



Culture and Religion: Kerala's Socio-cultural Struggles and the Erasure of Buddhism by Brahmanism

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Abstract : *The essay excavates the deeply rooted conflict in culture and society between Brahmanism and Buddhism and the eventual obliteration of Buddhism from the religious and social spaces and chronology by Brahmanical patriarchy in Kerala. The rise of modernity during the Western missionary intervention in early 19th century and the formation of anti caste struggles are critically contextualized. The dialectics of that peculiar modernity and its unique native epistemology and hermeneutics are analyzed and contextualized here. The cultural foundations of Kerala are identified to its ancient roots in Asokan Buddhist civilization in South India. The kinship of Kerala renaissance to that of Phule's Satyashodhak Samaj and Ambedkarite movement later are also evaluated in the present and in futuristic ways. Oligarchy and over representation by power elite are also probed and problematized. The grass root democratic movements having cultural and religious dimensions led by Ayya Vaikundhar, Ayyankali, Appachan, Narayanaguru and Sahodaran deconstructing and remaking Kerala modernity from the bottom as a critique of Brahmanical cosmology, theology and Sanskritized epistemology of Hinduism are discussed in detail in the context of the recent riots against gender justice and social justice unleashed by the RSS and NSS casteist orthodoxies in Kerala during the Sabarimala standoff in 2018. The threats to justice, equality and democracy from the caste Hindu forces who form the oligarchy or power monopoly and over representation are also critically discussed in the current conjuncture of India and Kerala. The historic junctures of the 1924-25 Vaikom struggles, the centenary is celebrated now are also used to analyze and understand critically the crucial subjectivities and contexts in Kerala's struggles for equality, justice and democracy in relation to religious and cultural changes.*

Key Words: Religion, Culture, Caste, Gender, Brahmanism, Brahmanic Patriarchy, hegemony, Varnasramadharma, Twice Born, Nationalism, Conversion, Buddhism, Neo Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, representation, democracy, mobocracy, oligarchy

You must move ahead crossing the barricades and enter wherever entry is prohibited...

They will open fire, but you must not move or fly away...

Gandhi is a child in matters of religion... Narayanaguru (in 1924 during Vaikom struggle)

It is Narayana Guru who articulated and practiced the social justice and democratic principle of entry and representation in all walks of social life in Kerala in the turbulent context of the Vaikom struggle (1924-25) a century ago in Kerala. Guru's own statements for public entry and representation in various public spaces including roads, schools and shrines created the paradigm shift that even attracted the Congress leaders from Tamilakam like Periyar E V Ramasamy Naicker (Athiyaman 2023: 119-141). It is the disciples of the guru like Mooloor, Asan and Sahodaran who fought through poetry and literature and created a change in culture and society (Sekher 2023).

The literature created by Vaikom struggles from the early modern age as in the Dalava Kulam struggle for entry into the ancient worshiping place that was an ancient Buddhist Vihara or Pally that happened in 1806 is remarkable. Around two hundred young Avarna young men were massacred and pushed into the slush of the muddy pond called Dalava Kulam that is named after Dalava or Diwan Velu Thampy who ordered it (Narayanan, K R 2018: 127-30; Jose 2022: 11-24).

The Vaikom ballad commemorating the valorous memory of the Ezhava young men is partly recovered by the late K R Narayanan (1905-1972) the local leader from Thalayolaparambu close to Vaikom and the leader of the legendary Adiyam anti caste struggles for freedom of movement in 1922 (Asokan 2018: 19-39). He became a Member of the Tiru-Kochi legislative assembly and the General Secretary of SNDP Yogam.

As per the Vaikom ballad Kari Panikar, Malu Tandar, Ottayi, Kunnel Chenni, and Mandantelankan were the leaders of the 1806 struggles at Vaikom (“Karivara Mukhanam Karipanikar, Guruvaran Amalan Kunnel Chenni, Pulipole Payunna Malu Tandar...”). People also say that it was the Avarna families having Buddhist lineage around Vaikom shrine, called Ettuchira Panikars who led the agitation on a Pradosha day in 1806. K R Narayanan and his friends were using Asan’s 1919 poem “Simha Nadam” for the freedom of movement agitations against the caste Hindu dictates during some temple processions for the Ezhavar and similar Avarna people. They were prosecuted for reciting the poem of Asan! It was composed by Asan on the request of Sahodaran and Boddhanandar and was widely used in Chelur, Arattupuzha and Tanisery anti caste struggles by the Dhamma Bhada Sangham led by Boddhanandar during 1919-1920.

K R Narayanan and his father along with the father’s uncle and a few Ezhavar people were coming back from a public meeting at Piravam. They were asked to give way when the temple procession came from Thalayolaparambu. K R Narayanan’s father’s uncle was beaten by the police for walking the public road. When the temple procession came back after the ritual bath called Pally Arattu, Ezhavar people

blocked their path and retaliated. The policemen were thrown into the river. The deity along with the Brahman priest called Embran fell down to the grounds from atop the elephant (Asokan 31-34).

Caste-culture and Untouchability and Unseeability of Hinduism as a Religious Persecution

In 1905 the Teendal Palaka or Apartheid boards proclaiming untouchability were installed there by the Kottayam Peshkar Mr Sankara Menon. He also happens to be the first signatory of the 1891 Malayali Memorial for the representation of Malayali Sudras (later known as Nairs from 1926 when the Travancore regime officially recognized the caste name). After a lot of legislative attempts from 1917 onwards in the Travancore Legislative Assembly for removing the Teendal Palaka; Asan himself came to Vaikom and made a public speech at Vadayar on Dalavakulam martyrs (Narayanan, K R 2018: 128). According to the great poet Asan the bones of the Dalavakulam martyrs must be regathered from the pond and must be worshiped as they have done an iconic act of immortal bravery against untouchability and caste. The poet called the martyrs his “ancestral thinkers” or “Purva Chintakars” in his Vadayar speech of 1923 near Vadayar Elam Kavu. K R Narayanan who has recorded this has also written poems on the plight of the ancient Buddhist people, now termed as Avarna outside the Chaturvarnya, who never submitted to Brahmanical patriarchy and its Sudra masculinity. As Ambedkar and K Sugathan in Kerala have explained; caste humiliations and untouchability were punishments given to the people who never submitted to it by Brahmanical patriarchy and its subservient Sudra henchmen (*Who were the Untouchables* and *Jati Vyavastayum*

*Buddhamata*vum). Caste was a form of brutal religious persecution as well.

Unfortunately, Asan passed away at the age of 51 in the boat tragedy at Pallana in January 1924. Otherwise, he would have come to Vaikom struggle in late March 1924 and could have made a second Vadayar or Vaikom speech on Dalavakulam martyrs. It is also worth noting that K R Narayanan is the only political leader, orator and writer to record the name of Amachadi Kannan Tevan the dalit leader of Vaikom struggle who was involved in Poothotta temple entry struggle too as the bosom friend of T K Madhavan. The very first day limestone solution was thrown into Tevan's eyes by the caste Hindu hooligans. As all the records and writings reveal they were all Nair henchmen perpetuating Brahmanism. Tevan became partially blind and was saved later by the special potion prepared by Narayana Guru. Later an inhuman assassin from the Nair caste applied calcium solution directly with hands onto the eyes of Raman Elayathu another volunteer, but he lost his eyesight completely though Gandhi tried to send him some medicine from Gujarat.

