

New Dimension of Social Change: Reflections on Mhathma Ayyankali's Dalit Mobilization in Cochin State.

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ABSTRACT : *Kerala society is highly stratified with many glaring inequalities among different socio-economic groups. The most important and numerically significant social category which is traditionally excluded from the main stream society is called Dalits. According to Dr. Gangadhar Pantawane, Dalit is not a caste, Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution. Dalits were always on the marginalized sections of the Kerala society, inequality was the main sources of this marginality which led to insecurity, injustice and exploitation. Dalits also known as untouchables, sit on the lowest rung of Kerala's social order. Dalits who were suppressed slaved and neglected from their social rights. Even their families were disintegrated and their life itself was stories of misery. The denial of basic human rights, lack of access to land and other earning assets and occupations ultimately resulted in to socio- economic deprivations of the Dalits through the process of social exclusion and discrimination.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional social stratification in Cochin State was the division of society in to unequal hierarchical social groups. Caste as a hierarchical social system rooted in a religious principle that imputed inherently pure or polluting status to social groups. Depressed classes in Cochin State are a designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as untouchables. The state has sixty eight Scheduled Castes communities. 'Polluting classes' in Cochin, like Pulayan, Mannan, Parayan, Kannakkan, Vettuvan, Velan and Parayan. They were largely agricultural workers and marginal farmers may be considered as weaker sections. They were also commonly referred to as the 'Depressed Classes' and are sometimes called the 'out castes'.

The transition of the traditional society and the emergence of the modern age had a deep felt impact on Kerala society in general and Depressed class in particular. In the 19th century Kerala witnessed a cultural and ideological struggle against the backward elements of traditional cultural and ideological hegemony of the Brahmanas, this struggle was due to structural changes in the society. Social reforms, spread of English education, introduction of temple entry to all classes of Hindus irrespective of caste, land reforms and activities of the Harijan welfare department and reservation policy have contributed great deal to the social revolution in Kerala. Kerala was fragmented as Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. Cochin State came under the political control of the English rule on 20th October 1795. The establishment of British power in India was a prolonged process of piecemeal conquest and consolidation and the colonization of the economy and society.

II. DALIT MOBILIZATION IN COCHIN STATE.

The present study examines the reflections on Ayyankali's movement in Cochin State channelized in three ways; through the social organization, 'Sadhujana Paripalana Sangham' (organization for the welfare of the Marginalized); fight for 'right of way' or 'Vazhinadakkal Samaram' and 'Struggle for Freedom of Education'. The earth which is the home of humanity suffers from atrocious inequality where a large section of mankind is the victim of oppression and inhuman casteism. This depression had it continued would have been a public disaster the dignity and equality of humanity. A revolutionary struggle for integrity and fraternity of humanity was engineered by a matchless genius called Ayyankali. Ayyankali (1863-1941) was the social reformer, who shook them aware and brought them back in to the mainstream of society. Travancore government nominated Ayyankali to the Sreemoolam Praja Sabha in 1912; he raised the problems of the dalits in the legislature. He firmly believed that unless the caste system was destroyed the social evil of untouchability could be removed and he realized that to achieve this objective the dalit should have political power. He was convinced of the need for an organization to channelize the new found Dalit power through the right course, to spread awareness regarding their rights and to acquire those rights through mobilized strength. In 1907 he founded an organization of the lower caste was the Sadhujana Paripalana Sangham (organization for the welfare of the Marginalized); to emphasize the importance of their aim of winning the right to unrestricted travel, access to schools awareness of good ways of life and protecting the rights of all dalit sections.

