girl after attaining puberty. (Theerthapadaswami, 1915: 123)

This was in fact an attack on the popular attitude towards *sambandham*, among the Nairs and the jatis belonging to the Kshatriya community of those ages. M. Ramavarma Thampan had portrayed the attitude of the Kshatriya families, as follows:

> In the regions where polygamy was in practice, it is the duty of the husband to provide for all his wives. So those people who cannot afford to provide maintenance for a second wife stuck onto monogamy. In Kerala, the Brahmins were not to provide for their women. This situation provided them with the opportunities to fulfill their lust. In the given situations where these people could engage in reproduction without providing anything even to the children converted them as mere sexual mongers. There was a popular conviction that only the Namboothiri women should maintain pativratya and the women belonging to the rest of the jatis are free from observing it. It was also maintained among the Namboothiris that they have right to establish conjugal relationship with any number of women and that too at the same time. There was also a feel among the Keralaites that even if the Namboothiris are married or that they are maintaining relationships with other women, it should not be a bar for accepting them in a sambandham. A woman belonging to a matrilineal family, entering into relationship with a Namboothiri will never enquire whether that Namboothiri is maintaining other connubial relations. Even the women belonging to powerful and rich matrilineal families express no hesitation in entering into relationship with an ordinary priest of temples. Even at Thrippunithura palace such a matter has happened. A woman belonging to that caste was married to a Namboothiri who is maintaining relationship with another woman. He is maintaining both these relationships even now. (Thampan, 1101ME)

Thus if we go through this text *açārapaddhati*, which was accepted as the basic ritual text for Nairs in Travancore we get an impression regarding the consolidation of jatis and prescription of a uniform ritual- religious code for the Nairs. This text very explicitly asks for the expulsion of the Namboothiris from all domains of life of the Nairs. It was in effect directing the people to give up their subscriptions to the Brahmanical texts which subordinated the Nairs to the Namboothiris. It was also a ritualistic challenge to the prescription in *Keralamahathmyam* that the nair women could not maintain *pativratya*.[3] Thus the call was for swajathivivaham (same caste marriage) and abandoning of conjugal relationship with the Namboothiris.

This quest for abolishing the conjugal relationships between Nair ladies and Namboothiris was not new among the Nairs. *Indulekha* which was published in 1890 had portrayed a similar issue as the theme of novel. (Menon, 1989) It has portrayed several types of marital alliances that existed in the Nair *taravadus* during that period. Most of them were based on connubial relationships based on sexual relationships without any surety of permanency. Thus the novel has, in a way, archived the various forms of expressions of the diktat in the Brahmanical text- *Keralolpathi*- regarding the non- observance of *pativratya* by the Nair women. It is into this plain of living reality, that the novel launched the concepts of 'new woman' and 'new man' through the protagonists Madhavi alias Indulekha and Madhavan. Both these characters are blend of Sanskritic and Anglican values- with knowledge in and about these two languages. Their tastes too were different- which has less in common with the native men and women of their age groups or their ancestors. Conceptualization of Indulekha as an anglicized-sanskritized woman, with less native and traditional *jati* elements in her was a proposition before the Nair community- regarding the new culture their women should inherit. Madhavan- the lover of Indulekha, whose horizons were ever widening through the British Indian map with expanding relations with new economic and cultural middle class , was portrayed as a representative of the new Nair male. These models were widely accepted and influenced the conceptualizations of aspiring youth among Nairs. The acceptance for the protagonist woman Indulekha is to be seen not only from the plain of twin rebellion she unleashed against the 'powerful', 'wealthy', 'influential' and 'desirable' Soori Namboothirippad and her *karanavar* Panchu Menon, through her wit, boldness, knowledge and cultured behaviour but also from the plain of metamorphosis she attained once she came to understand that Madhavan has left her, doubting that she has left him and his love. In that

stage the transformations, that Indulekha underwent were so new as far as the Nair households were concerned. Carving out the features in Indulekha was, in another way, the expression of the desirable features in 'wife' by an aspiring Nair youth, who was groomed with the colonial setting. The knowledge that Madhavan had left for doubting her pulled out the *pativrata* within her- who sees her world has collapsed. Thus, Indulekha was designed as a character having new features which was not known in the ordinary Nair women who were maintaining connubial polyandrous *sambandham* relations in their lives. The protagonist Indulekha thus was a desired conglomeration of 'modern values' imbued into her through English education and 'inherited values' from the tradition which was not her lived- historical one but planted in her through the Sanskrit education. Women like her were proposed not to the interiors of the *taravadus* as concubines of Namboothiris or a links in the *sambandha* chains that existed in those ages but were to be the wives of the aspirant Nair youths who were dreaming their positions in the colonial bureaucratic system and who were also managing to widen their reaches out of the localized Nair matrilineal domains. Thus *Indulekha* was proposing three main points with respect to this issue: (1) a 'legal- pativrata permanent wife' instead of 'short term sambandhakkari (a lady who was in a temporary connubial relation with one or more men) for a man (2) a micro family having husband, wife and children as members which can be in any parts of the world independent of the taravadus (3) *swajativivaham*- permanent legal marriages among the people belonging to same jati.

> If *Indulekha* as a literary work was the reflection of the aspirations and attitudes of Nairs belonging to the new generation of those ages, in later years, there were declarations and enactments for the establishment of such families. There were also certain attempts to break the age old taboos followed by the dominant jatis. One among such incidents was very inspiring as far as the aspirant Nair and Kshatriya youths were concerned. It was the journey in the ship and residing in England- a foreign land- for the purpose of learning, by a member of royal family of Kochi viz; Ramavarma Thampuran (Unninamboothiri, 1102ME)- both of which were considered as taboos in those days. (Unninamboothiri, 1104ME)

Data pertaining to the early decades of 20th century reveal that this mentality crept not only into the minds of people belonging to the Nayar *jati* alone but into the people belonging to many other *jatis* including the kshatriyas who generally preferred Namboothiri men as husbands to their women. M. Ramavarma Thampan has noted the

changes in the general attitude of the Kshatriyas. He writes:

> The proliferation of western education has brought profound changes. Common people are looking at this sex mongers with contempt. Some Nairs have taken position that there is no need of Namboothiris for *sambandham* in their families. Such Nairs are ridiculing such relations. Also, there are now laws which make them accountable in relations. Abhorrent by these nauseating activities of the Namboothiris, Kshatriyas are working with all strength to gain freedom from Namboothiris. When the Namboothiris felt that they are not getting enough honour or sometimes receiving insult from people who in past had honoured them, they established *yogakshemasabha*, did arrangements for *swajativivaha*. (Thampan, 1101ME)

The general attitude of the kshatriyas in this matter is reflected in the decisions taken in the 10th annual conference of the Keraleeya shathriya Mahajana Yogam, held at Karunagappalli. Ravivarma Thampan presided over the session. In this conference, there were discussions on *swajativivaham* and the on the need for sending married women to the houses of their husbands. Decision was made that while sending women to their husband's home, atleast a cow should be given to her from natal home. (*Kesari,* 1932 May)

A controversy which emerged during this period reveals the nature of attitudes maintained both by the brahmin and kshatriya women regarding the Sambandham of Kshatriya women with brahmin men. Parvathi Nenminimangalam raised the controversy by saying that the kshatriya women who are entering into connubial relations with Namboothiris are giving trouble to namboothiri women. (Nenminimangalam, 1098ME) To this a khsatriya woman wrote a reply in Unninamboothiri stating that really the burden is on Kshatriya women and they are suffering because of this *sambandham* system. (Kesari, 1932 April)

It was also during this period that three sisters belonging to the family of Zamorins were taken to the houses of their husbands. Cheriyanujatthi Thampuratti, Anujatthi Thampuratti and Kunjianujatthi Thampuratti were the women who shifted to the houses of their husbands. This was the first incident of this kind in the family of Zamorins. (Mathrubhoomi, 1932 July)

It was in the Nilambur royal family that the historical enactment of *swajativivaham* was conducted, putting an end to the age old custom of accepting Namboothiris as partners for women belonging to *Kovilakam.* The daughter of Nilambur Valiya Raja was married to the son of Munsiff A.C.Kunjunni Rajah belonging to Ayiranazhi Kovilakam. It

was for the first time that a *swajathivivaham* was conducted among the *Samantha jati* in Malabar. (*Kesari*, 1932 November)

These were indicators of an age which was to be faced by the Namboothiri youth. That was really an anxious situation as far as the younger brothers- *kanishta*- belonging to the Namboothiri families were concerned. Among the Namboothiris, only the eldest male in the family had the right to marry from jati. Other male members were to establish connubial relations with women belonging to Kshatriyas, Ambalavasis and Nairs. *Kanishtas* were pulled to a situation in which they feared that they would be denied their sexual necessities. The programmes for women emancipations are to be seen from such terrains of penile anxieties too.

The humanitarian considerations towards the women who actually suffered in such polygamous marital relationships are to be considered and respected. But along with those, one of the real issues is not to be submerged- the penile anxiety of the *kanishtas*. The moves for strengthening *swajathivivaham* among the *jatis* with which the kanishtas were maintaining conjugal relations and which they were denied of through the marital relations within the caste, complicated the situations. As the allied *jatis* were shutting doors against the Namboothiri Brahmins, they were to seek women from among their castes. The push of the Namboothiri males, who were traditionally to seek women from outside their *jati*, upon the women belonging to Namboothiri jati created tensions in the society and chaos in existing familial and social structure. The pressures upon the women belonging to Namboothiri *jati* through the added demand for them by the new claimants too was there behind the raising of slogans for *parivedanam* (marriage from Namboothiri jati by *kanishta*) and widow remarriage. It was also the claim upon the women of their own *jati*, who were denied to them, traditionally. As the distribution of the women who were to maintain pativratya, was limited within the elder sons among the Namboothiris, the *kanishtas* had no claim or control over the sexuality of the women of their *jati.* At that level, *kanishtas* were placed along with other castes. The demand for *parivedanam* and widow remarriage thus had three fold utilities when observed from the domain of *kanishtas*- (1) that they could be members of the marriage circle within the *jati* which was hitherto denied to them (2) that they could be mating males within the jati thus by having an access to control the sexuality of the namboothiri woman (3) that they could have full membership in the jati by the possession of controlling power over the women belonging to jati.

Regarding the alterations in the dress codes of the Namboothiri women, the reformists were in an applauding mood. Premji has commemorated the incident of abandoning the *ghosha*. He writes:

> That chapter of the convention of Antharjanams was at Rasikasadanam- house of V.T. as it was at V.T's house none of the traditionalist Antharjanams attended the meeting. Only a few Antharjanams who were seeking an opportunity to throw off the *ghosha* were attending the meeting. Parvathi Nenminimangalam and Arya Pallam were the prominent figures among them. In that meeting, they decided to throw off the *ghosha*. The decision was enacted there and then. After the meeting some eight Antharjanams entered the sit out of the house. V.T. was not there when they came. He was out in a school attending a meeting. Knowing this, the Antharjanams under the leadership of Parvathi Nenminimangalam marched to the venue of the meeting. The sudden appearance of these women in the venue left the people there- including V.T. wondering. (Premji, 1122ME)

Here too the agency of women was not fully accepted by the male reformists. Muthiringott Bhavathrathan Namboothirippad has written about the necessity of abandoning *ghosha* and the reason- at least from male point of view- for such abandoning. He writes:

> We have already decided to spread the message on the need to proliferate the *swajativivaham*. But along with this it is to be noted that the living is not possible depending on the ancestral property alone. In that case we will have to shift to other countries or to towns for earning livelihood. In that situation it will not be good to leave wives back at home. It's not a respectful deed. That's not possible too. As such, the *ghosha* should be in such a style that it should ensure comfortable mobility… Instead of palm umbrella, if a veil is used, there won't be any fault even from the normative point of view too. It should be remembered that in the marriage hall, before the crowd, bride would used only a veil. (Namboothirippad, 1102ME)

This again revealed the attitude of Muthiringott Bhavathrathan Namboothirippad towards the materialization of reform agendas- it's just a shift from *ghosha* to *purdha*.

The words of Muthiringott Namboothiri make everything clear about the anxieties the Namboothiri youth had. The penile anxiety manifested among them, was along with the spatial, economic, and cultural anxieties. The anxiety/fear that they would be forced to migrate to distant unknown lands for earning livelihood had both cultural and economic overtones. On the one hand, the economic insinuation

was about the opportunities they would have in the new world, taking into account the skill and competency they possessed. The cultural allusions latent in the anxieties were multifocal- (1) the anxiety that how the new world will receive them, who had grabbed the pivotal position in the caste structure of traditional society of Keralam (2) the anxiety over *jati*- focusing the food and social position- was latent in the discussions on migration (3) the age old investment of fear of female sexuality and the fear for 'other' male was ringing in the words of Muthiringott Namboothiri. The demand for *swajativivaham* is to be understood through these tinges too. A wife- belonging to the Namboothiri *jati*- accompanying a migrant Namboothiri is the provider of both food and sex to him- which culturally ensured the continued membership of the male and his generations within the *jati*. As O. Chandumenon, Muthiringatt Namboothiri was also proposing the cultural and economic significance of micro jati family. Hence, when the mentalities of the males belonging to the Nair and Namboothiri *jatis* are juxtaposed to understand their attitudes on migration, it could be easily understood that though both these sections were ready to migrate to seek better fortunes, the Nairs were aspirants, where as Namboothiris were compelled to do so.

Matriliny and *Illam*

One of the important activities of Sree Narayana Guru was his intervention in reforming the rituals associated with marriages. It was something a diktat from above- which was proliferated through the organization SNDP and later accepted by the members of *jati.* The consolidation of *jati* was not without transformations in the inheritance rights.

In Travancore, among Ezhavas there were people who followed matriliny and patriliny. Ezhavas residing in the region from Karunagappalli to Paravur followed matriliny. The Ezhavas in Moovattupuzha, Thodupuzha, Meenachal and Kunnathunadu followed patriliny. Ezhavas residing in the regions from Karunagappalli to Valavamkodu followed mixed system. In the Nanjinadu area, the Tamil speaking Ezhavas followed matriliny and patriliny according to their choice. (Mithavadi, April 1914) One of the attempts of the socio- religious activists was to make the diktat of Guru materialized. He had called for change in the inheritance system. He observed that there are people following *marumakkathayam* among ezhavas and he was of the opinion that there should be laws which allows the legal wife and children of a person to enjoy atleast a share of personal earnings by a man. If it is not done, the marriages will become meaningless.(Jojo, 2009:

64) But among the matrilineal Ezhavas, majority did not favour the transition into patriliny. (Saradamoni, 1999: 108) Their wish was that there should be certain 'codification and legislations of certain customary practices with some reforms'. (Saradamoni, 1999: 108) But, 'in 1899 the Travancore Wills Act gave male members of matrilineal communities the right to will half of acquired property to wives and children… The 1912 and 1925 Nayar Acts, recognising de jure *sambandham* unions and providing for full inheritance of self-acquired property by wives and children and partitioning of joint matrilineal properties, paved the way for similar legislation in 1925 regarding matrilineal Izhavas.' (Osella & Osella, 2000: 85) The questions of neither the agency of women nor their consent for such transitions were not looked into. As Saradamoni has noted, these were enactments for and of 'superior maleness' (Saradamoni, 1999: 108).