Vaikom Struggles and the Movement for Freedom of Movement and Untouchability

In early 1920's Narayana Guru's cycle-rikshaw was blocked there by the caste Hindu militia, mostly Padajas of Endam Turuty Nambiatiry the local Brahmanical ruler of Vaikom. Today the infamous Endam Turuty Mana is the procession of Toddy Tapers' Trade Union. Another original branch of the Mana still survives in glory in the southern gateway of the shrine. Gandhi also experienced caste insult here as he was forced to sit outside the sit-out in the front yard when he came to discuss with Nambiatiry in 1925 March

(Atiyaman 2023). Guru's asylum Vellur Madhom was quite close to the temple. He was forced to get down from the vehicle and walk to his retreat by keeping the untouchable distance by the henchmen of Brahmanism. This provoked Asan and T K Madhavan and T K plunged headlong into the battle against untouchability with the assent of Guru and made it a national and international issue by persuading the Congress to make it a part of their nationalist campaign against untouchability. This historic struggle against untouchability in South India has also attracted foreign scholars like Mary Elizabeth King the Afro American scholar from the civil rights movement who dedicated her work to Prof K K Kusuman the student of Prof T K Ravindran at the University of Kerala, as Kusuman guided her research and writing (King 2015: 3).

T K Ravindran has also written very important works on the Vaikom struggle. Ravindran asserts the fact that it was T K Madhavan who is the real leader of the Vaikom struggle and not Gandhi or anyone else (Ravindran 1980: 24-56). Madhavan went to Tirunelveli in 1921 and Kakinada Congress meetings in 1922 to present it before Gandhi and the Congress and finally at Kakinada in Andhra he was able to make the motion with the support of the then President of the Kakinada meet Maulana Mohammed Ali. As an act of remembrance and gratitude T K Madhavan named his only son Mohammed Ali (Vijayanadh 2010: 103). But T K passed away in 1930 following the inhuman torture and mutilation of the body that he experienced at the hands of the caste Hindu henchmen at Tiru Varp near Kottayam following the Tiru Varp freedom of movement struggles during 1925-27. T K also led the freedom of movement struggles in Kannankulangara and Ambalapuzha as well soon after

Vaikom. After the demise of T K when Gandhi came to his home, he renamed the child as Babu Vijayanadh as revealed later in the book *T K Madhavan my Father* by his own son Dr Babu Vijayanadh.

The root cause of Vaikom struggle and the immediate provocation to Madhavan and other disciples including Sahodaran, C V Kunjuraman and Satyavrata Swamy or Mooloor was the fact that the Guru was humiliated by caste Hindu henchmen at Vaikom in early 1920s. Even the Guru who broke the Brahmanical monopoly with his 1888 Aruvipuram installation and 1912 Varkala Sarada consecration and the establishment of 1903 SNDP Yogam was forced to keep the untouchable distance, and he was brought down from his vehicle. Mooloor S Padmanabha Panikar the lead disciple of Narayana Guru, has poetically recorded and historicized the humiliation of the guru by the caste Hindu gatekeepers at Vaikom in two poems. “Sahodaryam” and “Reply to Chidambarampillai” composed in 1924 (Mooloor 1992). Both Asan and Mooloor appealed to the Ezhava youth to defiantly act for the freedom of movement and other basic human rights and greater civil rights and democratic rights like entry into public space and public bodies and institutions including worshipping places. Asan passed away in January 1924 and Vaikom struggle began only on March 30, 1924.

Humiliating the Guru who envisioned a Secular and Democratic Kerala and the World

The marching song of Vaikom struggle was composed by Panap(v)ally Krishnan Vaidyar another leading follower of the guru. Sahodaran Ayyappan was also composing many songs and poems for social revolution and democratic

struggles of the untouchable Avarna people against the shackles of the caste Hindu system in the 1920s. His political poems “Samudaya Ganam,” “Samghatana Ganam” and “Parivartanam” are following the popular idiom explored by Panapally Vaidyar. He also wrote many poems for social struggles in the manner of Panapally as in his “Samghadana Ganam,” “Samudaya Ganam,” and “Ezhavolbodhanam.” It is in “Ezhavolbodhanam” the Exhortations to the Ezhavar people; that Sahodaran used the revolutionary address “Saghakale” or comrades for the first time in Malayalam in 1917 soon after the October revolution (Sahodaran 75). It was Sahodaran who introduced Kerala to world transformations including Soviet revolution and the democratic changes in early 20th century through his journal and daily *Sahodaran* and through his poetry, prose and speeches.

All these struggles for the freedom of movement and entry into public spaces are denigrated and sabotaged in Kerala today. All sorts of reactionary regressions are happening. The 2018 riots against the entry of young women at Sabarimala shrine unleashed by Hindu fanatic groups of the Parivar and the RSS following the supreme court verdict allowing the entry of women have prompted us to rethink the Kerala social model and its renaissance modernity (Sekher 2021b). In the dominant caste Hindu mutiny popularly called as Sudra Lahala against the constitution and gender justice carried out by an RSS-NSS combine some caste Hindu women used abusive words and casteist slur against Comrade Pinarayi Vijayan, the chief minister of Kerala in public on social media before the camera¹. It is a striking moment of

¹ RSS is Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh founded in 1925 at Nagpur by the Hindu extremist Hedgewar as a rightwing Hindu Nationalist voluntary brigade that later gave birth to BJP the present ruling Hindu Nationalist party. It is one of the

revelation for all of us that an old and economically challenged Malayali Sudra or Nair woman is abusing the elected and ruling chief minister for his constitutional positions and commitment in the present for gender justice and equality. A typical example of a caste Hindu woman abusing an Avarna man in public despite the fact that he is the chief minister of the state that testify the present reality that caste hierarchy exists and is severe than its close ally the gender hierarchy in Kerala and India on a day to day basis (Sekher 2022).

principal cadres of the Sangh Parivar and shaped by Golwalkar, Savarkar and other Hindu Nationalist ideologues. The NSS is Nair Service Society a caste outfit of Nairs founded in 1914 by Nair leader Mannath Padmanabha Pilla who was so close to Savarkar and Golwalkar till the end of his life, as Travancore Bhriyajana Sangham. Bhriyajana literally means the menial servants (obviously of Brahmanism). The Travancore regime recognized the word “Nair” only in 1926; till then the caste was known in all official parlance as Sudra or Malayali Sudra. Malayali Memorial and Malayali Sabha are cases in point at the turn of the nineteenth century as illustrated by Jeffrey. Mannam struggled more than a decade to rename the organization and to bring together almost 130 sub castes into an 18 scale consolidated caste pattern and an overarching Nair caste identity. See Robin Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nair Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1976). Also see Dilip Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) and N K Jose, *Sudra Lahala* (Vaikom: Hobby, 2018).

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Spitting the Venom of Caste Hinduism in Public and Sabotaging Democracy

Through symbolic and verbal or textual violence or genocidal significations, caste is redeployed in Kerala through the caste Hindu or elite Malayali Kuleena narratives. Their fiction and poetry are all on the othering and annihilation of the Avarna. Even in public talk and rhetoric they are casteists. The cruciality of caste and its hegemonic religion comes to the fore once again in public domain through this infamous act of a Nair woman worker who spitted caste abuse on Pinarayi Vijayan an Avarna CM from Malabar. It is also remarkable that the Nair woman used the vulgarized form of (A)soka Makkal or Asokan descendents as a term of abuse, exposing the genocidal caste Hindu slurs against the other, especially the Buddhist Bahujans or the people who are addressed by Asoka in BC third century as “Kera Puto” or the enlightened people of Kerala, in his rock edicts in Dhamma scripts or Asokan Brahmi. Such Dhamma script inscriptions form the first archaeological evidence and inscriptional evidence on the existence of an enlightened civilization of Buddhism in Kerala or Chera land within Tamilakam along the Pandya, Chola and Satiyaputra, during Asoka’s time and just before him, probably from the Buddha’s own time, as evident in the writings by Chinese travelers and monks like Xuan Zang.

