

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

M.R. Manmathan

Associate Professor

Department of History

Farook College, Kozhikode, Kerala

E-mail: mrmanmathanmr@gmail.com

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 Payyanur still function under a trust, constituted of upper caste men and a few dalits, which he had formed in 1984¹. 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; Saradmoni, 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 Anjarakkandy³ 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 BGEM⁴ 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 the 1920s 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 Sangh⁵. 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 recorded⁶. 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, 2011⁷; Chentharassery ; 2012)⁸. All these works, along with missionary literature (Tafarel, 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 volunteer¹². 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 year¹⁴. 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 1928¹⁶. 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' boys¹⁷, 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 leaders¹⁸. 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 Schools¹⁹ 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 four-fold: 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 temples²⁰ (*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 Payyannur 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* courts²¹ 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 (Ayarookuzhiyil: 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 tribes²³. 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 harijans 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 one's "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 merit²⁵. 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 Sundaeswara 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, "Harijanangalkethire 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.

References

- Aaron, C. Samuel. 1971. *Jeevita Smaranakal* (Reminiscences). Kannur: Deshamitram.
- Ambedkar, B.R. 1946. *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*. Accessed at <http://guruprasad.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/What-Congress-and-Gandhi-have-done-to-the-Untouchables.pdf>.
- Ambedkar, B.R. 2004. *Conversion as Emancipation*. New Delhi: Critical Quest, Reprint.
- Ambedkar, B.R. 2007. *Annihilation of Caste*. New Delhi: Critical Quest, Reprint.
- Ashraf, E.M. 2011. *Ore Oru Jeevitham* (The One and Only Life). Kozhikode: Lipi Publications.
- Ayarookuzhiyil, A.M. Abraham. 1987. *Swami Ananda Thirth – Untouchability: Gandhian Solution on Trial*. Bangalore: Indian Institute of Sociological Studies.
- Census of 1871, Malabar District*. Madras: Government Press.
- Chentarasseri, T.P. 2012. *Viplavakariyaya Ananda Theerthan* (The Revolutionary Ananda Theerthan). Thrissur: Kerala Sahitya Academy.
- Dhaneesh, M.P. 2012. *Understanding the work of Chirakkal Mission 1937-1950*. University of Hyderabad: M. Phil Dissertation.
- Elayavoor, Vanidas. 2006. *Theertha Prayanam* (Holy Journey). Kannur: Kairali Books.
- Gopakumar, P.F. (Ed.). 2015. *Faces of Social Reform in Kerala*. Thiruvananthapuram: Author.
- Gopalan, A.K. 2013. *Ete Jeevitha Katha* (My Life Story). Thiruvananthapuram:

- ram: Chintha Publishers. 11th Edition.
- Gudavarthy, Ajay. 2008. "Gandhi, Dalits and Feminists: Recovering the Convergence". *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 31 (83-90).
- Hardtmann, Eva-Maria. 2009. *The Dalit Movement in India: Local Practices, Global Connections*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Innes, C.A. 1997. *Malabar Gazetteer*. Thiruvananthapuram: Government of Kerala, Kerala Gazetteer Department. Reprint.
- Ismael, P.M. 2013. *The Quest for Social Justice: Malabar (1882-1947)*. University of Calicut: PhD Dissertation.
- Kannan, M.V. (Ed) (2015). *Gramacharitramunarumbol: Ezhom Grama Charitram* (Local History of Ezhom). Ezhom Grama Panchayat.
- Kelappan, K. 1972. "Jeevitavum Nhanum" (Me and my Life). In *Kelappan Smaraka Grandham*: 136-42. Kozhikode: Kelappan Smaraka Grandha Prasadhana Samiti.
- Kunhambu, Potheri. 2013. *Saraswativijayam*. Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers. Reprint.
- Logan, William. 1887. *Malabar I*, Madras: Government Press.
- Madhavan, M. 2013. *Social Reform Movements in Malabar*. University of Calicut: PhD Dissertation.
- Manmathan, M.R. 2013. "Temple as the site of Struggle: Social Reform, Religious Symbols and the Politics of Nationalism in Kerala". *Advances in Historical Studies*, 2(2): 57-69.
- Memoirs, Old Students (Unpublished). Payyanur: Anandashram.
- Menon, A. Sreedhara. 1997. *Kerala and Freedom Struggle*. Kottayam: D.C. Books.
- Menon, C. Achutha. 1953. *Keralolpathi*. Madras: University of Madras.
- Miller, Eric.J. 1952. "Village Structure in North Malabar". *Economic Weekly*, Feb.9: 159-64.
- Miller, Eric.J. 1954. "Caste and Territory in Malabar", *American Anthropologist*, 56 (3): 410-20.
- Mohan, P. Chandra 1999. "Groth of Social Reform Movements in Kerala". In P.J. Cherian (Ed) *Perspectives on Kerala History: The Second Millennium* (456-85). Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Gazetteers Department.
- Mohan, Sanal. 2015. *Modernity of Slavery: Struggles Against Caste Inequality in Colonial Kerala*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Nair, M.S. (2000). *Madayikavu Oru Padanam* (A Study of Madayikavu). University of Calicut: Centre for Folklore Studies.
- Nanda, Meera. 2016. "Ambedkar's Gita". *Economic and Political Weekly*, LI(49): 38-45.
- Nizar, M & Meena Kandaswamy. 2007. *Ayyankali: A Dalit Leader of Organic Protest*. Calicut: Other Books.
- Pallath, J.J. 1999. "Subaltern Christian groups and the crisis of cultural identity", *Journal of Dharma*, 24 (1): 51-66.

Swami Ananda Tirtha's 'Harijan' Reform

- Pandian. M.S.S. 2015. *Brahmin & Non-Brahmin: Geneologies of the Tamil Political Present*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black. Reprint.
- Patankar, Bharat and Gail Omvedt. 1979. "The Dalit Liberation Movement in Colonial Period", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14 (7-8): 409-24.
- Patrick, Stanley. 2014. *Malabarile Dalit-Dalit Christava Charitravum Varthamanavum* (History and Present of the Dalit and Dalit-Christians of Malabar). Thrissur: Baby Thekkan.
- Pilla, P. Govinda. 2003, 2009. *Kerala Navothanam*, 3 Vols. Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers.
- Pokkudan, Kallen. 2002. *Kandalkadukalkidayil Ente Jeevitham* (My Life amidst Mangrove Trees). Thrissur: Green Books.
- Saradamoni. K. 1980. *Emergence of a Slave Caste: Pulayas of Kerala*. Bombay: Peoples Publishing House.
- Shajimon. T.J. 2016. *Itaian Missionary Activities in North Malabar, 1936-1998: A Study of Socio Economic Changes in the Pulaya Community of the Region*. Kannur University: PhD Dissertation.
- Sree Swami Ananda Tirthar Shashtiabdapoorthi Souvenir*. 1964. Payyanur: Anandashram.
- Taffarel, S.J, Fr. 1950. *Jottings of a Poor Missionary*. Mangalore: City Press.
- Taffarel, S.J, Fr. 1978. *Fr. Caironi: A Missionary Indeed, A Missionary in Need*. Bangalore: Salak Printers.
- Thurston, Edgar. 1987. *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. II & VI. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, Reprint.
- Tirtha, Swami Ananda. 1939. "Separate Schools for the Harijans". In *Malabar Vidyabhyasa Guide* (24-7). Kozhikode.
- Tirtha, Swami Ananda. 1980. *Smaranakal* (Memories). Tellicherry: Swami Ananda Tirtha 75th Birthday Celebration Committee.
- Tirtha, Swami Ananda. 2000. "Harijanangalkkethire Kirathaniyamam" (Black Law against the Harijans). In Ambedkar, *Complete Works* (Mal), 9 (147-52). New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation.
- Varghese, V.J. 2009. "Land, Labour and Migrations: Understanding Kerala's Economic Modernity", *Working Paper 420*. Thiruvananthapuram: Centre for Development Studies.
- Varma, Manjusha. R. 2012. *Kolaswaroopam in Historical Perspective*, Kannur University: PhD Dissertation.