In the princely state of Kochi, there was a curious suit filed before the District Court, Thrissur in the early 1930s. The suit was filed by a Thiyya woman for getting a share from her natal property. But, the suit was dismissed stating there is no 'traditional practice' among Ezhavas to give share for daughters from her natal property. It is to be noted that the legal advisor in this suit for the family was the social reformer and the editor of Mithavadi- T.C.Krishnan. (*Kesari*, 1932 November) This case and the arguments therein throw light on some interesting factors. The main argument of the lawyer T.C.Krishnan on behalf of the family was that the traditional practice among Thiyyas doesn't conform to give share to the married woman from her ancestral home. Krishnan himself was a person who advocated change and actively worked and voiced against the 'social traditions' and 'age old practices'. But when the issue was one among the members of the *jati* and that too between male and female, the argument became fine-tuned 'traditional practice'. But roughly the same period after the judgement, Sahodaran K. Ayyappan moved a bill in Kochi Legislative Assembly seeking rights for married women over properties of ancestors. The bill sought for enactment of laws proclaiming the legal validity of women to possess half the share of what a son possess in the ancestral family. (*Kesari*, 1932 October)

An important decision taken by the dominant people among the Ezhava *jati* was regarding the abolition of *illam. Illam* was a traditional concept of clan. A person belonging to an *Illam* was supposed not to marry from the same *illam*. Ezhavas maintained four illams.

This was not peculiar to Ezhava *jati* alone. The influence of *illam* system is seen in other *jatis* also. A folk play enacted during the

performance of Kolamthullal, an art form peculiar to Kuttanad region in Kerala, reveals the impact of illam on the lives of people. The story line is as follows: A herdsman viz Kunjazhakan meets a lady, Kunjaali while grazing his cattle. They started talking and felt attracted to each other. Before taking decision to live together, Kunjaali asks Kunjazhakan about his illam and there every wish of Kunjaali and Kunjazhakan collapsed.

aççante illamétorillamāṇaççā? tārā
ennillam ponnillam koççu
taççanillamedī penkoççé
ninnillam ponnillamétō-
rillamedī penkoççé?
ennillam ponnillam koççu
taççanillamāṇé tārā.
illam māttaççā illam māttaççā
tōṭṭankérīlaççō tārā. (Vattamattam, 2011: 26-27)

The practice of *illam* was abolished by the *jati* decisions during the early decades of 20th century in the regions north to Ashtamudi Lake, among Ezhavas. But it was prevalent among the Ezhavas on the southern side of the lake.

A situation emerged which demanded reconsideration in the *illam* rules. It was in the context of a proposal for marital alliance in between persons belonging to families on the north and southern part of the lake. The family of the male was at Kollam, a region in which the system was not in force. The family of the female was at Thiruvananthapuram where *illam* system was in force. The problem arose when they found that the *illam* originally maintained by the family of male was the one which is maintained by the family of the female. This made the situation complicated. To make a decision on the matter, a meeting was held on 31st Edavam, 1106 (13th June 1931) at Mankeezhu Veedu, an Ezhava family. Around 100 persons including M. Govindan, C.V.Kunjiraman, and K. Narayanan attended the meeting. There ensued a heated discussion regarding the abolition of the system of *illam* itself from among Ezhavas. The prominent view was that, the people north of Ashtamudi do not maintain the system and it has helped them in several matters. M. Govindan moved a resolution which demanded the annulling of such a system from among the Ezhavas. It also read that there should be no bar in entering in marital relationship between persons belonging to same *illam*. A group of members including Panayil Velayudhan

Vaidyan supported the proposal. But some prominent persons as Thottathil Padmanabhan talked against the proposal. In this situation the meeting did not arrive at a common decision on the abolition of *illam* from among the Ezhavas, but a decision was taken on the issue at hand. The jati council met there, found it permissible to conduct the marriage about which decision was to be taken on two grounds: (1) the male and female entering into marital alliance are not blood relatives (2) the family of male has abandoned the system of *illam* long back. (*Kesari*, 1931 June)

Thus going through the total project of reforms among the Ezhavas right from the times of Sree Narayana Guru, it can be seen that among Ezhavas, there were several attempts to restrict the freedom of women at multiple levels thus by bringing control over the sexuality of women. A matter that is to be noted with importance is that, on all matters regarding the reforms opinions of male members were taken into account. Take for example, the meeting held for considering illam. Among around a hundred persons who attended, there was not even a single woman, though the meeting took a decision pertaining them too. Thus when we go through the decisions taken on reforming the family system, male- female relationship, marital system, inheritance rights, conjugal rights- or any such matters, the decision makers were men and only men.

Imposing of Widowhood

Along with the reform movements in other jatis, Kammalas too were experiencing reforms. The legislations on Travancore Kammala Bill reveal the nature of governmental measures and the responses among the Kammalas. As per the government records, 'Kammalas include the members of all communities commonly known or recognized following the profession of carpentry (asari), smithery (karuvan), jewelry (tattan), mason (kallasari) and brazier moosari). (Legislative Department File No: 291/1936)

Some serious challenges were raised against the proposed Travancore Kammala Regulation Bill. In a reply to the objections generated against the bill, K. Parameswaran Pillai, Additional Head Sirkar Vakil had written as follows:

> To the Hindus, marriage and to some extent inheritance also are mixed up with religious usages; as regards to marriage, it is itself a sacrament. The proposed measure affects marriage in many ways. Even if divorce, by consent or through court, is allowed, this will effect, I think a very fundamental change even in the very conception of a Hindu marriage.

> In regarding to inheritance, the statement of objects and reasons says that "drastic changes in the rules of succession have been made". I think that the Bill must in the circumstances be taken to affect the religious usages of the Dewan to enable its introduction in the Assembly. As such sanction has not, apparently been obtained the bill is inadmissible and the notice of motion is invalid. (Legislative Department File No: 291/1936)

Thus its motion on the floor of the house was terminated. In a letter written by G. Nilakantan, Member Srimulam Assembly, to the Chief Secretary to Government, the following points were raised:

1. Though the Kammalas are Makkathayees, and the Hindu law is supposed to govern their marriage, inheritance &c., the law is not strictly applicable on account of the changes in their maners and customs brought about by the influx of time and environment.
2. To establish, in cases of dispute, the right of succession, proof of marriage alone is not sufficient but that of *kudivaypu* (bring the wife to the home of husband and ritualistically making her part of that family) is also necessary. The insistence of the item of *kudivaypu* is also necessary. The insistence of the item of *kudivaypu* as an essential part of marriage rite has caused and is causing considerable hardships in the community. In olden times when marriage was contracted between the kammalas living within the limits of a village or group of villages or of a taluk, *kudivaypu* was not a costly function. With the opening communications throughout state and with the progress of education, territorial or sectional distinctions have vanished and the sphere of choice for contracting marriages has considerably been widened. The item of *kudivaypu* has become an expensive function. Further the *kudivaypu* item is not a necessary function in some parts of Travancore for instance in Trivandrum and Chirayinkil Taluks.
3. Polygamy and polyandry are permissible under the existing custom which is against the principles of Makkathayam law, not to speak on their incompatability with modern socaila ideas.
4. The widow remarriage and divorce are permissible under the existing customs. But mischievous persons are taking advantage of the customs and manners of the Tamil speaking Kammalas very often making use of the usage for launching criminal prosecutions. (Legislative Department File No: 291/1936)

Thus what were the objectionable factors, as found by Dewan and Sirkar Vakil - for a section of the Kammala communities in the bill is

revealed. The explanation provided by G. Nilakantan, the Member of Srimulam Assembly gives us an idea regarding the movements going in the Kammala communities to impose 'widowhood' on the women belonging to those jatis, which was not a practice till those days. This imposition of 'widowhood' upon the women was also a matter of discussion in the third annual meet of *Akhila Thiruvithamkoor Vishvakarmma Mahajana Sammelanam* held in 1935. The meeting was presided over by C.S.Umamaheswarachari M.A, who in his presidential address vehemently criticized the practice of imposing widowhood on women among certain sections of Kammalas. He said:

> Before concluding my lecture, I should say a few words on the fate of our women too. If certain activities of some people among us are considered, there will arise a doubt whether we are the people now upholding the Manusmriti diktat 'na sthree swathanthramarhathi'… there should be wise decisions on the issue of widow remarriage. Otherwise the fate of the community will be seriously admonished. (Legislative Department File No: 291/1936)

Pedagogical Writings

An overview of the literature produced during the period thus targeted the womenfolk of the society of Keralam, instructing them on various subjects pertaining to the behaviour of women in the family and outside. Those were also reiterating the necessary criterions for a woman for becoming chaste wife. Citing some of the themes discussed will give an idea regarding the pedagogical aims of this corpus of literatures. *Unninamboothiri, Sanathanadharmmam, Mangalodayam, Kairali, Mahila, Rasikaranjini, Keralachinthamani,* were the important periodicals which published articles containing pedagogical themes. The themes upon which writings were made were: Joint Family (Unninamboothiri, 1098ME), Freedom of Women (Kanippayyur Namboothirippad, Makaram 1101), Divorce (Unninamboothiri, 1104ME), Conjugal Relationship (Unninamboothiri, 1101ME; Rasikaranjini, 1081ME), Chathurvarnyam (Sanathanadharmam, 1913), Success in Life(Sanathanadharmam, 1913A), The Customs of Kerala (Sanathanadharmam, 1915), House Keeping (Mangalodayam, 1084ME; Mahila: 1932), Duties of Wife (Kairali, 1098ME; Mahila, 1921; Sadguru, 1099ME; Aryasiddhanthachandrika, 1892), Faith of women in God (Mahila, 1921), Character of women (Mahila, 1937), Marriage Rules (Kerala Chinthamani, 1092ME), Widow Remarriage (Rasikaranjini, 1078ME), Rights of Wives Rasikaranjini, 1078ME (1)) etc.

One interesting feature regarding these articles is that most of these were written by male writers belonging to the dominant jatis.

Thus through these writings these writers and the periodicals were trying to popularize the themes of new form of patriarchy in which husband gains an upperhand instead of Karanavars of taravadus. New standards, codes and diktats were being issued through these writings to the 'new wives'.

There were horrifying instances of honour killing of women by relatives. One such incident is reported from Erattupetta, in present Kottayam district. The report states that a man belonging to Pulaya jati committed homicide of his sister. Thereafter he cut her head, packed it and proceeded to Ettumanoor police station and surrendered. The reason for his committing of homicide was stated as the prostitution of his sister. (*Kesari*, 1931 December)

Thus an analysis of the age of reformations in the society of Keralam through the feminist lens will provide some insights very different from the existing eulogizing narratives on the movements and on the 'leader's of the movement. The consolidation of jatis and development of communities not only structured muscle power of those by widening the population base alone but generated the gender codes and ordered gender relations within those jatis and communities by subjugating the women and restricting their sexuality. The call for *swajativivaham* was a tool at the hands of the male members of the jatis to dominate the sexuality of women. These processes of jati- community consolidation and the call for *swajativivaham*- for which women too were perpetuators- brought the sexuality of women to a jati- community matter and thus a matter to be put to the surveillance of jati- community collectives. The consolidation of the jati- community and the imposing of *swajativivaham* resulting in the surveillance of women sexuality checked the trans-jati- community exchanges or distribution of women sexuality. Therefore the jati- community consolidations in the colonial period in Keralam was also a reordering of the distribution of women sexuality within the frames of jati- communities. Thus a monopoly was established by the maledom of each and every jati- communities over the females of these jati- communities. The impact of these structuring on women were as follows: (1) the free mobility and rights enjoyed with respect to the spaces were curbed (2) the rights over the property were redefined (3) strict surveillance upon the sexuality of women were maintained and the tools like defaming, im/moral policing, gossiping were used to demonize the detractors.

Along with these developments, as the women were circulated within the jatis, the hypergamy and hypogany were restricted. The

transformation of Brahmanical Patriarchy was subjected in this regard. As all the jatis were pushing them into the Hindu religious domain with restructured jati- community relations and grafted sexuality codes, *pativratya*- at least in theory- became the prerogative and duty of women belonging to every jati. Embedding of *pativratya* and moral codes associated with it into jati- community norms, the socio- religious reform movements and reformers were constructing *pativrata* in every woman of jati- communities and thus in every Hindu woman. The reservation of *pativratya* provided to the Namboothiri women and the free access to sexuality of women belonging to other jatis was transformed. This was not altogether a peaceful process. The lethal tools like shaming, honour killing and out-casting were used to impose the patriarchal codes and enforce maledom upon women.

Thus the creation of *Malayali* Hindu patriarchy is to be seen in the domains of jati- community consolidations and the proliferation of *pativratya*- at least in theory- among the women of entire jati-communities who were finding their spaces in Hindu religion.

Notes

1. Some among these are: K. Saradamoni, *Matriliny Transformed: Family, Law and Ideology in Twentieth Century Travancore*, New Delhi: Altamira Press, 1999; G. Arunima, *There Comes Papa: Colonialism and the Transformation of Matriliny in Kerala, Malabar c. 1850-1940*, New Delhi: Orient Longman Pvt. Ltd., 2003; Susan Thomas, 'Property Relations and Family Forms in Colonial Keralam', Mahathma Gandhi University, 2002 (Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis); Praveena Kodoth, 'Courting Legitimacy or Delegitimizing Custom? Sexuality, sambandham and Marriage Reform in Late Nineteenth- Century Malabar' in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2, May 2001, p.354; J. Devika, *Engendering Individuals: The Language of Re- forming in Twentieth Century Keralam*, New Delhi: Orient Longman Pvt. Ltd., 2007; Sheeba. K. A, 'Caste, Sexuality and the State: The Changing Lives of the Nambudiri Women in the Twentieth Century', Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2002 (Unpublished Ph. D Thesis); Susan Thomas, 'Engendering Through Shaming: The Case of the Syrian Christian Women' in *Catholic Journal of Studies and Research*, Vol. 3, No. 1&2, December 2014, pp. 131-138; Kathleen Gough, ' Changing Kinship Usages in the setting of Political and Economic Change Among the Nayars of Malabar' in *The Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 82, Jan- June, 1952, pp. 71-88; Meera Velayudhan, 'Law, Reform and Gendered Identity: Marriage Among Ezhavas of Kerala' in *EPW*, Vol. 33, No. 38, Sep. 19- 25, 1998, pp. 2480-2483.
2. Smarthavicharam Records with respect to the trials of Tathrikutty are kept in the Ernakulam Regional Archives.

3. It says: *tavabharya ca putrartham brahmanal nithyameva ca/ tai:saakam ca rathimkruthva tishtanthamavaneethale* which means 'let your wives receive the Brahmanas without any fear for pativratya and get enough children from them'.

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Drawing After: Cartoons, Partition and Women

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Abstract

This paper takes up the cartoons of British cartoonist Leslie Illingworth published in Daily Mail, particularly those which he did on the Indian context. Illingworth's cartoons recurrently show India as a lady vulnerable to violence, being surrounded by beasts like civil war, communal riots etc. The paper however, seeks to study the 'lady/woman' as a subject to the violence in these cartoons. How does Illingworth as a cartoonist bring up the image of a woman in his cartoons discussing violence/victim? What are the visual intricacies used in order to caricature women as a subject within the context of the highly intensive political situations? It would not be wrong to say that women – on both sides – were the worst victims of the partition riots. On the one hand they had to suffer at the hands of the rioters, who saw them as weak targets to tarnish the opposite community. While on the other hand they suffered from their own community, who would rather have their women dead, than having the honour of the community tarnished. Looking at these cartoons from such an angle, might add depth to the utilisation of woman as a symbol by the cartoonist. It would therefore be interesting to read those cartoons with such a dimension. An added emphasis would be placed on the ways in which the cartoonist used women's body as a symbol, provided the use of gender in cartoons later on became a technique.