The question of religion is key to the social transformations that shaped modern Kerala in and through its renaissance in nineteenth and early twentieth century. On a secular plain it is also seen as surpassing religion towards a human community and social imaginary where Narayanaguru’s inclusive secular ideals of fraternity and

compassion are often focused (Sekher 2016, 2017). The complex paradigm of colonial modernity was mixed with the religious discourse of Christian evangelism (Sanalmohan 2016). The beginning of the Kerala renaissance in the Nadar revolts (1820s to 1860s) for the basic human rights to cover the breasts decently was initiated in the context of Christian missionary intervention and conversion (Pandian 2005, Darwin 2008). If you probe further beyond in history we see the intervention of the Islamic missionaries from the seventh and eighth centuries to the late middle ages like that of Malik Dinar who came to Kodungallur with the seal of the Chera king Pallyvanar I as he passed away in Oman in Salalah after his meeting with the prophet in Arabia. The tomb or Khabar of Pallyvanar I is still there in Oman in Salalah. Before this it is in BC third century that a large scale basic transformation of society happened in the time of Asoka, when his Buddhist missionaries including the Bhikus and Bhikunis reached the shores of Kerala through sea via Sri Lanka and Kalinga and humanized and empowered the Kerala people with ethics and letters (Gopalakrishnan 2007, Sekher 2018, 2021). The nuns of Asoka were the first to introduce the art of writing and letters among the people widely in south India. They taught us the Dhamma scripts or Asokan Brahmi. Vattezhutu the script that developed in Tamilakam including Chera land, after seventh century is a gradual modification of Asokan Brahmi.

Religious Histories of Kerala: Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam

Fortunately, as a peninsula open to the sea, South India had the opportunity to be in contact with the world and various religious cultures. Jews, Christians and Arabs came

here and settled. Hinduism or Brahmanism and its social stratification called Varnasramadharma or Chaturvarnyam was established in south India and Kerala in particular after the eight century². The Muventars or Chera, Chola and Pandya rulers were mostly Sramana in ethical or religious affiliation and they resisted Brahmanical Hindu religion till early middle ages. But Brahmanism assumed socio political hegemony through cheat and usurpations as evident in the myths and legends related to Mahabali or Mahishasur. The Buddhist rulers who resisted the Vedic obscurantism were demonized or animalized and otherized. They were eventually killed and the kingdoms were converted to Hindu Brahmanical Vedic religion. It took centuries of covetous usurpation, othering, cheat, violence and genocide to erase Buddhism from its homeland and to push it to the peripheries like Burma, Thailand or Sri Lanka. The words “Mlechha” in Sanskrit and “Metha” in Malayalam were originally used against the Buddhists and once they are done with, by the middle ages, now these words are being used against the Muslims and other minorities by the Brahmanical elites (Sekher 2018, 2021).

² Chatur Varnyam or Varnasrama Dharma is Vedic and Brahmanic social stratification entrenched in the Rig Veda in the section called Purusha Sukta. As per the Vedic Purusha Sukta the infinite or Brahman is imagined as a huge Man or Virat Purusha and he gives birth to the fourfold Varnas through his mouth (Brahman), hands (Kshatriya), thighs (Vysya) and feet (Sudra). As Sudra came out through the feet they are treated as Padaja or lifelong slaves of the top twice born. TTB, theoretical Brahman and empirical Sudra are critical categories developed by Gopal Guru, “How Egalitarian are the Social Sciences in India?” (*Economic and Political Weekly* 37, 50 (14 Dec 2002)).

As Ambedkar has rightly pointed out in *Who were the Untouchables?* the Buddhist laity or the people who never submitted to Brahmanism were given the punishment of untouchability. Caste untouchability was a form of religious persecution that made them broken people. Caste humiliation was a religious sanction and subordination as well. They were submitted to unimaginable violence and humiliations like prohibition of covering the bosom in public and even breast tax in medieval Travancore. It came to an end after 1803 with the sacrifice of Nangeli an Ezhava woman of Chertala (Jose 2017b). It was a systematic humiliation of the Buddhists who followed ethical etiquette and decent dress codes in a self respectful way. The dress of the Christian and Muslim women in Kerala and the amazingly similar white attire of the Teravada Buddhist women in Myanmar, Thailand, Malesia and Sri Lanka testify this pan Asian Buddhist cultural connection. More over pioneers in Kerala cultural history like Elamkulam himself has written about the various dress codes and fashions prevalent during the Sangham era in the early centuries of the common era. Elamkulam has elaborated about the cotton dress of the women, the special organic jute like fibre-made Tazhayada or Tazhauda, the exquisite Kalinga silk imported from Odisha brought here on ships from the Bay of Bengal through Sri Lanka (Elamkulam 2005: 13, 15). The women in Kerala part of the ancient Tamilakam who were civilized and cultured to become world missionaries like Manimekhalai who was a non-Brahman girl educated in Vanchi Varsity in Muziris, who has crossed oceans and taught in south east Asian countries like her master Aravana Adikal in the ancient Tamil epics *Silapatikaram* and *Manimekhalai* where dehumanized to a level where they were not even

allowed to wear clothes before Brahmanic patriarchy.³ This grudge against the Avarna or untouchable was a religious grudge of the Brahmanic religion against the Buddhist Bahujans who continued to resist Brahmanism long after it terminated Buddhism in India. Dr K Sugatan in Kerala has also explained about this religious dimension of the breast cloth ban in mideaval Kerala in his book on The Caste System and Buddhism (*Jativyavastayum Buddhamatavum*) in Kerala (Sugatan 2011). The severity of caste atrocities as a form of intense dehumanizing having dimensions of religious persecution and othering is also visible in the works on nineteenth century and early 20th century Kerala like that of P Bhaskaranunni's *Pathombadam Nootandile Keralam and Keralam Irupatam Nutandinte Arambhatil*.

Annihilation and Resurgence of Caste within Religious Cultures in Kerala

Ayya Vaikundhar a sage from the Nadar or Channar Avarna community led a struggle for the abolition of menial slavery or Uzhiyam Adima system in 19th century Nanjinad

³ The real epics of South India are written in Tamil in the ancient Tamilakam at the beginning of the common era. They are called the Fivefold Great Epics or the Aim Perum Kapiam. It includes Silapatikaram, Manimekhalai, Jeevaka Chintamani, Kundalakesi and Valayapati. They are Dravidian, Buddhist and Jain in spirit. Tiruvalluvar's Tirukural is known as the Bible or ethical treatise of the Chankam or Sangham age extended from BC fifth to AD fifth century approximately. It is a non Brahmanical work inspired by Buddhism, Jainism and even Christianity as the apostle is believed to be in Tamilakam during the time. Tamil aesthetics of the Chankam age is known as a landscape based ecological, cultural and ethical aesthetics or the Aim Tinai Vazhakam. See A K Ramanujan, *Poems of Love and War* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2003) and Ayyappa Paniker, *Indian Narratology* (New Delhi: IGNC/Sterling, 2003).

by founding the Samatva Samajam in 1836. Soon after the Nadar Revolts in Nanjinad or South Travancore there were local protests and cultural struggles in mid Travancore as in the Kartikapally Taluk of Alapuzha district near Kayamkulam led by an Avarna local leader called Arattupuzha Velayudha Panicker (1825-1874). He bravely checked the caste humiliations and aggression on Avarna women widely perpetuated by caste feudal lords, mostly Sudra henchmen of Brahmanism and organized local resistance struggles and agricultural strikes against the Sudra lords (Sekher 2017: 62-76). He also organized schools, libraries, night schools, martial arts and Kathakali Kalari for the untouchables (Panikasery 2018, Jose 2017).

Arattupuzha was killed through cheat using a man with a Muslim name, who was close to him earlier. This happened in 1874 January, just a few months after Arattupuzha retaliated against the Edapally prince who asked him to give way in the name of caste. Edapally and Chembakasery principalities were directly under Brahmanical dynasties. Chembakasery got its lands and Ambalapuzha shrine from Ambanattu Panikar who was the ancient Buddhist ruler there till sixteenth century. The Vaishnava shrine was established in 1545 only. The Vaikom shrine was made into a Saivite shrine in 1539 only (Kramrisch 49). Such gruesome caste killings have happened in many places in Kerala including Tekumkur or Kottayam where the Perakathu Tandar was assassinated by a hired Muslim militia by the Tekumkur dynasty in 16th century. An understanding of the Kerala caste system and Varna structure is inevitable here. As Robin Jeffrey and P K Balakrishnan have elaborated it was a Sudra regime sanctioned by Brahmanism that monopolized power and positions in Kerala from the early Middle Ages onwards.

As elaborated by Elamkulam this Brahman Sudra alliance came to power in the period between the 9th and 12th century through the non-conjugal nocturnal alliance like Sambandham and the matrilineal social setup (Elamkulam 2005: 67-88). After the Vedic religious conquest in the eighth and ninth centuries Brahmanic patriarchy created its infamous sexual colonies among Sudra women and split the society into the untouchable Avarna and the touchable Savarna. Those local elites who submitted to the Brahman Sambandham were exalted as the Sudra and the fourth Varna as Nayar “the good leading ones.” The caste name Nayar was officially recognized by the Travancore state only in 1926. Till then they were known as Malayali Sudra. Malayali Sabha and Malayali Memorial 1891 are illustrative examples. When Mannam Padmanabha Pillai started the early form of Nair Service Society or NSS in 1914 it was called Travancore Bhriya Jana Sangham. As we have seen only in 1926, Travancore regime officially approved the community name Nair.

The Buddhist Legacies of the Avarna in South India

The Avarna people are having an ancient genealogy of Buddhism as argued by Ambedkar and many others. Those who resisted Brahmanic patriarchy and never submitted to its sexual or spiritual slavery were condemned as Teeyar “the bad ones.” In Travancore and Kochi the Teeyar call themselves Ezhavar a self respectful term that historically links them to Ezham or the Sangham and archeologically well inscribed and evidenced in Aritapatty, Kilavalavu and Alakarmalai inscriptions dating back to BC third century, the time of Asokan missionaries. Ezham also means Lanka as the land of the Sangham that remained Buddhist from Asokan

times onwards. It has remained as a Teravada Buddhist country since Asokan times with a brief Chola Hindu interregnum. Elamkulam and P K Gopalakrishnan who wrote the cultural history of Kerala had also written about the etymology of the word Ezhavar as followers of the Buddhist missionaries who reached Kerala through Ezham, Elamkai or Ceylon. Nanuguru's own statement that Ezhavar is not a caste but the people of Kerala is also remarkable. Flora like Ezha Chembakam, Ezha Mulla and Ezha Konna are also associated with Buddhism in Kerala and south Asia at large. They are also having a group or sect of flowers or inflorescence metaphorically suggesting the closely interwoven constellation or the Sangha. The ancient traditional weavers of Travancore were also from the same community. The former Tiru-Kochi chief minister C Kesavan has written about the caste slurs and abuses like "Chilanti Sir" and "Kotti Sir" that he faced while teaching in schools from Sudra kids (Kesavan 2009) as he was from the Ezhavar community of Mayyanad who also did weaving as a traditional cottage industry.

Narayanaguru, the visionary of Kerala modernity, was deeply influenced by the social reformism of Arattupuzha as he was a witness to these social churnings while a student at Kummanpally and resident of Varanapally in Kayamkulam. He was also keenly influenced by the pioneering reforms of Ayya Vaikundhar who was imprisoned by the Travancore king Swati Tirunal for initiating egalitarian social movement called Samatva Samajam in 1836. Ayya was tortured in the panther den of King Swati Tirunal for 141 days in 1835. It was another Siddha having Tamil lineage Tykad Ayya who saved the life of Vaikundhar through timely diplomatic intervention as he was close to the British as the manager of

their Tykad residency. Vaikundha Swamy self-fashioned himself as a Vaishnavite sage in a strategic disguise and articulated his social revolutionary messages in verses like *Akhila Tirattu* and *Uchipadhipu*.

Caste and Religion in Indian and Kerala Renaissance and Social Reformations

As Ambedkar has explained well, caste is sustained in Indian culture through religious sanctions and legitimations. The struggle against caste and its hegemonic religion is on the foreground in Indian renaissance as well as Kerala renaissance. The pioneer of Indian social revolution Phule is also called a British affiliate and traitor by Hindtva forces. Even for Communist leaders and ideologues like EMS Nambootiripad in early 21st century, Nanuguru and Asan were foot slaves or Padadasas of the British. Gopal Guru and B Rajivan himself in Kerala have written about the specificity of the Avarna question. Just before Gandhiji who imagined India as a Ramraj in early 20th century, it was Jotiba Phule in late 19th century Maharashtra who imagined India as a Baliraj and compared it to Christuraj (Phule 1990). Phule's predictions and warning against the rising Nationalism in India as elitist, exclusionary and Brahmanical also proved right in a short while. Like Mahatma Phule who advised his Satyasodhak Samaj followers to delink from the Brahmanical Nationalism, it was Nanuguru in early 20th century Kerala who welcomed the rule of the British by saying that it has got many good effects. He was also the first Indian sage-reformer and social visionary to call them gurus. He has clearly stated that the British are the ones who gave him Sanyasam and they are his gurus. The visionary thinker of Kerala renaissance has also made it explicit that if it was in the time of Rama, that is

in Ramarajya as an Avarna or Chandala he would had met with the fate of Sambuka the Sudra sage who was beheaded by the lord himself. He has made it explicit that the Hindus rule by the scripture and the Smritis⁴ (Balakrishnan 2000: 164).