***Keywords*:** Cartoonists, women, violence, partition, propaganda, communal violence.

Introduction

Political humour seeks to find what is inappropriate in day-to-day political life and to critique it. Political cartoons then, form an important medium of political humour. That cartoons can easily take sides, be aggressive, taunting, and highly critical only add to their advantage when compared to other, more restrained forms of printed communication. In fact, political cartoons "can match any other media for invective" and are used widely as "as a weapon of propaganda" (Kemnitz, 1973:84). The details that a cartoon provides on deeper interpretation enable a historian to learn more than the cartoonist might have intend-

ed to say. According to Medhurst and Desousa, "political commonplaces, literary/cultural allusions, personal character traits and situational themes" (1981:199-200) form the database on which cartoonists depend to go about their business. On the one hand this fact underlines possibilities in reading and interpreting cartoons and on the other it reminds us of the challenges of doing so. El Refaie states that literacy of different kinds is required, "ranging from a familiarity with cartoon conventions and a broad knowledge of current events to the ability to draw analogies" (2009:182).

Cartoons are, by nature, subjective rather than objective This subjectivity in a sense makes it more interesting for a historian; for it makes it easier to grasp the various perspectives that existed in a society by reading cartoons of a particular period of time in history.

This paper therefore, takes up the cartoons by British cartoonist Leslie Illingworth for *Daily Mail*, more so those he did on the Indian context. It seeks to study the 'lady/woman' as a subject to the violence in these cartoons. How does Illingworth as a cartoonist bring up the image of a woman in his cartoons discussing violence/victim? What are the visual intricacies used in order to caricature women as a subject within the context of the highly intensive political situations.

Reading Cartoons

Cartoons can be humorous, emotional, partial, extremely critical, taunting and teasing all at the same time; each of which are area where editorials and other printed modes of communication cannot tread into. Not to forget that cartoons are quicker and pungent in getting their message across. This is why Johnson explains that a cartoonist is not a mere commentator anymore, but "...an editorial writer who produces a leading article in the form of a picture" (1937:44). Cartoonists use a set of tools and techniques distinct from that of not just oral rhetoric but also other means of printed communication. They use linguistic and non-linguistic techniques simultaneously, (Sani, Abdullah et.al, 2012:156) which are advantages in communicating its message successfully.

Medhurst and Desousa have given in a nut shell three basic paradigms that try to explain the content and effects of cartoons; psycho analytic, sociological and communicative (1981). While psychoanalysis underlines the importance of symbolism in cartoons, it also says that condensation and displacement also play an important role in not

just the production, but also the interpretation of cartoons. The latter two approaches, namely sociological and communicative, focus on the culture that produces the cartoon or caricature and the symbols of that culture. It is however pointed out that all these paradigms fail in that none of these provide a structured frame of classifying and analyzing cartoons and caricatures, which they claim that they had done. What they attempt therefore is to look at the cartoon as a rhetorical form. Thus their focus does not merely limit itself to the analysis of cartoons; rather, it says that there should be a keen look at when and how the cartoon was made, or in other words, what went in, to the creation of each cartoon. A cartoonist uses a unique set of tools and techniques as distinct from other forms of communication; which include linguistic as well as non-linguistic ones.

Sanjukta Sunderason points out that a 'satirical image…seeks to embody a synthesis of a culture of critique with a culture of humour'. She therefore underlines the existence of multiple layers within the 'macro-frames of criticality and humour, which includes experience, identity, ideology etc. amongst others. A reader therefore is dealing with a 'visual document', when looking at such an image. This, while emphasizing the fact that such images could indeed narrate more than what they appear to do, also gives a hint as to what all needs to be looked for in a cartoon, or in other words what all could be found from them (2006:8).

The basic forms of dispositions, contrast, commentary and contradiction in a cartoon are made into a concrete structure by using elements of style. This includes the use of lines of various thicknesses, size of characters and objects, exaggeration of physical features, positioning of images and their correlation with the text – whether in balloon or caption – etc. (Medhurst and Desousa, 1981). But within these broader lines, there are more techniques that a cartoonist resorts to when bringing out his work that could be clearly seen when looked for. And these would have a lot more to say to a reader; indirectly if not otherwise.

The Political Background

The years of 1946-'47 being recognized as the crux of this work necessitates the clarification of the political background of this period so as to place the cartoons in context for the readers. The years following the Second World War saw the British government making

one attempt after the other to negotiate with the major political parties in India. The situation in India seemed to be slipping from their hands and therefore they wanted to leave while the going was good. In 1946, the government sent a three member delegation consisting of Stafford Cripps, a member of the British War Cabinet, Secretary of State Pethick Lawrence and another cabinet member Victor Alexander. They came into a situation where communal violence and famines werethreatening to tear the society apart. The discussions therefore, went in the direction of forming an Indian government for the interim period by bringing in a coalition between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, to undertake decisive administrative measures as well as to oversee the transfer of power. In spite of various formulas being put up, such a move failed and the Viceroy left it to Congress, to form a government in the light of League non-cooperation. Thus on the 2nd of September, Congress formed the Interim Government. Attempts at negotiation were still on and at a later stage Muslim League came in as well. The frictions between both these sides were however too much to be softened so easily and this widened into one between two communities of the sub-continent that settled at nothing less than the partition of the country into two with riots and bloodshed accompanying it (Wolpert, 2006:9-11).

It would not be wrong to say that women – on both sides – were the worst victims of the partition riots. On the one hand they had to suffer at the hands of the rioters, who saw them as weak targets to tarnish the opposite community. While on the other hand they suffered from their own community, who would rather have their women dead, than having the honour of the community tarnished (Menon and Bhasin, 1993). Looking at these cartoons from such an angle, might add depth to the utilization of woman as a symbol by the cartoonist. It would therefore be interesting to read those cartoons with such a dimension. An added emphasis would be placed on the ways in which the cartoonist used women's body as a symbol, provided that the use of gender in cartoons later on became a technique.

Leslie Gilbert Illingworth

Leslie Gilbert Illingworth is regarded as someone who drew cartoons "...that were to lift Britain's morale during the Second World War, commenting on Churchill's leadership and Allied military victories" (llgc.org.uk). These cartoons reached the readers through *Daily Mail*, that was "...sympathetic to the fighting man..." during the war

time and had a strong hold in the market (Bryant, 2009:19). When *Daily Mail* therefore advertised for a political cartoonist, Illingworth apparently saw it as the chance to serve his country the best way he can. This however, was not the sole reason. The pay at *Daily Mail* was good and compared to his earlier stints as freelance illustrator, it was more stable and interesting for him. On his part, Illingworth thought that a cartoonist must have a pragmatic approach and thought of himself as "...very Venal" (Bryant, 2009:16). He has made it clear that he was never told what to do in his cartoons and also that the best of editors is someone who looks at the works and say that that's just what he wanted. Underlying this statement however; is the fact that he kept his editor happy with the work he did. He also used to contribute to the government propaganda service for which he prepared cartoons, both signed and un-signed ones, to be used as leaflets for aerial propaganda. A few of his cartoons from *Daily Mail* were also used for this purpose.

The choice of Illingworth as the focus of this study, over his contemporary David Low, who is regarded by many as one of the best political cartoonists ever, is in no way a coincidence. It is indeed with definite reasons that this has been done. In fact, there has already been a prediction that the former would fare better than the latter in the long run. This was made by a former editor of *Punch*, in his obituary for Illingworth in *Guardian*, with the explanation that "... Low's cartoons usually relate to some immediate situation which soon gets forgotten, whereas Illingworth's go deeper, becoming at their best, satire in the grand style rather than mischievous quips; strategic rather than practical" (Bryant, 2009:13).

The differences between these two cartoonists does not, however, cease at that; they do seem to represent two distinct styles of cartooning, if not two schools altogether. This is not to allude to any kind of theoretical debate, but rather the point here is that there were differences in the ways in which both these men approached and drew cartoons; so much so that it is evident for an ordinary reader.

To begin with, Illingworth was keen on details. He seldom leaves a space blank in his works. The images are full – literally and metaphorically. The figures are sharp, clear and of realistic anatomy rather than crooked, non-detailed or those with minimal lines. Similarly, the space allotted is used to the full, with shades and images; so much so that one might take it for a sketch rather than a cartoon (Bryant, 2009:25). However, this is not the case with David Low, who does his characters with minimal lines.

Secondly, looking at the cartoons of both these cartoonists a little closely, it could be understood that Low does not give much importance to where he sets his cartoon and its characters. Landscapes, cricket ground, household, etc. all become his background and quite often, it is left blank too. On the other hand, Illingworth gives much importance to the background. They do have a bearing on the characters and the message conveyed in the cartoons. And they are drawn with utmost details. With varying shades of black as well as strokes of different thickness, he makes it vivid, detailed and 'colourful', even though they are all black and white illustrations. A third reason is their position on the Indian political scenario. Though Low has indeed done several cartoons on the Indian situation, most of them are mere comments. There is not much of a satire. While Illingworth's cartoons are no less than sharp swipes as far as satire goes.

All this has been said not to judge the cartoonist that David Low was; and there would be no point in trying to do so with one of the best political cartoonists ever. The point here was to prove how useful his cartoons would be to a historian. What he/she looks for in a cartoon is not merely the message that the cartoonist intended the cartoon to convey. Rather, the attempt would be, to unravel the cartoon and through that, the cartoonist as well as the political scenario. In fact a historian refuses to be satisfied with what is given at the surface and digs in for more. Looking at Illingworth and Low in such angle, it is obvious that Illingworth by far gives more food for thought for a social scientist, when compared to Low.

These facts therefore make it furthermore important to study his cartoons. To be more to the point and specific in the narration those cartoons in which the image of a woman/lady have been utilised, are taken up for analysis here. Adopting a set of cartoons as a whole, with a covert thread connecting them into becoming a story is what is attempted here.

Illingworth and the Indian Woman

The first amongst these was published in *Daily Mail* on 13th of March 1942 titled *New Policy for India* and it was a comment on the Cripps mission (Figure.1).

Figure.1 (*Daily Mail*, 13 March 1942; Courtesy: www.cartoons.ac.uk)

Situations in South Asia and the closing in of war on India had started troubling the British by this time and they badly needed the support of Indian public as well as the leaders, which the latter were not willing to give. The fact that their support was taken for granted and the way they were treated at the end of the First World War, in spite of their giving full support in that case, were the reasons. It was in this light that Cripps persuaded the British War Cabinet to a draft declaration that promised India Dominion Status once the war ended (Sarkar, 1983:385-386). The cartoon therefore has Cripps running in hard to a building which is ablaze (persumably the British Empire) of which a good part i.e. up to Burma is already burnt down. The next in the line of a fast spreading fire is Ceylon and then India. These two are drawn as ladies visibly frightened and apparently awaiting a saviour. The plan that Cripps is coming with however, is exclusively for India; alluding thereby that when compared to Ceylon, it is India, that the British can ill afford to let go and that the same is whom they need on their side.

The situation however went from bad to worse, when the Cripps Mission failed. The British were at their wits end and so were the Indian leaders, though for two very different reasons. This is evident from Gandhi's asking the British to leave India to God or anarchy; he said he would rather prefer pushing India to "...complete lawlessness..." than to stay within the orderly disciplined anarchy of the British rule. Thus on the 8th August 1942 Congress passed the Quit India resolution and

followed it by a call for a mass-struggle. If the leaders were arrested, each Indian was to act as his own guide in how to carry the movement forward. 'Do or Die' was the call given by Gandhi, to his followers. However, even before the movement could spark off, the top-notch leaders were arrested and removed on the morning of 9th of August (Sarkar, 1983:389-390).

The problems in India were fast getting out of hand for the British and therefore the government sent a Cabinet Mission to reach a settlement between the parties involved about the future of the sub-continent (B. Metcalf and T. Metcalf, 2001:215). The Viceroy in fact was not very favorable to this idea as he did not believe that a few weeks of discussion would help in settling the scores (Wavell and Moon, 1973:206). In spite of the second Simla conference, the two major parties in India, the Congress and the League did not find themselves getting any closer. In fact they had grown further apart from each other, though both parties were quick to explain that they had gone to great lengths but the other party would not budge and thereby causing the failure of the talks(Wavell and Moon, 1973:267). On the 14th of May, was published a cartoon under the title, *Civil War and famine threaten India*, depicting the tug-off for power between the Indian leaders (figure.2).

Figure.2 (*Daily Mail* 14 May 1946; Courtesy: www.cartoons.ac.uk)

Here the lady –India – is visibly scared of the approaching tiger and wolf, which are civil war and famine respectively. The 'men' in the cartoon are Gandhi, Jinnah and Cripps (safely sitting atop a tree), of which the first two are locked in conflict over the new constitution while the lady is in a deep predicament, vulnerable to attacks from wild animals. It is a critique of the Indian leaders, who according to the cartoonist are safe from the threats in the jungle. Thus, he effectively releases the colonial government off the hook with regards to these two tragedies. Ironically, Wavell himself admitted that it was in the provinces 'best administered' by the colonial government that the famine struck harder, thereby underlining the failure on the part of the colonial government (Wavell and Moon, 1973:202). It will, thus, have to be assumed that the cartoonist chose to conveniently overlook this fact.

After several rounds of talks and conciliatory attempts between the Congress and the Jinnah-led Muslim League, the Congress was setting up an interim government, following the rejection of the latest Cabinet Mission proposal by Jinnah and his Working Committee. This was due to the fact that the formula that League demanded (with parity of Muslim and Hindu members and several other issues) was not accepted. League passed a resolution saying that it was 'Congress intransigence' and the breach of Muslim trust by the British government that led to their rejection of the proposal. They also resolved that it was time to get down to Direct Action to achieve Pakistan and therefore called on the followers to be ready for any kind of sacrifice towards this end (Mansergh and Moon, 1979:135-139). However, even Jinnah was not sure as to what Direct Action actually meant other than it was going to be a mass unconstitutional movement, and a Muslim hartal was going to be observed on the 16th of August and there would be mass meetings in every town and village. The government feared that this would lead to friction, (Mansergh and Moon, 1979:174) which proved to be right as the hartal resulted in widespread riots and clashes in Calcutta (Mansergh and Moon, 1979:239-240).Following League rejection of proposals, the Viceroy invited Nehru to form an Interim Government (Mansergh and Moon, 1979:188). After a few further deliberations finally, an Interim Government led by Congress came into power on the 2nd of September 1946 (Sarkar and Bhatacharya, 2007:297-298). On the 2nd of September therefore, a government under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru was sworn in (Sarkar, 1983:431).

The cartoon that was published on the same day with the caption *Nehru rides the Indian elephant,* therefore shows Archibald Wavell,

the then Viceroy, waving off Nehru as he prepares for the ride on the elephant titled India (Figure.3).A woman, apparently representing the people is sitting in the cabin behind him and her frightened gaze takes our attention to what Jinnah is doing. He is lighting explosives tied to the tail of the elephant in an attempt at endangering the riders atop the elephant. The implication being that through efforts like direct action, Jinnah and his party were trying to sabotage the new government in office.