Like Phule he has never participated directly in the Nationalist movement. Only his disciple T K Madhavan participated in the Congress led Nationalist movement in Kerala. Even in the 1924 Vaikom struggle the involvement of the guru was minimal and he only donated money and blessed the movement in general as it was specifically anti caste in spirit and suited his core concern of annihilating caste. But he stressed on his key message of entry into public sphere and public roads or institutions. He gave the message for breaching the barricade and participating in public feasts inside the shrines. He also asked the people to eat the milk-rice or milky pudding called Pal Payasam that is concealed in the Tidapally of the shrines (Bhaskaran 268). Guru used the metaphor of Pal Payasam for political representation and power. The rule of the oligarchy or power monopoly and over-representation was critiqued by him in this 1924 key democratic message to the people. Gandhi wrote in Young India that the Tiya Guru is inciting violence and then Guru

⁴ *Manusmriti* or the Laws of Manu, being the code of law for the Hindus is a double speak that consolidated the Varnasramadharma. Punishment for the same crime was given according to the culprit's caste and Varna. Brahmins are often acquitted or banished for killing a human and Sudras were given capital punishment. Ambedkar argued that it was codified under the regime of the Sungas to legitimize their heinous murder of the last Mauryan emperor Brihadradha in BC second century. See the Laws of Manu translated from Sanskrit by George Buhler. Or Wendy Doniger, *Laws of Manu* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1992).

clarified that his words are misinterpreted and his point is to follow non violence in all democratic struggles. But in matters of freedom of movement and anti caste struggles like inter-dining nonviolence may not be always strictly practical (Bhaskaran 265-267).

Further the notion of community and the social imaginary of community formation as developed by Nanuguru and Sahodaran (Ayyappan 1990) that envision a greater human community formation at large is against (Sekher 2012, 2016) and cancels any parochial nationalism and attempts a universal and truly cosmopolitan internationalism in the manner of Buddhism that crossed the national and ethnic boundaries throughout Asia (Alexander 1949, Omvedt 2005, Narayanan 2005, Sekher 2018). The teachings of the guru was based on the ancient Tamil Sangam literary culture of Valluvar and the philosophical discourse of Anitya and compassion unleashed by the Buddha. He was often called the modern Buddha or Kerala Buddha by leading poet-disciples like Mooloor, Karupan, Asan and Sahodaran.

Hindu Colonialism or Internal Imperialism of India

The historical critical term Hindu Imperialism was first used by Mooloor in his 1924 poem “Sahodaryam” textualizing the blocking of guru’s vehicle at Vaikom by the henchmen of Brahmanism. In 1942 this critical term was made the title of his book by another disciple of guru, Swamy John Dharmateerthar who wrote and published *The History of Hindu Imperialism* in English and Malayalam from Lahore in today’s Pakistan. If Nationalism is a reaction against western colonial aggression, critique of caste and human communitization form a resistance to internal imperialism in India or Hindu colonialism (Dharmateerthar 2015). British

colonialism was here for less than 200 years, but the internal imperialism of caste and Varna is still here and is in power through manufacturing consent through Hinduising the Avarna people and misusing their mandate. Thus this lasting empire of caste and Brahmanism was under attack in Kerala renaissance rather than the short British Raj during which the subaltern in India got certain breaks and ruptures through colonial modernity. That is why in all the organic intellectuals in India who stood with the people like Phule, Pandit Ayyothee Thasar and Narayana Guru or Ambedkar you will find the persistent critique of the lasting internal empire of caste and Brahmanism rather than the Raj (Guru 1998: 156). As we have seen the Guru had also made the public statement that the British are our gurus.

Human liberation or annihilation of caste was more important for these visionaries of humanity like Guru, Thasar, Phule or Sahodaran. They are true cosmopolitan intellectuals and internationalists of the global order. It is not the Nation and the monolith of hegemonic elite Nationalism, dominated and monopolized by the Nationalist elites and Brahmanical caste Hindus but the people and their liberation are important in all these regional renaissance movements that transformed society at the grass root level. Like Buddhism, Kerala renaissance as imagined and led by Nanuguru and Sahodaran was also a critique of this Ramarajya and Varnasramadharma the hegemonic elite Hindu Nationalism as a whole; in its keen addressing of caste and Brahmanism the rudimentary aspects of Indian fascism (Sekher 2008, 2012, 2015). It must also be noted that the Kerala renaissance was not a Hindu reformist attempt from the top under the aegis of caste Hindu Nationalists like Ram Mohan Roy's Brahmo Samaj, Saraswati's Arya Samaj or Ranade's Prardhana Samaj as in

north Indian Hindu renaissance. The outcastes of Varnasrama Hinduism like Ayya Vaikundhar, Narayanaguru, Ayyankali and Appachan made it possible and provided the model for the caste Hindu elites to follow them. It started with the 1903 inception of SNDP under the auspices of Nanuguru and provided the model for the 1907 SJPS by Ayyan, 1908 Yogakshema Sabha of Nambutiri Brahmans, 1910 PRDS by Appachan and 1914 (Nair) Bhriya Jana Sangham or NSS. Thus, it is clear that Kerala renaissance was envisioned and led by the Avarna the people at the bottom though unfortunately it got hijacked into a Hindu framework in recent times through erasures and hegemonic appropriations. Such Hinduized versions of Kerala renaissance must be critically explicated and exposed in the current conjecture of Hindu Nationalism and Hindu fascism proper, as it is materializing in many parts of the country including the North East. The cultural diversities and differences must be acknowledged in a democracy.

Cultural and Religious Monolith of the Nation and Homogenizing Totalitarian Discourses

Periyar and self respect movement was introduced in Kerala by Sahodaran. He also wrote many editorials on Ambedkar as well in 1930s to 1950s. Sahodaran Ayyappan has written numerous editorials and articles contesting the Brahmanical core of Nationalist formations and comparing the two key public figures in India; Gandhi and Ambedkar. He was also keenly following the Dravidian movement in Tamilakam. Periyar came twice to Vaikom struggles in 1924 and he was inspired by the guru and Sahodaran. Then he also invited Sahodaran to speak in Tamil Nadu. On 24 June 1939 Sahodaran wrote a report titled “A Greater Person than

Mahatma Gandhi” on E V R. The subtitle to this was: “The Agrahara Rule of Congress.” On 29 March 1941 he reported about the agitation led by E V R for stopping special refreshment rooms for Brahmans in the railway stations (Sanu 378).

Ayyappan published a review of Ambedkar’s *Thoughts on Pakistan* on 8 March 1941. In the review Ayyappan critically agreed with the arguments of Ambedkar who said that Nationalism is a double edged sword. On 14 January 1950 he has written a historic editorial titled “The Teaching of Ambedkar.” In these editorials and reports Ayyappan was endorsing the critique of caste, Brahmanism and Hindu Nationalism found in the writing and speeches of Ambedkar and E V R (Sanu 379). Critique of caste and internal imperialism was more important for him than a monolithic Nationalism that was elitist and hegemonic because it was drawing from the Brahmanical Hindu order of things. He outrightly rejected Madan Mohan Malavya’s Jai Sri Ram at Tirunakara and termed him as a brutal murderer of Sambuka and Bali (Sekher 2012: 68).

Minority Question and the Threat of Fascism

It was Gandhi who sent back all the minorities from the Vaikom struggle. Barrister George Joseph was sent away. The Sikhs were forced to leave who were feeding the volunteers. Gandhi got this idea from Sardar K M Panikar who advised him. The idea of Savarna Jadha or caste Hindu procession was also that of Gandhi. Sahodaran was a critic of Gandhism and its repressive and passive Hindu hegemony. Sahodaran was a liberal democrat. He was for liquidating Hinduism. He is the most vibrant face of guru’s committed acts and words towards ending caste and its hegemonic religion. He was also

farsighted in raising the minority issue in the debate on democracy in and out of legislative assembly. He pointed out that a mere domination of the majority of numbers would result in the erasure and silencing of the minor voices in the legislative assembly. The aspirations and anxieties of the minorities must find a place in the democratic legislative process and the minor subjects must also get sufficient representation in the democratic institution and in public life at large. The representative democracy paradigm of Sahodaran was so close to Ambedkar. These champions of democracy in India prove the fundamental fact that democracy is the politics of representation.