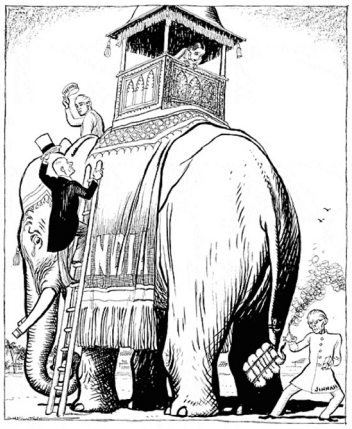

Figure.3 (*Daily Mail*, 2 September 1946; Courtesy: www.cartoons.ac.uk)

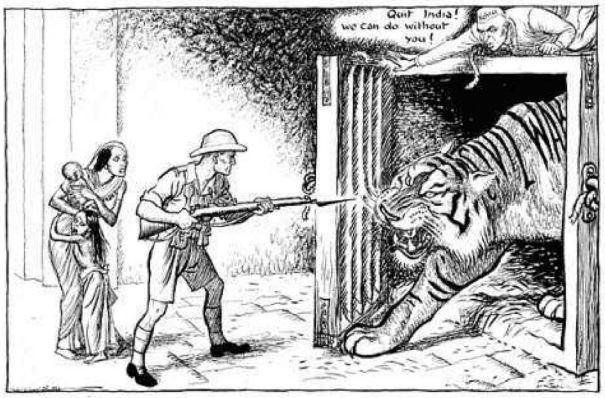

Figure.4 (*Daily Mail*, 17 December 1946; Courtesy: www.cartoons.ac.uk)

The last months of the year 1946 found the sub-continent falling steeply into the grasp of riots and massacres. Bengal, Punjab, United Provinces, Bihar etc. were affected by violence which showed no signs of subsiding (Sarkar, 1983:432-433). On the 17th of December a cartoon was published a cartoon with its caption asking, *But can they?* This question however, is a jibe which is clear when we look at the

cartoon (Figure.4). It shows an open cage out of which a ferocious tiger – Civil War- emerges. Nehru, representing Congress, is depicted as opening the cage and out of cowardice lying atop it. Lying there at a safe distance, Nehru asks the British to leave India, and claims that they can do without them. The cartoonist is thereby taking a dig at the Congress leadership, accusing them of being at least partly responsible for letting violence and civil war happen and their inability to face it and put an end to it. A soldier representing the British however places himself valiantly between the beast and the vulnerable lady (Indian people) who is carrying a baby this time shown with another kid – who is again, a girl. The question raised by the caption therefore could be elaborated into - what could the Indian leaders do without the help of courageous and able British officers?

Figure.5 (*Daily Mail*, 20 May 1947; Courtesy: www.cartoons.ac.uk)

The political situation kept deteriorating early in 1947 as well (Sarkar, 1983:432-433). The cartoon published on the 20th of May 1947with the caption *Free India* (Figure.5), therefore tries to raise an irony that even when faced by the mass-scale riots and killings, Gandhi, Congress, U.S. sympathizers and the Liquidators of the British empire (meaning thereby the British leaders who stood for putting an end to the colonial rule in India) still thought of the British to be the biggest problem in India.

Once again there is a lady depicted as holding a child close to her, timid and afraid - as if to refer to the people – of what is going on

around. What has to be noted in particular is the way Gandhi has been depicted. With all the killings and riots going on around him, he is shown as calmly spinning the Charkha, as if to denote Nero's fiddling while Rome was on fire. This is yet another case of the cartoonist Illingworth playing into the hands of the British government by choosing to avoid the facts. Gandhi, tired of the unending negotiations and hurt by the spreading violence, had left for riot affected villages like Noakhali and later moved between the similarly torn slum areas of Calcutta, Bihar and Delhi. He often travelled on foot through these places, starting in January 1947 and worked amongst the suffering masses through the days of independence and partition (Mahajan, 2000:238-253). Depicting Gandhi as an idle old man sitting back and spinning in a cartoon published in May 1947 suggests that either the cartoonist got his facts wrong or that he chose to overlook them. It would thus seem that he was going out of his way to posit himself with the British conservatives who scoffed at the imminent disbanding of the empire's hold in India (B.Metcalf and T.Metcalf, 2006:218).

The cartoon on the 28th of August is titled *Race hatred* (Figure.6). It shows a woman named the Minorities on her knees crying for help.

Figure.6 (*Daily Mail*, 28 August 1947; Courtesy: www.cartoons.ac.uk)

A ghastly looking man in typical North Indian attire, titled Race Hatred, is grabbing her by the hair and is about to kill her with his sword. With the whole street filled with similar scenes, the lady has rushed into what seems to be the office of a British officer (as is evident from the hat hanging on the wall). He has just left the office, leaving his cigarette to burn out. The reason for his leaving seems to be the letter

on the table that reads 'Renunciation of British Sovereignty'. The use of the term 'Race' is however, problematic considering the fact that the riots were communal, not racial in their nature.

Another point to note in the light of this cartoon is the notion of void that is left behind by the British. It is as if to suggest that Indian leaders who have already been tagged cowardly (figure.4) and idle (figure.5) are inept as well. Looking at the cartoons that way also suggests that throughout these cartoons, the existence of a national movement of any sorts have been ignored. All through it has been the valiant British coming to save lady India from the troubles posed by the leaders as well as the society here.

These six cartoons that mostly had the Indian situation in their focus have a lot more to say than is overtly visible for an ordinary reader. The depiction of India, its society, the social situation and its parties show a hidden thread of sorts that connects them with each other. Firstly, Illingworth's use of animals in the frames is worth noting. Tropical animals like elephant and tiger appear now and then. While it is India and the Indian National Congress that are depicted as elephants, the tiger is used to depict the civil war in two of them. Famine is depicted in a cartoon as a hungry jackal. This personification could actually be reread, in that Illingworth uses a wild jungle, a riot scene or fire and rising smoke in most cases as the background for his cartoons on India, which implies an attribution of a wild and uncivilized nature to the Indian society; a society, where wild beasts like tigers, jackals and elephants belong.

Next, and more importantly as much as this paper is concerned, comes the depiction of women. Frightened and vulnerable, they are tagged as India in two situations; apparently represent its people in three of them and the minorities in one. Such repeated depiction cannot be coincidental; what then could have led him to draw so? One explanation could be that he must have been alluding to the reality where the women were, in most cases, at the receiving end of the communal violence and riots. However, as has been already stated, none of the cartoons cited here use the image of a woman to represent women; rather the woman in these cartoons represent India, its people and the minority section of the society. The expressions of these women, on the other hand show nothing but fear, weakness, helplessness etc. Add to this the fact that these characters require immediate help against the looming threat and then, the ploy becomes clear. The technique of depicting women by drawing upon gender stereotypes is very much visible in

political cartoons. Wickham, in her study of cartoons on German unification, has explained the depiction of women and the stereotypes and sexism that cartoonists stuck to (Wickham, 1998:156). Illingworth's ploy therefore could be traced along the same lines whereby India is in general shown as a frail being that requires immediate help. And that, is where the valiant British soldier (figure.4) comes in, facing the tiger in order to save the lady. In fact it is the same courageous soldier who makes a point in the last cartoon (figure.6) with his absence.

Underlying these depictions is also an attempt to look down on India and its society as weak, vulnerable and afraid of the threats like famine, civil war, communal riots (at the same time being responsible for it all) and a self-proclamation of the British as the savior. Also, the repeated use of the image of the elephant denotes a jab at its stubbornness – another way of reading the persistent waves of national movement. Elephant, it must be remembered is an animal, which in spite of its massive strength and size, can be tamed by a human being, because of the power that he wields. This therefore lays bare the British outlook on the Indians. There is an undeniable way of looking at the sub-continent through the glass provided by Orientalists (Said, 1978:54-57). Edward Said says that, this practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space as "ours" and an unfamiliar space beyond "ours" as "theirs" is entirely arbitrary. He goes on to say that the "…two aspects of the orient that set it off from the West…will remain essential motifs of European imaginative geography... Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant", whereby Asia becomes, a "…silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries". And that reflects in Illingworth's drawings too, though when taking into consideration the audience that he catered to, the daily newspaper that he worked for and the sources of news that he had access to, this is of no surprise at all.

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E.M.S. Namboodiripad And the Practice of Communism in Kerala*

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Abstract

The contribution of Indian communists towards broadening the theoretical vision of Marxism was negligible when compared to USSR, China, Cuba or Vietnam. But the Indian communist experiment has significant practical achievements. An examination of the communist politics in Kerala and the role of E.M.S. Namboodiripad as a practical visionary in guiding it, gain momentum in this context. Namboodiripad had exerted significant influence on every programme laid down by the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) until his death. In this paper, the attempt is to trace the history and political culture of the communist movement in Kerala and their plan of Communism focusing on CPI (M) and Namboodiripad's writings. In this process, the making and transformation of Namboodiripad as leader and theoretician, the rapidly varying political scenario before and after Indian Independence and the role played by communist parties of Russia and China form crucial variables. Finally, my intent is to present an understanding of Namboodiripad's line of thought to parliamentary communism which forms the crux of the present communist movement in Kerala.

Keywords: Kerala, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Congress, Congress Socialist Party, Communism, CPI, CPI (M).

Introduction

The communist theory and practice in India when compared with that of USSR, China, Cuba or Vietnam, appear to have relatively little theoretical contribution to the broader vision of Marxism. At the same time, the Indian communist experiments have been significant in practice, particularly in the state of Kerala where one of the first

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democratically elected communist governments in the world emerged. An analysis of the praxis of the communist movement in Kerala will force one into an interface between the Marxist theory-analysis and the socio-political dynamics in Kerala. The sixty years of parliamentary communism had its own impact on the socio-economic structure of Kerala society, aiding the state to be in the forefront of various human development indicators like literacy, primary education, health, and democratic decentralisation. An examination of the communist politics in Kerala and the role of E.M.S. Namboodiripad as a practical visionary in guiding it, need an examination in this context.

Namboodiripad had exerted significant influence on every programme laid down by the Communist Party of India-Marxist, the CPI (M) in Kerala from its official establishment in 1967 up to his death in 1998. Even many years after his death, the CPI (M) leaders in Kerala used to refer to Namboodiripad and whenever any political crisis happen they would say "if E.M.S.[1] had been here he would have sorted out these problems easily". The communist leaders like A.K. Gopalan who were crucial to CPI (M) in Kerala from the beginning, wrote the following words (1973:76) to show his commitment to Namboodiripad's capabilities in building the communist movement in Kerala:

> I am not at all sorry if people feel that I am a blind follower of E.M.S. I learned much from him. The strength of the bond that unites me to him stems from the realization that he has so completely understood my character, my strengths and weaknesses. A good leader should be able to understand his followers. Failure to do this so often resulted in disastrous consequences. He always assigned me tasks best suited to my abilities and taught me Marxism through them.

The point made is not that CPI (M) in Kerala was a party solely dependent on a particular individual. Instead, I consider him as a line of thought which gained the support of other communist leaders and lead to the foundation and popularisation of communism as a mass movement in Kerala. To study Namboodiripad's line of thought, an in-depth understanding of the process of evolution of Namboodiripad as a leader is crucial. He began as an Namboodiri community reform activist before becoming a Nationalist- Gandhian, then to Congress Socialist and finally into an authority in the moulding of CPI (M) in Kerala. An analysis of Namboodiripad's ideology through his writings and, speeches and that of his contemporaries will help one to trace the history, political culture and adaptations taken by the communist movement in Kerala.

Independence struggles and beginning of CPI

If one goes through the history of the struggles in Malayalam-speaking regions of pre-independent India, it could be noted that the politically conscious Malayali youth had actively participated in the different socio-political activities in this region which later became Kerala.[2] During my archival data analysis to identify the genesis of the left and communist movement in Kerala, I had to go through five stages of the history of political movements in Kerala between 1900 and 1998 as follows:.

1. Social reform movements against caste practices and for more access to education among Dalit, upper caste and other religious communities from 1900 onwards.
2. National Movement for independence led by Congress: broadly, the period from 1921, when Gandhi's views became dominant in National Movement and the Non-cooperation-Khilafat movements started to gain support among the educated masses..
3. Congress Socialist Party Phase: The period between 1934 -1939
4. Communist Party of India Phase or CPI Phase: The period between 1939 to 1964
5. Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI (M) Phase: 1967 Onwards

The origin and development of the ideologies of Namboodiripad are from this motley of transformations and syntheses. Born in an upper caste Namboodiri Brahmin community in 1909, Namboodiripad began his social activism as early as 1920-23 by joining the movement to reform the Namboodiri community called Yogakshema Sabha.

The social movement in Kerala soon gave a way for Gandhi's announcement of a civil disobedience movement and the salt satyagraha, made an impact in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. Deeply inspired by the ideas of Gandhi-led national movement, many politically conscious Malayali youth joined the National Congress and followed Gandhism as their ideology.

At the same time, but far apart from the milieu of political movements of Kerala, the Communist party of India was officially formed in Tashkent in Russia on October 17, 1920. The members of the party formed in Russia were M.N. Roy, Evelyn Roy, Abani Mukherji, Rosa Fitingova, Muhammad Ali, Mohammed Shafiq Siddiqi and M.P.B.T. Acharya. But the party could not function in India due to restrictions under the British regime (Govinda Pillai 2007:105-122). Namboodiripad (1986: 182) observed:

> The formation of the Communist Party of India in Tashkent led to the beginning of a process of separating the wheat from the chaff in the freedom struggle. Because it was not formed on "Indian soil", the Communist Party of India had to face opposition from a considerable section of socialists and communist sympathizers in India. But the contribution of this organization to the growth of the communist movement in India was more valuable than that made by many who were working from "Indian soil" itself.

About the same event, Namboodiripad (1994:8-9) stated:

> The existence of that group and its activities helped to attract Indian revolutionaries to communism, and they, in turn, formed more communist groups in India. The articles published, the letters written and other forms of communication established by the Tashkent group (which styled itself as the Communist Party of India) helped in radicalizing the Congress.

But when CPI was operating from Tashkent, the future founders of CPI in Kerala, like P. Krishna Pillai, E.M.S. Namboodiripad and A.K. Gopalan were actively participating in the national movement for independence inspired by Gandhism. They took part in many struggles initiated by Gandhi and were arrested and jailed in different places with British jails in South India (Fic 1970:8-30).

Jails and Socialist ideas

The second radical shift occurred when the leaders embraced socialist ideas by becoming part of the Congress Socialist Party, which represented the left tendency within the national movement (Namboodiripad 1967:162-194). According to Namboodiripad,[3] the jails were the birth places of 'socialist/communist ideas' in the Malayali mind:

> Two weeks in Kozhikode sub-jail, one month in Kannur Central Jail, more than two years in Vellore Central Jail- this was how I completed my imprisonment days. It was a great experience as far as my intellectual developments were considered. It also helped me in deciding the direction of my political stance. The prison inmates I had interacted with, include famous Gandhians and revolutionary leaders from Bengal and Punjab. I strongly believe that the seeds of the Left, initially through the Congress and the Congress Socialist movements, were sown at different jails.

If we follow Namboodiripad's opinion, the entry of socialist/communist ideas into the Malayali mind was made possible in jails where many North Indian socialist leaders were also imprisoned. Young Ma-

layali men had the opportunity to meet, interact and live with these intellectuals. They made Malayali youth read books and pamphlets which they used in their political activities. This sort of political atmosphere of deep philosophical thinking and intensive reading in the jails could be considered as the initial spark for socialist/communist thinking in Kerala. It was the period during which socialist elements were becoming strong within the Congress-led national movement (Fic 1970: 14-16). Kannur jail in Malabar and Vellore jail in Madras State were famous for activities that spread the ideas of a new political ideology like communism. The Malayali youth were imprisoned there for participating in Gandhian struggles, but they left the jails inspired by socialist/ communist ideas.

Gradually the people, who were inspired by 'socialist ideas', the stories from the Soviet Union and Bolshevik revolution, began to realize the need of a new platform in order to carry forward their political activities. The Congress-led national movement gradually became less attractive to socialists for several reasons. Gandhi's decision to withdraw the civil disobedience movement fuelled their anger. Many of them developed disagreements with Gandhian mode of struggle and the birth of the communist party became a hope for them (Gopalan, 1973: 52).

Later, the development and formation of the Congress Socialist Party at an all-India level under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan in 1934, created a positive wave in the minds of communists in India (Rao 2003: 58). The communist party members and sympathizers chose to be a part of Congress Socialist Party (CSP) to resist the British government's legal charges against them. P. Sundariah who played a pivotal role in the formation of the Congress Socialist Party in Malabar was actually in charge of the South Indian region of the Communist Party of India (Rao 2003:115). The young Malayali communist leaders, such as P. Krishna Pillai, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, A.K. Gopalan and K. Damodaran, who were initially inspired by socialist ideas, were present at the formation of Kerala branch of Congress Socialist Party in 1935 (Rao 2003: 115). On that occasion, P. Krishna Pillai was assigned to explain the party mission and objectives to other attendees.

The communists used the Congress Socialist Party as an effective platform to carry out their work by forming local and regional-level associations of industrial workers, plantation workers, peasants, tenants and landless agricultural labourers (Rao 2003: 86-87). Slowly they strengthened their organizational base and began to consolidate

working-class movements. A number of strikes and agitations that took place in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore under the leadership of communist sympathizers between the 1930s and the 1950s were part of this consolidation.

Theory and practice during socialist phase

The communists in the initial stage of the development of the movement in Kerala had meager theoretical understanding of the fundamentals of Marxism. They had a general idea of the Soviet Union, an iconic nation which has achieved progressive growth in the social and economic aspects of their people, just by following the socialist line. Namboodiripad[4] explained the initial dilemmas of the communist movement in Kerala as follows:

> Our understandings about socialist ideas were incomplete and hazy. But we tried to spread among the people what we knew, using the propaganda machinery then available. No substantial knowledge on basic tenets of socialism was there. But we knew that the Soviet Union was a living symbol of all of that. It was a time that a big and all-pervading economic crisis was raging in the capitalist world. At the same time, the Soviet Union was successfully implementing its first five-year plan. Their economic progress was taking place at a pace not achieved by any other country so far. Is there anything more needed to have a good impression of socialism and the bad impression of capitalism? During that period, we never had any opportunity to make a theoretical study of the fundamental tenets of socialism; it was a fact which was helpful to develop one's own opinion favouring socialism and to convey it to the people.

The Socialist party leaders in Kerala had great enthusiasm about the progress made by Soviet Russian society. But the Malayali leaders' knowledge of the theory of Marxism/ Leninism was very limited because of lack of materials to understand the theory. The only thing they could do was to follow what they had heard about Soviet Russian line of action and Russian Communist's success story to mobilize people. They knew the idea of class struggle and they thought they were supposed to organize oppressed people to facilitate class struggle.

The leaders were aware that the practical concern of the socialist view was to organize peasants and workers by making them aware of the possibilities of collective protest against the atrocities and inequalities they had been suffering for many years. This was the area where the socialists had done some groundwork in the initial stage. They established different cells for their peasant and workers' organizations. As a result, different layers of organizational work were car-

ried out, from primary village level to the central committees, to make the movement more effective.

The party functioning based on the vague understanding of Soviet class movement made a departure only with the formation of the first Communist Party unit in Kerala in 1937. It was established during a secret meeting held at Kozhikode, participated by four active leaders of the Congress Socialist Party - E.M.S. Namboodiripad, P. Krishna Pillai, N.C. Sekhar and K. Damodaran. P. Krishna Pillai was nominated and elected as the first secretary of the Communist Party of Kerala branch in that meeting (Namboodiripad 1994:6). Among the people involved in socialist/communist activities in Kerala, P. Krishna Pillai is generally known as the founder of the Communist Party in Kerala (Namboodiripad 1976:69). Following this, in 1939, during a meeting that took place in Pinarayi-Parappuram, a small village in Northern Kerala, a movement was triggered to recruit unhappy Congress Socialist Party members to the Kerala branch of the Communist Party.

The conversion of Congress Socialist party into Communist party was accompanied by a strong emphasis on developing theoretical understanding. On this Namboodiripad[5] notes:

> When preparations were being made to convert Congress Socialist Party as a whole into Communist Party, during the weeks just after the beginning of the war, a syllabus on Marxist theory was implemented. During the two and half years of underground work, this activity continued.

In this process, the focus was to educate the leaders of the party in authoritative works like 'Socialism, Utopian and Scientific' by Engels, 'What is to be done' by Lenin and 'Fundamental Principles of Leninism' by Stalin. The works like 'CPSU (B) History' by Stalin was translated into Malayalam for wider circulation among party members.

The emphasis to learn theory became stronger when the party came out of the underground. When the leaders understood the theoretical aspects of Marxist/ Socialist ideas in a detailed way, it made an impact on the organizational strategies of the party. Once they had the opportunity to gain better theoretical knowledge and relate this to practical concerns of society, the leaders realized the futility of organizing workers and peasants without offering 'party classes'. The leaders realized that the need for generating political consciousness among the people was essential. Based on that vision, the leaders organized 'party classes' to educate masses into a political consciousness. They also took initiatives to establish reading rooms, and libraries in villages.

And they also organized cultural activities like drama portraying the existing social and economic conditions.

The question of why Namboodiripad emphasized on the theory is also relevant. This was the specificity of the communist movement in Kerala as the leaders made effort to teach the cadres theories of Marxism and educate the masses by methodically explaining the party programme and ideology.

CPI and mass movement: Before Independence

The people's movement for independence in India became more powerful after Second World War. The Communist Party was legally allowed to function in the country as part of the consensus and alliance made between Soviet Russia and Britain in the Second World War. Immediately after the war, the British called for an election to various British Indian provincial constituencies as promised to the nationalists before the war. Two major political groups of pre-independent India, Congress and Muslim League, faced the election and tried to mobilize people on two different agendas (Namboodiripad 1999:67-69). Congress raised the slogan for 'United India' and Muslim league demanded a 'Separate Nation' called Pakistan for Muslims in India (Chandra et al.2007:487-504). But the communists claim that they demanded a 'Federal India' based on the reorganization of existing British provincial states on a linguistic basis with autonomous powers. They demanded an economic and socio-political system where land would be handed over to the original tiller, and better wages and labour conditions would be provided to industrial workers. The communists claimed that they participated in the election with this aim.

Namboodiripad (1999:74) observed provincial elections of 1946 as a landmark in the history of the communist movement in India as it was for the first time that the CPI contested in an election as an independent political force. However, the Congress and Muslim League enjoyed a dominant victory in the elections. The communists failed in a majority of constituencies except in eight reserved legislatures which were kept solely as the labour reserved constituencies (ibid: 69).

Namboodiripad was of the opinion that the advantages of this particular election were taken off completely by the British in the initial stage and later by both the Congress and the Muslim League to mobilize people in favour of their cause. The communists claimed that the willpower of the working class and the class character of the national movement were completely hijacked by other issues of religious

and communal flavour. They felt that the high margin of seats won in the labour reserved constituencies and thousands of votes secured by the communist candidates in some general constituencies provided a sensation of new hope and signaled changes favourable for the communist movement in India's new political conditions. To stimulate this cause, the communists called for struggles by lining up different sections of the working class in different parts of the country. They organised struggles in their strong pockets like Telangana of Hyderabad state, Malabar, Punnapra-Vayalar of Travancore region and Tebhaga of Bengal (ibid 69).

CPI and mass movement: After Independence

Different leaders of Communist Party analyzed the Indian independence and the transfer of power as a contract made between the British imperialists and native bourgeoisie, to prevent a people's democratic movement which was quite expected during the later independent days (Chandra et al.2007: 487; Namboodiripad 1999:78). Under the influence of the radical communists, the second Party Congress of the communist party held at Calcutta in February-March 1948 took the decision to go forward with struggles against the Congress-led government at the centre. Slogans like 'Telangana way is our way' and 'Land to the Tiller and Power to the People' were raised at the Calcutta conference hall (Namboodiripad 1999:78). This came to be known as the famous 'Calcutta thesis' of the communist movement in which the Communist Party of India adopted a line of advocating armed struggle against the Congress-led government at New Delhi. A struggle like the Malabar communist revolt of 1948 was organized to materialize the vision of the party. Radhakrishnan (1980:2100) who has extensively studied the agrarian issues in Malabar locates the revolt in the following words:

> This revolt was mainly aimed at preventing 'janmis' (landlords) from hoarding and black marketing paddy. Batches of peasants and communist volunteers, armed with all available weapons went from place to place and seized the granaries of the janmis. The communists argued that it could not be treated as looting as they offered a fair price to the janmi, but many of the recalcitrant janmis registered their protest by not accepting it. The grain so taken was distributed among the poor villagers at (a) fair price.

Further, the radicals argued that the armed line of struggle should continue as mere change in government did not make any difference in the element of oppression and the exploitative nature of the State remained

the same even after independence, as pointed out by Radhkrishnan (1980) as follows:

> […] Police attacks on these groups in different places resulted in the death of twenty-two persons during April-May 1948. The revolt was however quelled by pressing army into action. The attack launched by the Congress, the janmis and the police even after the revolt was quelled, solely with the object of liquidating the communist movement. [This] resulted in the death of many more peasant and communist activists in different parts of Malabar. Particularly notable in this connection is the death of twenty-two persons in a firing incident in the Salem jail on February 11, 1950, of whom nineteen had been arrested earlier from Malabar.

Thus, it can be seen that the movements led by communists against the state did not stop suddenly on 15th August 1947. Mass movements that began before 1947 continued through the period of independence, because they thought that the ground realities of inequality and exploitation remained the same even after formal independence to the country. Here an important point to remember is that the stand against the 'Congress led parliamentary state' was not the result of a homogenous voice within the Communist Party. There were internal disagreements between people within the CPI regarding the position of the party like 'whether the party should support the Nehru government or not'.

Parliamentary communism and the question of support to Nehru

In 1951, the Communist Party of India withdrew from the armed line of struggle and took the decision to participate in the parliamentary democracy by taking part in the first Indian general elections. In this juncture, people like Namboodiripad took the position that the party should continue their struggles against the 'bourgeois-democratic system'. Simultaneously, he suggested to form communist-led governments at places where the party had dominance. Here the idea of communist led governments was a mechanism to follow all possible steps in favour of the poor and the working class. By taking this step, Namboodiripad(1999:85) claimed that the party mission was to prevent the transformation of the existing bourgeois democracy into bourgeois autocracy and instead, effectively transform it into a working class democracy.

By following a parliamentary line of action, CPI was to continue extra-parliamentary activities to protect the revolutionary potential of the party. So the party had to follow its cadre character, secrecy in the

organization and extra-parliamentary struggles in order to preserve its revolutionary content and carry forward the fight for the wider dream of socialism. On the other side, it took the decision to take part in the democratic election process, both at the regional, state and national level. Theoretically, the idea was good enough to address the changing socio-political dynamics of the country at that point of time. But at the practical level, the idea was not easy to follow. So the new strategic position intensified the differences among people in the party. In the 1951-52 Lok Sabha elections, the CPI won only 16 out of 489 seats but it became the largest group of opposition MPs. This lead to senior leader A. K. Gopalan becoming the de facto leader of the opposition in the First Indian Lok Sabha.

Following the parliamentary line, CPI also took part in the first state legislative assembly election following the formation of Kerala state in 1957. It won the election and formed the government under the leadership of Namboodiripad. Namboodiripad government carried out revolutionary steps by bringing out Land Reform Ordinance and Education bill. But in 1959, the Namboodirpad government was dismissed by Nehru's central government following congress lead protests in the state called the Liberation struggle. This added to the debate on whether CPI should support Nehru lead Congress government.

Further, during India-China war in 1962, the nationalist 'CPI right' and Nehru government accused 'CPI left' as Chinese spies and many of them were imprisoned (Namboodiripad 2008:12-13). All these long-running clashes and conflicts added fuel to the crisis situation when Dange's letters were revealed. The letters of CPI Chairman Shripad Amrit Dange to the British government asked for his release from their custody in return for his services, during his jail tenure in the late 1940s.The letters were revealed to the other leaders only in 1964 and it immediately led to a split in the CPI. In response, a section of communist leaders walked out of the CPI's National Council meeting. Later, they were suspended from CPI and in Calcutta they formed a new party named the CPI (Marxist) or the 'CPI left'. They saw Dange's act as a betrayal of the revolutionary spirit of the movement and the communist morality (Ray 2011:114).

As most of the suspended members of the CPI were from Kerala, communist activities in Kerala came to a temporary standstill. In order to overcome this crisis, the so-called 'CPI left' organized an all-Kerala campaign to explain the factors and circumstances leading to the split. Namboodiripad and A.K. Gopalan were assigned to lead the campaign

to convince the masses, who were confused by the split. In Namboodiripad's (1994:211) words:

> It was clear that a substantial section of Party members was in sympathy with the left; the mass of the people too gave their enthusiastic support to the struggle launched by the left. At the same time, within the State Committee, district and lower committees, there were bitter conflicts on which group, left or right, would control the organization. Where one group secured a majority, the others formed a separate party. Within a few weeks of the suspension from the National Council, the entire Party came to be divided into what were then known as the "CPI right" and "CPI left".

The seventh party congress was organized by both 'CPI left' and 'CPI right' separately. At the congress, the 'CPI left' decided to form a new party with a different programme- a new strategy for Indian revolution and a different tactical line (Namboodiripad 1994:231). The essence of the tactical line of the new party [the CPI (M)] was that of following a mass line to prepare Indian society for revolution. But Namboodiripad (1994:231) observed: " the seventh party congress of 'CPI left' [held at Calcutta 1964 from October 31 to November 7] was remarkable for what it said and for what it failed to say." He (1994:232) also observed that:

> […..] the Party Congress deferred the discussion on the ideological questions that were being debated in the International Communist Movement. This act was taken as a refusal to toe the Chinese line as the left in the CPI had been expected to do.

Thus, at the same conference, an ideological division within the CPI (M) took place as it seemed to follow a mass line which resembled the parliamentary line of action with some exceptions. This was unacceptable to a group of people (who later became Naxalites) in the party who considered the Chinese line as the best suited revolutionary strategy for India. Namboodiripad(1994:231) justified the CPI (M) party programme by saying:

> [Even though] most delegates were, of course, inclined to accept the Chinese positions, but, considering the sharp division on ideological questions, and in view of the complete unity achieved on the strategic objective and the tactics of the Indian revolution, the leadership did not consider it advisable to divide the [Seventh] Congress on international ideological questions.

All these events forced the Chinese Communist Party and the people who supported the Chinese line to view the position of the CPI (M) as a betrayal and 'revisionist'. The second phase of the split hap-

pened in the CPI (M) in 1967 and the Naxalite group[6] detached from the CPI (M) forming a new organisation, CPI (Marxist-Leninist) in 1969.This anti-parliamentary line in Indian communism had its genesis in the Tebhaga Movement of 1946 in Bengal and the Telangana Movement (1946-52) in the Andhra region of former Hyderabad princely state (Dasgupta 1974:16). The second phase of split marked a clear cut divide in the Indian communist movement into two streams: one of parliamentary line and another of anti-parliamentary/anti-state line. Scholars like Rabindra Ray (2011:76) see this as:

> […] in both the split of the CPI(M) cadre from the CPI and the subsequent split of some of the CPI(M) cadre from it, the urgency of the matter brought home by the example of the Chinese success was summed up in the question, 'Why is it that the Indian revolution has not yet succeeded ?' It led the CPI (M) to accuse the CPI of 'revisionism' and, subsequently, radicals within the CPI (M) to accuse itself of revisionism.