Sahodaran was aware of the pitfalls of majoritarian politics in that early stage itself. He was also making prophetic comments on the challenges ahead for Indian democracy while making the minority question visible in the house of the assembly. His awareness about the micro operations of power and the threat of fascism in the form of pseudo majority mass mobilization and anti minority cultural Nationalism was also remarkable in these contexts.

Liquidating Hinduism and its Caste Hierarchy or Varnasramadharma

Sahodaran has repeatedly exhorted that only by liquidating Hinduism the people can achieve real freedom and equality. The lead disciple of Nanuguru was a pluralist. Though Ayyappan was born a “Hindu” outside its Varna structure he became a Buddhist, rationalist and humanist towards the mature face of his life. From a very young age itself he found inequality and injustice in the religious and social fields of Hindu society. He identified caste and the elite ideology of Brahmanism as instrumental in the perpetuation

of caste envy, hierarchy and untouchability the root cause of all the inequities in his society.

Ayyappan had also countered the recurrent arguments by Hindu fellow travelers that the original Vedic Hinduism was pure and harmless and it degenerated into a casteist system only later on. In the 1920 itself Ayyappan had written that at no period of time from the Vedic ages onwards Hinduism was devoid of caste. Hindu religion is a caste based religion from the early Aryan invasion and Vedic period onwards. According to him we might get the egg of a pachyderm or the horns of a bunny but a Hindu religion without caste is impossible (Sanu 440). And India could excel only when the casteist religion of Hinduism is abolished here. India would attain self rule only then. Till then this great country would weep. This was his early and well conceived position regarding the reform of Hinduism which is actually covert and wolfish Brahmanism in sheep's naïve clothing.

Cosmopolitan and Multi Cultural Democratic Interpretation of the Englightend One

Ayyappan was also in solidarity with Mitavadi C Krishnan in his scathing critique of Hinduism. C Krishnan was also doing the same thing in Malabar after embracing Buddhism like Ayyappan. Through his editorial powers he appealed to the Thiyas of Malabar to abandon Hindu religion which is a euphemism for caste and embrace the ethical religious culture of Buddhism which is more egalitarian and democratic. For Ayyappan and Krishnan Buddhism represented the cultural past of Kerala and a challenge and critique of Brahmanism and caste. Ayyappan translated the *Dharmapada* of Buddha into Malayalam in collaboration with Justice Ayyakkutty. Later he also prompted Mooloor S

Padmanabha Paniker who was another reformist poet and elder disciple of Nanuguru, to do another new translation which is acknowledged by the poet himself in the end of the text in 1925 (Mooloor 78). Mooloor has historicized and textualized all the major incidents in the life of the guru as the Vaikom incident in which his rikshaw was blocked.

Sahodaran has also compared Nanuguru to Buddha in his poetry. He has also radically interpreted the teaching of his guru as “No caste, No religion, No god for the human, but Dharma, Dharma and Dharma.” The concept of Dharma or ethics is drawn from Buddha’s teachings. It is also interesting to note that the master piece of Ambedkar is titled *Buddha and His Dharma*. So we could easily see that Neo Buddhism provided an alternative epistemology and liberation theology for the subaltern in India at the wake of the 20th century in confrontation with the Brahmanical imagination of the nation. All the Bahujan thinkers and social revolutionaries referred back to Buddha for advancing the basic critique of caste, Brahmanism and Hindu Nationalism (Omvedt 2005). From Ambedkar to Ayyothee Thasar to Ayyappan we could see this great commitment for the welfare of the people, the Bahujana Hita and Sugha in Buddha’s own words. These subaltern leaders were not obsessed with the mystery of gods but the misery of their fellow human beings as the enlightened one himself. Buddhism provided them an ethical and egalitarian alternative nationalism and global internationalism. Minor religious sects like Christianity and Islam provided the subaltern in India and Kerala the space for self determination and human improvement, though Brahman-Sudra alliance has polluted these alternative religions as in the case of dalit xianity and dalit Sikh dilemma. The dalit movements led by Poyka and Ayyankali also gain importance in these contexts.

Religious Conversion and Countering the Monolith of the Nation

Against the monolith of the Sanatana Nation and Hindu Nationalism, as Dharmateerthar a sage-disciple of Nanuguru who wrote the *History of Hindu Imperialism* (1941) and converted to Christianity, Sahodaran also projected the freedom of opinion and religion and inaugurated the subversive discourse on conversion. Asan and Murkothu Kumaran were against this Buddhist fervor of Ayyappan and they strongly opposed conversion. Asan wrote the essay “Mataparivarthana Rasavadam (The Paradoxical Argument for Conversion)” against the argument for conversion that was in the air in the early decades of 20th century Kerala. It was rejected by *Mitavadi* outrightly as its editor Krishnan upheld the freedom of choice and Buddhism. It was published by Murkothu Kumaran in book form. C V Kunhircaman the elder disciple of Nanuguru and a towering intellectual and writer of the time was also in favor of conversion.

C V had even participated in the Maramon Christian convention on the banks of Pampa and expressed his musings on including Christianity as a choice for one of the largest communities in Kerala. He also published a controversial “Yellow Book” on conversion during this period to awaken the consciousness of Savarna monarchy and state system in Travancore. These strategic intellectual interventions of C V immensely influenced the caste Hindu authorities’ decision to open up the temples for all Hindus. There was also an argument to remain secular and self-reliant as an independent community, mostly articulated by the work of E Madhavan, called *Swatantra Samudayam* (1934). Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj and Sikhs also came to Kerala for propagating their

messages during this period (Subramanyam 470). Some families south west of Vaikom, in Chertala region including Advocate K C Kuttan and friends converted to Sikhism as well. It is said that K C Kuttan and friends embraced Sikhism at Amritsar Golden Temple and Ambedkar was there during the ceremony. Ambedkar visited Kerala twice in 1935 and 1950 June 8-11. And even today we have Ezhava households using the surname Singh in this region, though the religious practice and rituals withered away.

But Narayana Guru was unmoved by these turbulent debates of religious choice and conversion. For him ritualistic religion was immaterial. He always emphasized the improvement of the human qualities across and irrespective of canonical religions. He was neither for nor against any religion. He was for humanism and humanity at large. But he always upheld the individual freedom and choice in religious matters. He equally respected and defended the mentalities of the religious and rationalists in his students. He was able to develop equal communication with Asan as well as Ayyappan. We could see at this moment that the philosophy and praxis of inclusion, inter subjectivity and pluralism and polyphonic nationalism evolve in Ayyappan under the unique tutelage of his great guru.

Resisting Ram and Keen Camaraderie with the Dravidian Movement

It is the guru who wrote in “Jeeva Karunaya Panchakam” or Five Verses in Compassion and Mercy to Life, in 1914 itself that the killer has no virtue and he is equal to a killing animal. So Sahodaran had no hesitation in asking Gandhi in 1925 about the serial killer Lord Krishna! He also questioned Gandhi on the violence of Hinduism on its others and the

epics and Puranas propagating symbolic violence. Ambedkar in the 1930s has also written about the humanity in question of these killing gods Rama and Krishna in his Riddles. Guru in 1914 also made the historic comment that if it was during Ramraj he would had met with the fate of the Sudra Sambuka, because the Hindus rule by the Smritis.