There was an opposition, in the line of action and thought, regarding the method of revolution between Charu Mazumdar, the founder of Naxal movement and E.M.S. Namboodiripad. The radical communists like the Naxalites and others in Kerala, however, accused the CPI (M) of supporting the very structure of the state that promotes the ideology of the dominant class. Here they accused (Rabindra Ray 2011:84):

> E.M.S. Namboodiripad as a bourgeois agent and as No.1 revisionist in league with the revisionists of the CPI who fondly believed that communism could be achieved by the ballot box and democratic means.

But a notable question raised at this particular period was if both CPI and CPI (M) follow parliamentary line then what would be the ideological demarcation between these two parties. Here it is very important to note that influence and involvement of both Communist Party of Soviet Union (B) and Communist Party of China had a wider impact in the different splits and developments of the Indian communist movement, which necessitates a detailed analysis.

Influence of Soviet Union

During the 1950s, the Soviet Union became closer to India and formed a strategic alliance. The Soviet Union was impressed by the fact that the Nehru led Indian government was following a 'mixed economy' pattern. They saw India as a transitional economy which might under Nehru's leadership transform into a socialist economy. Also, India's history of colonial oppression also prompted Soviet Union to partner with India in their efforts to build an anti- imperialist front against the U.S. and European forces. Considering all these pos-

sibilities, the Communist Party of Soviet Union advised CPI to support the Nehru government.

The 'CPI left' had an antagonistic take on the Communist Party of Soviet Union's direction and they argued that Nehru's policies were semi-feudal in nature. But this was an irony, since initially they had argued within the undivided CPI not to give up the plan of class struggle just to protect Communist Party of Soviet Union's interest. Those who were with the 'CPI right' accepted the Communist Party of Soviet Union's direction and thus their attitude towards the Nehru government became a crucial point in deciding the CPI- CPI (M) split of 1964.

The Prime Minister Nehru's recommendation to the President of India for the dismissal of the first communist government in Kerala in 1959 also became a crucial reason for the split. It occurred as the communist supporters across the country were viewing the radical policy initiatives of the communist government, like the Land Reform Bill, the Educational Bill and the Police Neutralization policy as progressive steps for preparing a fertile ground for Namboodiripad's plan of Socialism.

Influence of China

Like the Communist Party of Soviet Union, in the early 1950s, the Communist Party of China also perceived the Nehru government as progressive and anti-imperialist in nature. But by the end of the decade, when China had territorial issues with India, the Communist Party of China changed its stand. Namboodiripad (1999:233) explains the shift in Chinese position in the following words:

> At that time, the Chinese party itself was moving rapidly leftward, organizing "the Great Leap Forward" first and then the Cultural Revolution. The ideology of these movements was based on, among other things, the negation of bourgeois parliamentary institutions. As the Chinese leadership told the delegation of the CPI (M) that visited China in 1983, they had no experience of working in bourgeois parliamentary institutions, and they thought that the line of working in bourgeois parliamentary institutions was right- revisionist and opportunist. It was the CPI (M)'s subsequent record that the Chinese understood that bourgeois parliamentary institutions could be used in a revolutionary way, to the extent of forming governments as in Kerala and West Bengal.

He (1999:233) also observed that:

> […] the Chinese went to the other extreme, equating the Nehru government in India with the Chiang Kai-shek government in China. As a corollary, they [Chinese Communist Party] held that the governments

> of socialist countries as well as revolutionary parties in India should do everything to bring down the Congress government.

The CPI (M), however, viewed the shift in the Chinese Communist Party's (CPC) directive with criticism. Soon, therefore, the CPC called the CPI (M) as revisionists and extended their support to the radical elements within the CPI (M). About this Namboodiripad (1994:234) opined that:

> […] the Chinese comrades noted that there was a revolt inside the CPI (M) against its 'revisionist' line. Those who were dissatisfied with the strategic and tactical approach of the Party formed the Naxal group, which called for total support to the ideological-political positions of the CPC. This group began to organize against the Party leadership in general and in the two states where the Party was in power in particular.[…] Beijing Radio and other organs of the Chinese media hailed the emergence of this group, which they called a genuine Marxist- Leninist Party. The leadership of the CPI (M) was denounced as revisionist in the Chinese media. The Naxalites publicly declared their loyalty to the Chinese Party and its Chairman and the Chinese media called the Naxalites India's genuine Marxist- Leninists.

Namboodiripad (1994:233-234) explained that the CPI (M) had an independent line of thought in assessing the Nehru government at the centre:

> The CPI (M) analyzed soberly the class character of the Nehru government and its political role, and the Party formulated the political-tactical line of uniting the broadest sections of the people against the Nehru government. This did not mean, as the Chinese Party suggested, that the revolutionary forces in India were to work towards the immediate overthrow of the government. The line of the CPI (M) was to strengthen the mass democratic opposition to the Nehru government and thus to strengthen revolutionary forces led by the working class. In order to realize this objective, the Party Programme envisaged the formation of non-Congress governments in some states.

Namboodiripad also pointed out that in a way, the CPI (M) position was not aligned with either the CPSU (B) or the CPC directives. Due to this, the CPI (M) had to face questions from both CPSU (B) and CPC. He (1994: 234) justifies the CPI (M) line by saying that:

> The practical implications of this line [CPI (M) line] became clear when the Party became a significant force in the electoral struggle to defeat the Congress in more than half a dozen states, and was also able to form governments under its leadership in two states. In the opinion of the Chinese Party, these events were clear indication that the CPI (M) had become an ordinary bourgeois party.

Post-Split: Support to Congress in Centre and Intelligentsia in States

In the centre, especially following new political developments in India after 1990's, CPI(M) stated that their support to the Congress at the centre was only to prevent the BJP and other communal parties from coming to power. It was part of the CPI (M)'s plan, resting on the idea that Indian communist revolution could be achieved only through democratic means. The CPI (M)'s attempt to build a third front in national politics by combining all the like-minded people had to be seen in this light. For this, an argument of Namboodiripad (1994: 232) was employed:

> The programme (7th Party Congress) steered clear of the right opportunist dependence on parliamentary activities at the expense of mass actions and left sectarian negativism towards parliamentary activity.

At the same time in the state, CPI (M) followed a twin approach of preparing a mass base as well as influencing the support of intelligentsia, more like Namboodiripad's line of thought of focusing on theory as well as parliamentary communism. CPI (M)'s plan of socialism through democratic means was intended to prepare the people for a revolution in the long run. Nonetheless, the CPI (M), particularly under the leadership of Namboodiripad, had a clear vision that the unfolding of Kerala history and society had a lot to do with the development of intelligentsia among various layers of people from the Malayali community. So the CPI (M), very specifically in Namboodiripad's time, was very keen on establishing organic links with the emerging intelligentsia of people from different communities. Owing to their efforts, a majority of intellectuals, particularly the youth, became part of or affiliated with the communist movement.

In this way, the communists provided a direction to the development of the intelligentsia and also to the youth in modern Kerala. The CPI (M) under Namboodiripad's time succeeded in guiding and aligning the intelligentsia to their cause while other political parties had shown no interest in doing so or had failed to win the support of the evolving intelligentsia and the majority of youth.

The Democratic Decentralization Campaign

While analysing the Namboodiripad's line of communist theory, practice and praxis; the democratic decentralization campaign requires some attention. The idea of decentralisation was a major boost for the communists of Kerala in countering the bureaucratic and detached governance of the modern nation-state. It was implemented as a mass

campaign called People's Campaign for Decentralised Planning (Isaac and Franke 2000:13). In 1996 almost 40% of the Kerala state government budget was handed over to the local Panchayat Raj Institutions (ibid.13). This transfer of economic power to local self-governing bodies was actually aimed at devolving economic power of the state government to empower people from below. The idea was to get people into the decision making process of developmental activities.

The communists perceived the decentralisation movement as an opportunity to sensitise people about their rights thereby expand the struggle for socialism in the long term. With democratic decentralisation they sought to create a federated state government and governance which was efficient through its very characteristic of incorporating the 'voices from below' – voices which may have been obscured in the top-down dispensation that existed previously in the bureaucratic mode of governance. They also claimed that this is different from the capitalist welfare-state form of governance where rule occurs according to the wishes of a specific section of the population, i.e. the bourgeoisie. The movement was claimed to be different even from the top-down form of Stalinist administration which ultimately contributed to its downfall.[7]

The decentralization movement in Kerala was part of Namboodiripad's parliamentary line. Namboodiripad had the plan of decentralised governance when the communists gained power in governing bodies of Malabar during 1950's but it failed due to lack of majority. Even though Namboodiripad had started his work for a decentralised idea of governance much earlier, he had to wait till 1996 to implement it (Govindapillai 2007:349).

In 1996, the CPI (M) led government came into power with a considerable majority. At the same time, the central government took the decision to implement the Balwant Rai Mehta Commission's suggestion to amend the Constitution to make local self-government institutions mandatory across the country. Because of these two possibilities, Namboodiripad realised that this was the appropriate time for implementing his project.

P. Govinda Pillai, a biographer of Namboodiripad observed that even Namboodiripad initially had to face many criticisms and doubts within CPI (M) regarding his democratic decentralization plans. But even those who criticized it accepted the theoretical background of the project and raised concerns only about its practical implementation. Finally Namboodiripad, as the topmost leader of CPI (M) took strong position that the newly formed CPI (M) led government should take up

this project immediately. In this sense, the plan of decentralisation in Kerala has to be considered as one of the best examples of Namboodiripad's vision of using 'bourgeois parliamentary institutions' for revolutionary ideas. The project of decentralisation became the last, but certainly not the least, in the pillar of his plan of preparing the ground for a more egalitarian society in Kerala.

Thomas Issac (1997), a communist economist who had played a crucial role in implementing decentralisation project in Kerala, analyzes Namboodiripad's contribution in the decentralisation project as below:

> If anyone can be titled as the progenitor of People's Plan Campaign, it is comrade EMS. He had a clear cut vision that the newly elected left-wing government should have power decentralisation as one of its prominent agendas. The draft of the People' Plan Campaign has been prepared by his active contribution. Comrade EMS presented the draft on People's Plan Campaign in the State Party Committee. Also, in the three regional party meetings which followed this, EMS briefed on the political importance of this new enterprise.

Namboodiripad[8] himself analysed the decision to implement the decentralisation project in the following words:

> After Independence [of India] and the united Kerala [federal state] formation, the most remarkable revolutionary movement happened in Kerala has been 'the campaign for people's planning'. The reasons for this judgement was, we considers 'as if now the leadership of planning which was so far centralized in Delhi and Trivandrum'. Only because of the implementation of this project 'the decision making power' has not only shifted to panchayats and municipality councils but also to the lakhs of people who participated in the discussions at grama sabhas and ward sabhas at the grass root level'.

In the federal system of governance, as was inaugurated in India through its Constitution, the central government was given pre-eminence in a number of areas. The working of the Planning Commission which formulated the five-year plans with the aim of development (which was being imagined in a top-down manner) and the control of funds by the Centre increased the dependence of federal states on the central government and greatly hampered the implementation of policies envisaged by the communists for Kerala. Namboodiripad said that they were fully aware that they would have to work within these constraints. It is interesting to analyse how they got through these dilemmas. Kerala has a progressive history of communist intervention

through the party, through people's mobilisations and also through democratically government reform initiatives.

Conclusion

As against the viewpoint of the hardcore critics, the CPI (M), since the very beginning, worked for both democracy and socialism simultaneously. They did not abandon the idea of socialism or communism but their position was that the 'time is not ripe for the revolution.' They assumed that the specificity Indian social and economic structure has a scope for a revolutionary future. But they also realized that the society in India has many issues like caste centric inequalities, religious polarisations, communalism etc. which prevents the crystal clear solidification of working class unity against the bourgeoisie. By focusing on the futuristic categories of society like the youth and the evolving intelligentsia among various layers of Malayali community, the CPI (M) in Namboodiripad's time had a plan of preparing a base suitable for their imagined idea of society.And for me, the CPI (M)'s organic link with the intelligentsia and the youth, as well as its continued experimentation with Parliamentary politics are few of the noted factors that still power them. These help them to overcome the hassles and turbulences that challenge the very existence and future of the Left movement in Kerala.

Notes

1. E.M.S. Namboodiripad is popularly known as EMS in Kerala.
2. The Kerala State was formed only in 1956 November 1 by coalescing the Malabar, which was under the direct rule of the British government, into Travancore and Cochin which were princely states; and separating two Tamil speaking regions from Travancore and Cochin state and its addition to Madras state.
3. https://www.cpimkerala.org/eng/party-formation-15.php?=1
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Those people who initiate Maoism as their revolutionary strategy are known as Naxalites and they are also called as Maoists.
7. In the Soviet Union the lack of parliamentary democracy and electoral accountability may have been a major cause for its losing touch with the grassroots which ultimately brought down the State itself. The idea of 'revolution from above' under Stalinism has to be considered in this direction.
8. Preface written by E.M.S. Namboodiripad to Dr. T.M. Thomas Isaac's book Janakeeya Aassothranam: Sindhandavum Prayogavum [People's Planning: theory and Praxis], Trivandrum: Chintha Publishers.

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People's Art as a Movement: The Wave of Political Theatre in Kerala

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Abstract

This paper seeks to investigate how people's art worked as a means of protest, on behalf of political theatre in Kerala through a case study of the farce You Made Me a Communist, which is one of the important socio-political plays in Kerala. The author attempts to understand the ethno–history of nineteenth century Kerala through a 'thick description' of performance.

Keywords: Performance, Political theatre, Ideology, Protest, Cultural movement.

Introduction

The evolution of human speech and language, and the invention of writing, both had a revolutionary impact on human consciousness. Each changed fundamentally the way humans interacted with each other and their environment and how they imagined themselves and their place in the world. Theatre and performance being complex kinds of communal reflection and communication, we have found it fruitful to consider them in relation to innovations in communication at large (Williams: 2006).

The theatre relates us to the great archetypal patterns of human purpose and destiny, the patterns expressed in the great myths. It is an extension of life. Andrei Serban, has said "Theatre is a manifestation of the essence of life". That essence is more than pleasure in entertainment, more than role–playing, more than any personal emotion of love, hate, anger, or jealousy. The essence of life is a deep sense of wonder and awe, of a common human destiny (Kernodle: 1978). August Boal in his book *Theatre of the oppressed* has mentioned that theatre, in particular is determined by society much more stringently than the other arts because of its immediate contact with the public and its greater power to convince.

In the discussion of theatre and society it is necessary to note that theatre is a social phenomenon. It unquestionably represents a social

situation and social gathering. It constitutes a certain social frame work in its own right wherein the actors are an integral part of it. We go to the theatre in order to re-experience certain social situations which have been occasionally oppressive and so to free ourselves from that oppressiveness or perhaps we go because of some driving enthusiasm which we used to have and which is beginning to fade requires reviving by some invigorating spectacle. And what we find at the theatre, when driven there by the problem of real social life, is-all kinds of novel perspectives (Gurvitch: 1956).

According to Victor Turner, drama basically is a literary composition that tells a story, usually of human conflict, by means of dialogue and action which are performed by actors and are presented to the audience the nature and degree of whose involvement varies from culture to culture. More precisely a theatrical audience sees the material of real life presented in meaningful form. However it is not just a matter of simplifying and ordering emotional and cognitive experiences which in "real life" are chaotic. It is more a matter of raising problems about the ordering principles deemed acceptable in "real life" (Turner: 1986)

Practice of Political Theatre

In the field of theatre studies, the domain of political theatre has assumed a significant position. Many theatre groups in various countries appropriated political theatre as a weapon to fight against all sorts of social imbalances and exploitation of weaker sections. The main purpose of political theatre in the initial phases was to transform self-consciousness into group consciousness and to initiate active political struggle for propagating their ideologies. Political theatre is intellectual theatre. It deals with political ideas and a concept that is usually an attempt to attack or support a particular political position. It is a literary theatre not because it necessarily involves words or a script but because all production elements are subservient to, support, and reinforce the symbolic meanings. Political theatre does not merely deal with government as a passive subject. It makes explicit reference to contemporary governmental problems and issues (Kirby: 1975).

Erwin Piscator (A.D. 1893-1966) used the word political theatre for the first time to describe his efforts to create a theatre that would champion the cause of the proletariat in its battle against the bourgeoisie. In the 1920s Brecht and Piscator pioneered new forms of representation in German theatre. But Piscator relied primarily on modern stage technology, including film to provide a political commentary and

extend the scope of his production. Brecht on the other hand developed new dramatic as well as theatrical forms. Through his dramatic techniques, acting methods and staging devices Brecht created a dialectical theatre that would expose the contradictions in social reality and depict society as an ever-changing process and not a fixed state. Brecht defined political theatre in terms of form not just content. He argued that new theatrical forms were needed to deal with modern socio-economic reality (Bradley: 2006).

Political theatre in South Asia tends to draw its inspiration from ideological sources that are opposed to the "center"-primarily, but not necessarily from the political left. In most of South Asia as elsewhere, the political left is identified with Marxist –Leninist parties of one sort or other and the rhetoric of their manifestos like the dialogue of their plays is replete with calls for continuing "the revolution". Theoretically "the revolution" is the event in which the outsider party-the leftist party-takes power on behalf of the common people and political and social justice is finally served (Zook: 2001). By mapping out the political theatre Darren Zook explained political theatre in India and Kerala has consequently become boxed in on two fronts. On one side it is boxed in by circumstance: there is the discomfiting similarity between the British and the Indian National Congress and between the centrist and "revolutionary" or "fundamentalist" governments. On other side it is boxed in by rhetoric: how can one evoke a people's theatre when everyone claims to speak for the people?

The emergence of political theatre in Malayalam establishes a lasting effect upon the future developments in the radical theatre practice of Kerala. It is indeed illuminating to have a glimpse of the overall social background of the origin of the radical political theatre movement in Kerala. The left movement spawned a host of cultural organizations that served as extensions of the political struggle. Touring plays like Pattabaki (Rent arrears) by K. Damodaran and Ningalenne Communistakki (You Made me a Communist) by Thoppil Bhasi, moved in to the villagers though out the state and had an abiding impact on the masses. K. Damodaran's Pattabakki (1936) is considered as the first political play in Malayalam. Pattabaki rooted itself in the anti-feudal consciousness of the people, which was getting manifested in the struggles of the peasants against feudal landlordism supported by the British regime. A new structure of human experience, determined, by the socio-political reality undertook the task of vehemently challenging the hegemonic ideology of the times. This new performance

pattern which was basically realistic reached every nook and corner of Kerala to establish a lasting effect upon the future developments in the radical theatre practice of Kerala. (Ramachandran: 2000)

Communist Cultural Movement in India

There is no evaluation of the way communist party used culture as a means of protest, without an analysis of which the nature of communist cultural movement in India and Kerala will not be complete. The communist cultural movement has to be viewed as the cultural aspect of India's freedom struggle. Communist cultural movement was a progressive and popular movement because for the first time it addressed itself to the people who were so long denied entry into the national political mainstream because of their exploited status.

Theatre is a social construct that operates within the parameters of particular context and to that extent; it tends to reproduce the aspirations as well as the dilemma of the specific socio cultural contexts. And theatre is a strong medium of art form that can work as a catalyst to social changes. The progressive movements world over used this medium for developing consciousness; India also witnessed these kind of progressive cultural movements. Theatre groups like Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) and Kerala People's Arts Club (KPAC) contributed immensely to the arguments of the progressive ideologies and movements

The new and fast developing discipline of cultural studies and post modernist insights have accorded greater importance to culture in public life and the power structure of society. The history of the working class and socialist movements testifies to the fact that the pioneers of these movements recognized the decisive role of culture, literature and the arts in the preservation and transformation of social structures. (Pillai: 1998). The unique contribution of the Marxist cultural movement has been that artistic creation and appreciation is no more confined to the intellectual elite. The growth of the organized working class and peasant movement, together with the movements of other sections of the working people, had awakened the millions of toilers not only to political consciousness, but uplifted their aesthetic sensibilities and creative talents. (Namboodiripad: 2011)

In Kerala, the communist Party assimilated the most progressive features of various local socio-political movements and gave them a new philosophical and political direction. Communists played a leading part in the literary movement and in the cultural movement (includ-

ing the theatre movement) in Kerala. A number of highly competent drama troupes under the leadership of the party gained popular support.

The Plot Synopsis

'You Made Me a Communist' shows the struggles of agricultural labourers and poor peasants for a better life by focusing on how Paramu Pillai, a conservative farmer, makes the decision to become a communist. The play focuses on his change in socio-political consciousness and calls for the revolutionary overthrow of landlordism. Kesavan Nair, a capitalist landlord who is as greedy for more land as he is for sexual trysts with the young women of the village, wants to take the land of Paramu Pillai, father of Communist Party member and worker Gopalan. Gopalan is in love with Sumam, the daughter of Kesavan Nayar. And Mala, a beautiful young girl of the Pulaya (low-caste) community, is in love with Gopalan. That love remains unreturned. Kesavan Nayar produces threadbare papers to gain title to Paramu Pillai's lands. With no other possible alternative – Kesavan Nayar is connected to the Congress party and Paramu Pillai turns to the Communists for help. Through agitations, demonstrations, and processions, the communists ultimately fire up enough popular support to gain concessions from big landlords such as Kesavan Nair to protect the small landowners and tenants. Gopalan and Sumam promise to marry one another, and Mala fades to a pathetic demise. The play ends with Paramu Pillai proclaiming to the young communists who fought on his behalf "you have made me a communist!" and demanding to carry the red flag of the revolution as the communists march off into the revolutionary red sunset. (Zook: 2001)

Analysing the Drama

'You Made Me a Communist', for instance, took the people of Kerala by storm. All sections of the society, from the illiterate agricultural labourers to the most sophisticated intellectual, paid enthusiastic tribute to the author, producer, actors and to other artists connected with its staging. There was however, one major defect in this particular play as well as in most other plays produced and staged by the revolutionary progressive writers and artistes in order to convey the message of the struggle of the toilers (Pillai: 2008).

Different dimensions like theme, characters, dress, language and songs are centre of the analysis of the play 'You Made Me a Communist'.

Theme as a Reflection on Social Inequality

The play reflects the major changes taking place in Kerala after the colonial rule. During that time Kerala society witnessed many changes including disintegration and collapse of many old and conservative families. The main theme of the play 'You Made Me a Communist' discussed the redoubtable force of circumstances which has transformed Paramupillai into a communist. According to him, all what is happening in life is due to communism. In the beginning of the play we find that Paramupllai was against communism as he told his neighbour "eventeyokke 'ism' vanathanallo mudiyan karanam" (it's because of communism that everything happened). But the turning point was when landlord (janmi) Kesavan Nair betrayed Paramupilla for his land. At that time he is convinced about the oppressive landlordism. Thus he experiences a change in himself and he realizes that the red flag is of the 'have-nots'. At the end of the play, he takes the flag from the hand of the dalit girl Mala, and yelling "aa kodiyingu thaa mole ethonne enikke uyarthi pidikkanam" ("I want to hold this red flag high").

Another theme is Bhasi's construction of the idea of the people, particularly the untouchable cherumas and pulayas. In Ningalenne Communistaki, Karamban , the cheruman (the lower caste men) is shown as part of the moral community of the Nair household. He is characteristically obedient and hesitant about involving himself in political activity. The one moment in the play when he shakes off his trepidation is when Gopalan, the upper-caste Nair peasant union organizer and Karamban's patron, is beaten up. Karamban and the other Cherumans impulsively reach for their implements and sticks and wish to seek revenge for their master. They have to be disciplined and reminded of political norms. Karamban's character –obedient, impulsive and emotional – undergoes little transformation during the play. He remains someone who will witness the political activity of the upper caste protagonists who lead him into controlled political participation. (Menon: 2001)

Characters as Social Reformers

It is through the characters in the play that the author succeeded in portraying realistically the various manifestations of social conflicts in the society. The landlords or capitalists at one end; and the oppressed agricultural labourers , tenant cultivators, industrial workers and other toiling people at the other , with their families and surroundings , these are all portraying true life. The class and social struggles through which they live are realistically portrayed by Thoppil Bhasi in this play 'You Made Me a Communist' (Pillai: 2008)

The world of the Nairs is what Bhasi is most comfortable with and there are brilliant portrayals of crumbling households, litigious families, shady land deals and a critique of Nair nostalgia. Paramupilla, the small landlord of Ningalenne Communistaki is the best example of this 'Nair nostalgia'. Paramau Pillai, hero of the play, a conservative to the core, represents the ideologies of yesterday even though his family is shattered . He lives in a small village with his wife Kalyani, son Gopalan and daughter Meenakshi. He is traditionalist as 'tharavadi'. Paramupillai is introduced to the audience in the following manner "a man in the fifties, lean body, bald headed, unshaved grag bearded, unsatisfied wearing a munde (Lungi) and thorth" (Angochha). He does not live in the present society; he is in the imaginary world of the past. In this play Bhasi, explains, Paramupillai moves from being mired in the past to holding up the red flag in the last scene. The play, in keeping with the national imagination, work with the notion of a hypostatized past, a present in flux witnessed by a passive 'people' and a future indeterminate and unimagined. Finally, Paramupillai finds redemption from his feudal past through holding the red flag. (Menon: 2001)

Karamban was a small farmer in the village. He lives with his daughter Mala, who is the heroine of the play. He is introduced as fifty years of age, "wearing only a shabby thorth and turban which made from the areca palm". He represents the lower caste people of the society. He is also a victim of the caste evils in the society. His wife was attacked and killed by land lord janmi. He is the agricultural tenant who works in the field of a land lord is a representative of the working class community in this play. Through this character Bhasi tried to explain the density of the exploitation and discrimination against 'lower caste or class' people in the society. Karamban and his daughter Mala were symbols of the society; Karamban as part of the moral community of the Nair household. In 'Janayugam', (December 19, 1952) one of the discussion weeklies in Kerala, the famous writer Anand pointed out that "Ethoru Nadakabhinayamalla oru Ardharathrikidayil vach oru Nadinte Jeevitham Kanmunpiloode Neengukayane" (The play 'You Made Me a Communist' is not only a drama. It made people witness their own lives being staged in just one midnight.)

Kesavan Nair, the land lord, is the villain in the play. Kesavan Nair is the local land lord. He is introduced as "42years of age fair and fat. He is wearing Kasavu munde and wearing Gold chain and he is slightly bald headed person". He is cruel and he approached his workers as slaves. Kesavan Nair succeeds in taking the possession of

the holdings of some of the poor farmers in the village. His eye falls on Paramu Pilla's land also. He succeeds in taking possession of Paramupillai's and Karamban's land by using forged title activities. He represents the so called 'upper' caste men in the society. His statement "the low caste people are now reluctant to give way to the upper caste people" shows his notorious character. There are certain factors which are realized through the keen observations of Kesavan Nair's character, like caste discrimination, untounchability, etc. In this play we can see caste discrimination and exploitation through Kesavan Nair's approach to Mala. He lusts after Mala, a beautiful young girl of the Pulaya (low-caste) community, whom he intends to seduce and dishonor.

Mala, the heroine of the play is the representative of the young girls in that society. In this play she is witnessing the same problems which are being faced by other young girls in the society. Mala is a representative of those who were marginalized with cultural specificity, in the socio-political situations in Kerala. While Kesavan Nair is molesting Mala, her reaction against it has a wider impact on society, especially on young girls as they started to resist themselves against the landlord's exploitation. Victor Turner tries to explain this social situation in his 'Social drama'. He explains how a play that describes the conflicts and social interaction by the people influences the audience to change their ways, perception and views. KPAC's current secretary Adv. Shajahan pointed out that while watching this play the people realized their situation and the question arose in their mind was this – is this my story?[1]

Gopalan, son of Paramupillai, represents the young blood, wedded to the socialist philosophy. "Aged as near 25 years and wearing munde and shirt, he looks like a gentleman. He works for the welfare of agricultural labourers and small time farmers. He is an educated young man from upper caste Hindu family. His comrades are drawn from other religious and certain castes and outcastes which have been traditionally looked down upon as untouncahables – Mathew, Pappu, Karampan, and his daughter Mala. Dileep Menon observes that in this play, Mala's, the untounchable Cherumi, love for Gopalan, the Nair political organizer, is thwarted by the barriers of caste. In one scene Gopalan contemplates marrying Mala by giving up Sumam, the woman who loves him. At the end of the play we are left with the assumption that he will indeed marry Sumam, though Gopalan said nothing to revise his altered position (Menon: 2001)

Sumam who represents an upper caste young lady, is introduced as 17 years pretty looking Nair girl who wears skirt and blouse. She wore bangles and pinned her hair with beautiful red ribbon, who is ideologically against her father Kesavan Nair. Sumam herself is a communist and defies her father facing dreadful tortures and sufferings. She falls in love with the young communist party worker Gopalan.

Through the analysis of these characters we can understand the social and political background of the 1950s; which is referred to in many parts of the drama.

The symbolic dimension of cloth and ornaments

In this part is explained one of the important cultural aspects in the society, that is dress. The dress has been seen as a non-verbal mode of communication where even without speech a large amount of information about a person can be transmitted. Such coded information is not exclusive to any one culture and is part of the repertoire of most cultures. Moreover the changes in dress patterns are often indicators of an attempt at negotiating changing social positions, although such may not always be successful as social inequalities follow a deeper level of indicators that may not be adequately covered by overt patterns of dress. Yet dress and ornaments have remained a very obvious symbolic vehicle of both communicating existing status and to attempt renegotiations of the same (Channa:2013).

This play 'You Made Me a Communist' removed conventional theatre practices of portraying the lead cast in luxurious dresses. In this play the hero, Paramupillai, is introduced to the audience as, "A man in his fifties, lean body, bald headed, unshaved grag bearded, unsatisfied, wearing a mundu (Lungi) and thorthu (Angochha)". Mala the peasant girl acted as heroine is introduced as "18 year old peasant lady. She is wearing shabby clothes and she had a glass necklace and glass earrings. She has a long hair and stiff body which is due to hard work" Subadra Channa pointed out that, humans have created a symbolic world of their residence in which almost every object has an assigned meaning that is relevant for marking out the significance of these objects and that also includes the human body. There is no culture where clothes, adornment, hair and bodily decorations do not have a significant role in marking out identities and status. (Channa: 2013). The appearance of the characters with simple dress code helped the people to identify better with them. Through these symbolic dimensions, they came to know that the hero and heroine were representing one of them.