When Madan Mohan Malavya tried to impose Rama mantra on the Avarnas of Kerala in the 1929 annual meeting of the S N D P Yogam at Kottayam it was Sahodaran who resisted it by invoking Ravan. T K Madhavan as the organizer pacified the protestors and Sahodaran released a critical note in dissent with Malavya then and there. Ayyappan quoted a popular statement by T M Nair of Madras in his note: “The Ethiopian could change his color, the leopard could shed its spots, but the caste consciousness of Brahman would linger.” This episode cited by M K Sanu (453) and Subramanyam establish firmly the inter connections and dialogues between the Sahodara movement and anti Brahman movement that flourished in Tamil Nadu at that time. Sahodaran also wrote many editorials on Dravidian movement.

Exposing ‘Hindu Unity’ and its Hidden Caste Hindu Agenda

Sahodaran had to confront this Hindu unity façade of Savarna forces again in the form of the Hindu Maha Mandalam platform floated by Mannam and R Sankar for their own purposes of power in the Thiru-Kochi politics during 1949-50. The religious mobilization attracted a lot of illiterate Avarnas and enriched the social leverage of the Savarna leaders. Sahodaran exposed the Savarna agenda in the masquerade through his public speeches and writings and took a clear and well founded position against the charming

notion of “Hindu unity.” He also received the support of Members of Legislative Assembly like V Madhavan and K K Viswanadhan. Sahodaran was able to check the mass participation of backward communities in the Hindu Maha Mandalam. Now as in the case of the Vimochana Samaram the right wing riot against the first democratically elected Left Government in Kerala, Mannam’s Sudra hidden agendas and loyalty to CIA and Golwalkar are exposed in hindsight. For Vimochana riots the caste Hindu forces received American funding and support and for Hindu Mandalam the RSS and Guruji Golwalkar provided the backup. As we have seen Mannam became leader of the Savarna Jadha or caste Hindu procession in 1924. This paternalistic idea came from Gandhi. In his later stage Mannam had done a lot of reactionary and racist hate speeches against the people as in Pazhavangady speech, Muthukulam and Sastamangalam speeches in 1950s and 60s. In Sastamangalam speech he said that Ezhavas are the offspring of pigs and their freedom of movement and entry into the temples must be repealed (Vasavapaniker 385). He also invited and tried to establish Savarkar and Golvarkar as Hindu icons in Kerala.

Hindu Fervor and Cultural Nationalism

According to Ayyappan Hindu unity fervor of Hindu Nationalism is just a façade to attract and win the votes of illiterate backward classes. The real intention behind the Hindu unity agenda is a craving for political power through such pseudo campaigns and coercions. He also warns the perpetrators about infuriating fanatic Hindu sentiments that could be catastrophic and fascist in the future. Sahodaran adds that Indian culture is not just Hindu. It is a composite culture and ethnic amalgam. Making India, a mere Hindu

nation is an erasure of history and a violent reductionism. He argued repeatedly that Hindu Nationalism is a totalitarian or fascist agenda (Sekher 2012: 34).

Sahodaran also elaborates that we must look forward to modern human sciences and applied sciences for nation building instead of looking back to an imaginary Hindu golden age. A revival of old obscurantist texts of Hindu Brahmanism would only reproduce hegemony and reiterate inequality and exclusion. These have become prophetic in the present as the Hindu nationalist party has even tried to make the *Gita* the National text of India.

Representation and Inclusive Democracy

Mannam and other caste Hindu leaders were asked to go for just and adequate representation in priesthood and other iconic positions within the Hindu temple before they talk about Hindu unity by Sahodaran. Through his analysis and critique of the consolidation of the Hindu sentiments by some Savarna forces who tried to mobilize the backward Hindu communities for their vested interests by playing on their religious fervor, Sahodaran warns the people about the trappings in the homogenizing Hindu discourse which is totalizing and hegemonic in effect. The summary of his arguments is that Hinduism is a myth and numerous hierarchical and unequal castes and communities are real in the cultural materiality of India. There could be a union of equals. But the so called Hindu communities are not equal by any rate. They were historically placed in a hierarchy of human status and rights. The current backward classes were denied education and human rights for many millennia because of their outcaste or Avarna status or lack of it in the Hindu Varnasramadharma, idealizing which Gandhiji has

written and published a book. It is a mockery of history that the NSS has now won the “economic reservation” in the Devaswom board after their pressure tactics in the RSS led Sabarimala riots. The irony is that more than 80 percent of it was filled with the same caste. Now the Nair caste has grabbed 10 more and enjoys almost cent percent in Devaswam board. Even before the Union Government implemented EWS in 2019 January such a system was established in Kerala in Nov 2018 itself. It is a total sabotage of Indiandemocracy and representation system its foundation. Political representation and democratic participation of people in power are destroyed through the invalid economic criterion.

By infuriating the Hindu sentiment the covert Savarna forces are erasing this long history of exclusion and denial of various forms of capital to the subaltern. As Pierre Bourdieu has enlightened us capital is plural as identity is (Bourdieu 1986). Economics is only one aspect of identity and capital. There are cultural and social forms of capital and identity. Making India, Hindu is a neo Brahmanical agenda to which the subaltern people must not lose their battle. In a society marked by social exclusion and inequality the various unequal communities must seek justice and equal opportunity first as independent players in representative social democracy. The subaltern communities must voice their historical difference and dissent in the constitutional arena of the politics of the new subjectivities that is termed as democracy. The state must also acknowledge the denial of historic shares and ensure inclusion and equity through affirmative representation policies and projects. According to Ayyappan the state and its constitution must guarantee this social justice and equal opportunity to the marginalized. There should be

clear and strong social contracts and policy positions while addressing historic inequality.

The Hindu alliance was self annihilated on the issue of reservation for backward communities. The Savarna ideologues in the unity movement used the Hindu unity as a cover to suppress the strong demands for inclusion and affirmative representation by the marginalized communities. They also abused the backward communities of communalism whenever they demanded their rightful shares in education and public service according to population. Ayyappan was warning against this opportunistic coercion of the Brahmanical forces. The Savarnas were always self proclaimed secularists, and the subalterns fighting for their just shares in power were condemned as communal in order to save the Savarna monopolies in power and resources of the state that runs on the tax revenue of the people. It is interesting to note that the Hindu unity facades are still used by the Hindu Nationalist forces in Kerala time and again to sabotage and undermine the causes of social justice and affirmative action through various opportunistic alliances.

Ramraj and Hindswaraj: Critique of Gandhism and the Paternalistic Nationalism

The demolition of Babari Mazjid is the culmination of Hindutva in recent times, but the demolition or seizure of holy shrines of the religious other is not new to the Brahmanical Hindu religion. It began with the taking over of many Sramana sites from the Sungan times onwards. While Phule imagined future India as Baliraj and Christuraj, Gandhiji imagined it as Ramraj. It is strikingly futuristic that Sahodaran imagined it as the kingdom of Ambedkar in early 20th century by acknowledging his contributions to democracy in India in

the poem “Caste India.” As an ardent critique of the Brahmanical imagination of the Nation and the National movement led by the Savarna elite, Kerala renaissance leaders like Ayyappan could not approve of the hegemonic conception of the Ram centred Nation and Nationalism by Gandhi. He was also critical of Gandhi’s unlimited use of Hindu Brahmanical symbolism and imagery in order to move illiterate masses like Varnasramadharma, Ramrajya, Hindswaraj and Harijanodharana. He also identified repressive and fascist dictation in Gandhi’s practices like the hunger strike. In brief Gandhi’s political practice was the least democratic and inclusive for a social revolutionary like Ayyappan. He was sure that the religious revivalism and Hindu Brahmanical affiliation of Gandhi would rejuvenate the Savarna fascism in India.