Language Shapes the Way of Thinking

Language, which may be defined here as a system of vocal signs, is the most important sign system of human society. Its foundations are, of course, in the intrinsic capacity of the human organism for vocal expressivity, but we can begin to speak of language only when vocal expressions have become capable of detachment from the immediate 'here and now' of subjective states. The common objectivations of everyday life are maintained primarily by linguistic signification. An understanding of language is thus essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life. (Berger and Luckmann: 1966)

Language is another important element of the culture. Anthropologically we can see that, language plays an important role in the success of this play as what they saw was their real lives. The workers, agricultural labourers, people coming on stage and speaking their own dialects and ordinary language – not a literary language (Zarilli: 1996). In this play they did not use the difficult Sanskrit and Malayalam words. Language, spoken (speech) and written (writing) which has existed for about 6,000 years, is our primary means of communication. Like culture in general, of which language is a part. Language is based on arbitrary, learned associations between words and the things they stand for. (Kottak: 2009).

The Power of the Song

In Kerala, the activists of KPAC decided to mould 'folk tunes' and craft a ' new folk' idiom that used simple lyrics and lilting tunes that were soon accepted as the voice of the people. This new idiom consciously worked on the structure of folk music by introducing greater melodic content as it was felt that the Malayalam folk tradition consisted of forms that were monotonous and repetitive and that a message to change the world needed to be packaged within a new, more appealing aesthetic. The Kerala song tradition, therefore, used fewer 'authentic' and traditional songs in their protest song repertoire. (Damodaran: 2008)

The KPAC'S music was created out of intense discussions among activists of 'people's music'. In contrast to Sanskritized and Tamil based lyrics , KPAC's songs had greater emphasis on colloquial usages while consciously eschewing anything that might sound like sloganeering. These songs typically talked about the lives of peasants and their families and did not directly refer to class relations or exploitation except through symbolism, such as references to the 'sickle shaped

moon' that attracts a poor peasant girl (ponnarivalambiliyil) in the play 'You Made Me a Communist'. The love motif, invoking the pure love between ordinary people, became a hallmark of KPAC songs. This new 'language of the people' got a tremendous response and the plays and songs of the KPAC were performed to large audiences all over the state. (Damodaran: 2008). There are 22 songs in the play 'You Made Me a Communist' each of which was above half an hour long. All of these songs widely influenced people in society. And these melodies became a part and parcel of their daily life.

Emergence of Political Theatre: A Close Textual Analysis

Theatre is as old as human community and it has emerged as religion-civic ritual, lyric poetry, popular entertainment or political protest in virtually every culture. Anthropologist Victor Turner has suggested that for cultures to survive and grow we need exploratory moments when we can step out of the routines of life in to a selective, dramatic re-enactment of key issues of our communities. Drama is a cultural space in which actors symbolically represent the struggles of the community, but in a frame of plot resolution that points these searching debates to possible idealised goals (Turner:1974).

Richard Schechner sees theatre as essentially dramatic performance, a cultural space separated from everyday life in which human and social issues are symbolically and fictionally re-enacted. To explain more clearly the nature of the 'new' theatre, he distinguishes two basic elements of the theatre: entertainment and efficaciousness. All theatres have something of both elements, but if placed on a bipolar continuum contemporary conventional theatre tends much more toward the entertainment end of the continuum while peoples theatre tends toward emphasis on effecting socio-cultural and political change. In Schechner's view, the purest form of 'efficacious theatre' is socio-religious ritual. In religious ritual, the mythic harmony established by divinity or the history of salvation is symbolically acted out. In social ritual there is more emphasis on the strong sense of community, the resolution of conflict and the definition of responsibility to the community for the harmonious welfare of the whole group. In both the focus is on the results. In 'entertainment theatre' participants are more taken up with the aesthetic, emotional pleasure of the performance: the poetic expression, music, dance, the suspense of the plot, good impersonation, elaborate costuming and stage setting and the overall cathartic relaxation in a moment of leisure. (White: 1988) The play 'You Made Me a

Communist' comes under the category of efficacious theatre because it emphasised the strong sense of community in Kerala in 1950s.

The famous sociologist Robin Jeffrey analyzed the play 'You Made Me a Communist' as "The popularity of the play – it swept like a storm for months up and down Kerala – stemmed from its debt combination of familiar things, both old and new. Musical drama was an old form of rural entertainment but the content –the struggle of the rural poor against police and landlords-was recognisable in daily life to many audiences. Even for town-dwellers, the subject was as topical as the daily news papers. 'You Made Me a Communist' is a long play with a simple plot. Paramupillai, the pivotal figure who is 'made a communist', stands, as classic example of an older male in a decaying matrilineal joint family, constantly recalling the good old days and unable to cope with the poverty and exploitation of the present. Indeed, the fascination with such ineffectual men, living on declining rents and vanished glories, underlines the importance of family disruption in modern Kerala. This play both symbolized and extended Kerala's changing Political culture. The fact that audiences responded so enthusiastically indicated that they sympathized with the ideas of equality and struggle that the play sought to convey. The play itself not only reinforced the legitimacy of such attitudes but presented them to people who might not have encountered them before. The efforts to ban the play testify to its effectiveness" (Jeffrey Robin (1991) cited in Mohandas, 2002: 78)

Societies change by evolutionary or revolutionary force or at times by means of both. The play reflected the social realities of the day and the aspirations of the downtrodden for a society free of exploitation and oppression. Theatre transcended the realm of entertainment and took on an agitational and propagandistic function. 'You Made Me a Communist', for instance took the people of Kerala by Storm. All sections of the people from the illiterate agricultural labourers to the most sophisticated intellectual watched this play. KPAC and their plays had a very significant role in spreading the message of the peasant movement in the country. The plays were based on the everyday life of the working class and the peasantry. The playwrights took themes which were simple and which contained strong political messages. (Mohandas: 2002). In contrast to those characters in the play through the author succeeded in portraying realistically the various manifestations of social conflicts in the society. Famous historian and writer P.Govinda Pillai pointed out that "KPAC is an integral part of the Kerala model. Along with the Progressive Writer's Movement, the Library Move-

ment and other movements of cultural renaissance, KPAC contributed to the success of the Kerala model of development, the main indicators of which are high standards of living, hundred percent literacy and so on."(Menon: 2001)

Representation of Ideology and Culture

The play Ningalenne Communistakki told the philosophy of Marxism in a simple and interesting way. At the same time this play represents the ideology of Marxism and the culture in that society also. Nigalenne Communistaki revolved around the gradual ideological conversion of a conservative old man, Paramupillai, into a communist sympathizer fighting against feudal values. Its anti-feudal stance was considered radically provocative for its time, and the Kerala government banned it under the Dramatic Performance Act, alleging that it instigated people to rebel against the government. KPAC continued with its staging despite the government ban, and to this day it remains one of Malayalam's longest running productions, with over10000 staging recorded in its itinerant schedule across the state (Kumari:2000). As Richard Schener insists, good theatre is always entertaining. Theatre involves colorful impersonation, wit and humour, satire, a poetic language with heightened emotion that captures moods, and a suspenseful plot. Peoples theatre emerges most strongly, however, in contexts where there is a combination of arising cultural identity in a community of people and a degree of cultural and political repression that prevents the cultural identity from articulating itself in public media and conventional performance.

Positive directives for Communist party in Kerala

KPAC as a tool of the Communist Party of India in raising the social and political consciousness of a state marginalized and shackled by the rusty, brittle chains of feudal submissiveness and bigotry is undeniable. The KPAC had played a big role in popularizing the communist movement in the state. It helped unite public opinion, raised self awareness and dignity eventually paving way to form one of the first democratically elected communist governments on the planet. This play has the significant role in enabling the communists to come to power in Kerala 1957.

Handelman (1990) (as cited by Zarrilli: 2009.p.446) shows that during certain historical periods, public events collectively reflect not the same "frozen cultural ideals, but the turbulence that wracks social order during that time and place. It becomes a direct extension of ongoing or emergent struggle that co-opts any and all venues for their conflicts''.

Conclusion

Thus we could see how theatre functioned as a strong medium of art and it could work as a catalyst for social change in the context of Kerala. The play 'You Made Me a Communist' had not only changed the cultural situation but also had influenced most of the political and social sectors of Kerala. Further, it has been used as the political tool to spread the propaganda of the Communist Party in Kerala. Through this play the Communist Party identified theatres potentiality as a political tool. The popularity of the play 'You Made Me a Communist' shows that it is the only work which has opened up a discussion in the cultural history of Kerala. Even today it is being staged again and again. It was staged on 6th December 2012 to mark the 60th anniversary of its staging.

In Kerala, the concept of political theatre started after the staging of K. Damodaran's Pattabaki (Rent Arrears) in1936. It was considered as the first political play in Malayalam. Pattabaki rooted itself in the anti-feudal consciousness of the people, which was getting manifested in the struggles of the peasants against feudal landlordism supported by the British regime. The playwright meant to imply that poverty and dependence of the poor on the upper classes breeds immorality, that only in an egalitarian society may evil be eradicated and that revolution is the only sure means of achieving social change. (Richmond: 1973) Moreover the political presence on stage in Kerala begins after staging Pattabaki, but it reached the audience in the real sense after the staging of Ningalenne Communistakki.

Through the case study on 'You Made Me a Communist', I have raised the question about theatre and drama playing an active role in helping to generate shifts in individual and socio-political consciousness at a local level in Kerala during the 20th century. Through the case analysis I found myself aware of the importance of the play Ningalenne Communistaki in the society as well as the theatre's power to change society. It was a socio-political play of that period. Before this play other social dramas were also being staged but they were only centered around the selected sectors of the society. There is no doubt that these social dramas were a landmark in the Nambutiri movement in Kerala, which addressed the problems of the Brahmins in society. But mainly they were centered on the upper caste audience and well related to rituals or temples. The lower caste people were demarcated from them. Untouchability, the caste system and discrimination prevailed in that19th century society was main reason behind it. But the

play 'You Made Me a Communist' was opened to everyone in society especially the lower caste people and peasants.

Through these plays it is significant to know the details of the culture, socio-economic status, different divisions of the society etc in the Kerala society of the 1950s. The theatre protest of Kerala provides an in-depth study of how the oppressed has been struggling hard through to liberate the strength locked up in him. It is a study of the structural conflicts latent in Kerala society. The man who was deprived of his right and dignity as an individual in society sought to make himself heard and listened to. Historically speaking the organized attempt to exhibit scientifically and theatrically the issues were analyzed exhorting the audience to rise in revolt against social and cultural oppressions that appeared in the garb of traditional values. In these plays the diction and other means of theatrical expression were as progressive as the themes, enlightening the individuals regarding their complex situation in the society. Oppression was a common theme in these works and the purpose and motive was to protest against the causes and circumstances of such slavery. In the play 'You Made Me a Communist', Bhasi raised the issues like social and economic inequality, casteism and feudal prejudices to the establishment of an egalitarian society. The theatre represented in theatre was in fact an extension of the revenge and anger felt at the social levels. It was an expression of dissatisfaction and discontentment over the conditions of life in society (Pillai: 2008).

In 'You Made Me a Communist' the author succeeded in portraying realistically the various manifestations of social conflicts through the characters in the play. The landlords or capitalists were at one end and the oppressed agricultural labourers, tenant cultivators, industrial workers and other toiling people at the other with their families surrounding them. These all were portrayed true to life. The class and social struggles through which they lived were realistically portrayed. (Pillai: 1998) The content, songs, and timely everyday concerns created an immediate and widespread demand for 'You Made Me a Communist'. The play was not only popular and topical, but potentially dangerous. Since the movement was banned and many of the players like Bhasi himself were in hiding from the police once a performance was over, the performers not only left the stage but also had to disappear into the countryside so that they wouldn't be apprehended. Seventy eight year old Ganesh Iyer a teacher at that time recalls: "how anyone attached to the government didn't want to risk seeing the play (for fear of retribution or loss of one's job). But I went. I was free from politics,

so nobody could find fault with me for seeing the play. But most of my colleagues would not see this or other plays for fear that they would be dubbed a communist". [2]

The play 'You Made Me a Communist' is labeled about self realization dawning upon a middle class farmer Paramupillai. This play reflected the society of that time. The social and political background of the 1950s is referred to the many parts of the drama. The Communist Party in Kerala began to use social dramas both to raise consciousness about social ills and to propagate potential socialist solutions for these ills, a strategy which helped prepare the way for Bhasi's involvement in leftist social drama. Bhasi's 'You made me a communist' not only had revolutionary social messages but was part of a revolution in representation. 'You Made Me a Communist' wasn't a drama at all! The social relevance of the play made people forget everything when they saw it. This play gave people what they wanted to see at the right time. It was a magic wand. The audience was like a mental vacuum that sucked up what was given. In 1951 it was so apt! It was the medicine that the patient was waiting for. People were ready for that message of social change. (Zarrilli: 1996). However theatre and society had to be mutually supporting and supplementing. One cannot be discussed without a reference to the other. One is actually for and because of the other, not at its expense. Both can have the fullest expression only in terms of this mutual response and co-operation. Thus theatre is both political and artistic. It should become the best means of cultural communion and communication.

This paper seeks to explore some other implications of society like arts and aesthetics from a political perspective. The production of 'You Made Me a Communist' helped sensitize a generation of Malayalis to issues of social conscience and helped begin a mass modern theatre movement throughout the state of Kerala. The presentation of the drama was an important reason for the success of the play.

KPAC plays are mainly centered on Social themes. The plays especially reflected the aspirations of the downtrodden for a society free of exploitation and oppression. Along with criticizing the existing society, the plays looked for an alternative form of society. The new performance pattern which was basically realistic reached every nook and corner of Kerala to spread the propaganda of the Communist Party in Kerala. This way KPAC played a historical role in popularizing the Communist Movement in Kerala during 1950s eventually leading to the establishment of the first democratically elected Communist Min-

istry in the world in1957 in Kerala under E.M.S Namboothiripad. The famous historian P. Govindapillai stated that the political cultural and ideological struggles and advances in the 1950s led to the historians naming it as the Red Decade. Without knowing the ideologies of Marxism and without reading 'Communist Manifesto' and 'Das Capital' the layman in that society started to think about communism in the society. The social climate in the society itself also was ready for a new change.

It was after all, not simply anthropology's "thick descriptions" and superb photographic technology that turned "culture" into "theatre". For the Geertzian turn was itself heir to half a century, during which modern society and culture were transformed bit by bit into a theatrical experience, in which everyone would in effect become a participant-observer of his or her own life. (Pecora: 2007). The radical, aesthetic, social and political movements responded just as self –consciously to the steadily increasing ability of media to capture and then play for a mass audience events unfolding on their own urban boulevards in daily newspaper accounts, in candid and quickly reproducible photography and film and on radio.(ibid)

In Kerala, the playwrights of the earlier times focused on social issues and social problems of common man in society, whereas presently there is a drastic shift from social issues. The theatre persons experienced new methods and techniques in Kerala theatre. They imitated western stories and stories from ancient mythology for the present day theatre lovers in order to provide entertainment. Here the role of theatre changed as a means of entertainment from that of protest. This has completely changed from the founding ideas of KPAC which was aimed at generating social awareness about society and social evils.

Nowadays Kerala theatre is far removed from common people and their problems in society. Through their exploration and experience of 'other' cultures in theatre, like Western theatre, they transformed theatre from being a means of protest to that of entertainment. Therefore, saying that theatre is a reflection of society in this regard becomes a problematic assumption.

Note

1. Telephonic Conversation, 15th July, 2013 .
2. Interview on July14, 1993. In Memories in Hiding (1996) by Thoppil Bhasi, trans. Jose George and Phillip B.Zarilli. Calcutta: Seagull Books, pp 6-13.

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