In 1925 when Gandhi visited Kochi Sahodaran met him. From Kochi Gandhi went to Travancore. At Kanyakumari he was denied entrance to the temple by the Brahmanic priesthood for being a Vaisya. Unfortunately Gandhi succumbed to that casteist decree. The newspapers of the time reported the incident with all due significance. Ayyappan composed his poem “Gandhi Message” in these contexts. He criticizes not just the Brahmanic priesthood and their naked and barbaric practice of caste untouchability but Gandhi too for his acceptance of this most disrespectful dictation. The disgracing surrender of Gandhi before Brahmanism and caste is compared to the shameless act of a good old doggy that licks the kicking feet of the oppressive master.

Though interventions and corrections like these slightly influenced Gandhi’s attitude to Varnadharma and Hindutva

he was essentially and ultimately a Hindu to the end. He furiously attacked the notion of reserved constituencies for the untouchables and depressed castes. This once again brought to light the historic debates between Gandhi and Ambedkar. Gandhi tried to dictate and hijack the situation with his hunger strike, which led to the infamous Poona pact (1932). Commenting on these ancient Brahmanical moral hijacking tactics in which moral intimidation and pressurizing predominate political reason and social justice, Ayyappan coined the term “Poona Pattiny” or Poona starving to critically expose its unethical ideology and immoral practice in his editorials. This coinage has become a hit in Kerala journalism and political rhetoric ever since, especially with the critics of Brahmanical nationalism and Gandhism.

Early Warning against Hinduization of Dalit Bahujans

As in present Kerala and India the Hinduization of Avarna forms the backbone of Hindutva ascend to power. The Sudra and some Chandala have become more Hindu than the Brahan. The newly Hinduized masses become its agents and vampires. In a statement Sahodaran severely criticizes the Hinduization drive of the excluded depressed castes in Gandhian Harijanodharana project. It condemns the naming of the Dalit Bahujans as “Harijans” by Gandhi. (In Gujarat the homeland of Gandhi it was the name given to the children of feudal prostitutes who were kept in the Hindu temples and used by the priestocracy and feudal patriarchy. So for Dalits it is a derogatory term which is equal to calling them bastards.) Sahodaran clearly records that this Gandhian term is disrespectful for the depressed classes. He also asks Gandhi to stop compelling the untouchables to chant the name of Ram. No self respectful outcaste could chant the name of

Ram who represents Aryan invasion, genocidal Brahmanic violence and Varnadharma.

Sahodaran also urges Gandhi to stop the propaganda regarding the sacred cow metaphysics of Brahmanism. The irrational aversion to cattle meat practiced by caste Hindus (which has its origin in the post Buddhist Hindu revivalism that projected vegetarianism and moral sanctity in order to challenge the philosophy of non violence posed by Buddhism and Jainism. The Vedic Brahmins were meat eaters, says the Sanskrit texts of the time) must not be imposed on the Dalit Bahujans who had historically utilized the locally available resources as part of their work culture. This neo vegetarianism is also a ploy for the Hinduization of the masses, adds Ayyappan (Sanu 471). He appeals to Gandhi to stop these anti people, anti untouchable and anti minority Hinduization drive and delink it from anti colonial nationalist struggle. It is clear that Sahodarn aptly identified and critiqued the patronizing and paternalistic Hinduization hidden agenda of Gandhian Nationalism and Harijanodharana project. It was done at the time of Gandhi and was given to him in written form in the format of a public statement at a public gathering in Kochi.

Sahodaran also writes that the depressed classes have better options than Hinduism. They must be allowed to choose their religious or political affiliation. Hinduizing them would be harmful for them and for the society at large in the long run. They would not get equal rights and justice within the Hindu fold as long as the caste system and Varnadharma which is so dear to Gandhi, survive. If the untouchables are freed from the Hindu fold they would excel in their human potentials and would provide better models for the caste

Hindus to follow (Sanu 471). Abolishment of dominant and institutionalized religions and the caste system alone are remedies to liberate the untouchables in India (Sanu 472).

Rethinking Religion and Culture; Ayyappaniam and Ambedkarism

A unique critical mode of addressing the crucial question of religion is found in the democratic philosophies and praxes of Ambedkar and Ayyappan. Both these organic intellectuals addressed the cruciality of culture and religion and tried to intervene in that social and ethical sphere. The unique anti caste cultural politics is a lasting futuristic legacy here. In the context of Gandhiji's defense of his Hindu paternalistic Nationalism Sahodaran wrote an editorial "On Varnasrama Dharma." In the analysis he exposes the double speak and contradictions in Gandhi's defense of Chaturvarnyam and his struggles for the uplift of the excluded. He also illustrates the dehumanizing and unjust practice of hereditary vocations and destinies made mandatory by the Varna theory. In his poem "Jati Bharatam" or "Caste India" Sahodaran pays homage to Ambedkar the great champion of the excluded in India (Subramanyam 664). According to Ayyappan in the poem the future India would chant the name of Ambedkar as a Sarana Mantra (of Buddhism) with a heart full of gratitude and contemplation. Ayyappan's imagination and iconic conception of Ambedkar as a Neo Buddha or an enlightened one in the modern democratic age is unique and futuristic.

It is also worth remembering that Sahodaran, Mooloor, Asan and Karupan had also imagined their guru as a Kerala Buddha. It is also remarkable that Ambedkar and Ayyappan represent modernity and social democracy in the caste-ridden society of India and Kerala combining the true spirit of

enlightenment traditions in the east and the west. It could be well seen that this early appraisal of Ambedkarism was also part of Sahodaran's critique of Hindu Nationalism at large. The violent forms of Cultural Nationalism of the Hindutva forces that are already into mob lynching, rape and arson, that are rising all over India and Kerala could be effectively countered, critiqued and resisted through this renaissance legacy of Kerala that emanates from Sahodaran and his guru in particular. There is an urgent need to reread and reinterpret their texts in the light of surging Ambedkarite hermeneutics with a keen sense of social justice and representative democracy.

There is also an emergency to reread and critically rehabilitate the voices from the bottom and margins like Poykayil Appachan who lamented about the absence of dalit history and writing and whose songs and spirituals were prevented from printing for almost a century by the publishing big shots of caste Hindu and caste Christian camaraderie in Kerala that shares and boasts about its bogus Brahmanic lineage in blissful ahistoric and anachronic ignorance, that can be excused but not erased. It is also alarming that pioneers of public space and public education in Kerala like Mahatma Ayyankali are also insulted on social media in Kerala by the Mallu skinheads and neo Nazis. The insults to guru and Ayyan in society is the tip of the iceberg in Kerala where hate campaigns like the Sastamangalam speech are brewing against the founders of democracy and public sphere. The wrath against the representative democracy paradigm is growing even among the so called educated elites and over represented. Democracy can be restored only by restoring the social representation system sabotaged through Constitutional amendments and oligarchic interests. Power must be shared

and decentralized among the people and cultural and symbolic capitals must also be democratized and disseminated among the people. Cultural and ideological elements and crucial socio political factors like religion and caste are to be addressed and understood in India for the sustenance of democracy and humanity at large.

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