An attempt is made in this paper a history of the struggle for social equality by the depressed classes in Cochin State was led by Pandit Karuppan, P. C Chanjan, K. P Vallon, and P.K Chathan Master. Pandit Karuppan. In the state of Cochin the depressed class had been living a life of forcible suppression, carrying the yoke of slavery like animals in the dark depths of ignorance. It was due the inspiration drawn from Ayyankkali. In the Cochin legislative council Pandit Karpuppan was the first nominated member of the *Avarnas*. He spoke against practice of caste distinctions among the depressed classes of the state of Cochin and stood for the uplift of the poor section of the society. In 1913 Pandit Karpuppan and Krishnadiyashan launched 'Cochin Pulaya Mahasabhha'. They were prohibited from entering the streets of Eranakulam or walking on important public roads. They were not allowed to assemble in any common place for meetings .To keep such meetings away from the eyes of the land lords, so that meeting was conducted in backwaters, Karuppan asked the Pulays to come in row boats to the expanse of the Eranakulam backwaters and tie their boats together. There he addressed them on a wooden –planked platform and charted out strategies for their emancipation by forming a sabha.the president of 'Cochin Pulaya Mahasabhha' was elected by Krishnadiyasan.He was the leader of pulaya community and their activities provoked the missionaries. Later he was converted to Christianity, so the sabha got disintegrated, the activities of sabha was led by K P Vallon.

K P Vallon(1900-1940) was actively participated in Cochin Pulaya Maha Sabhha activities with the inspiration drawn from the Pandit Karuppan. In recognition of his outstanding service to the Harijan community Vallon was nominated the member of the legislative council in 1931.Vallon took to fight for social freedom was to struggle for the right of depressed classes to walk along public roads and he raised the problems of this in the legislature. He firmly believed that unless the caste system was destroyed the social evil of untouchability could be removed and he realized that to achieve this objective the depressed classes should have political power.He was elected to the leader of sabha in the annual conference of sabha in 1924 at Eranakulam Maharajas College. After the demise of Vallon it was P K Chathan Master who took the leader ship of Cochin Pulaya Mahasabhha'.mean while the idea of the amalgamation of the All Travancore Pulaya Mahasabha which was founded by T T Keasavan Sastri and Cochin Pulaya Mahasabhha originated Kerala Pulaya Mahasabhha took the shape in 1969 conference at Kollam, which was attended by selected representatives from every district. The sabha got registered only in 1970.P .KChathan Master was elected to the founder president of the sabha.

P.K Chathan Master (1923-1988) was tried to bring awakening among the depressed people worked for their self respect and tried to get social justice for them. He devoted his life for the upliftment of the most oppressed and suppressed section of the society, especially the Pulayas in Kerala. Master founded the Kerala Pulaya Mahasabha, in order to organize the lower caste people and their fight for the eradication of social inequalities, such as untouchability. His aims were to fight against the inequalities prevailed in the society and try to humanize the people. Master occupied a unique position, being a shudra himself his understanding of untouchability and the steps to tackle it had a depth of its own. He tried to bring awakening among the depressed people worked for their self respect and tried to get social justice for them. He devoted his life for the upliftment of the most oppressed and suppressed section of the society.

The caste system in Cochin State was much more oppressive them that prevailing in other parts of Kerala. The caste system contains both social oppression and exploitation. They were prohibited from entering the streets of Eranakulam or walking on important public roads. The government organized an exhibition of agricultural products at Eranakulam in which Diwan W. H Bhore was the guest of honor, Karuppan during his speech, brought to the attention of the Diwan that the Pulayas who had labored hard to cultivate the agricultural products showcased in the exhibition and were not allowed to see the exhibition. Touched the words of Karuppan, the Diwan ordered the organizers to allow the Pulayas to entire the grounds. It was a result of his endeavors that the Pulayas and other depressed classes secured the right to walk in freedom along the public roads in Cochin. Kuttamkulam struggle for the 'right of way' or 'Vazzhinadakkal Samaram'; struggle for protest against untouchability in to the premise of the temple entry race began on 6th July 1946, was held in Ayyankau ground in Irinjalakuda.The history of Irinjalakuda is related to an important temple namely Kudalmanikyam. The untouchables were prohibited to walk from Kuttammkulam road to west and prohibition was exhibited in a board, through the way of kuttamkulam road to Kudalmanikyam temple. The Pulayas and other lower castes were not allowed to travel through the public roads. But Christians and Muslims had permission to walk through these roads. The caste organizations like S N D P, Samastha Cochin Pulaya Mahasabha, the political parties like Prajamandalam, Labour Organizations, Beedi workers organizations protested against this injustice. Workers and laborers united together and they reacted against this untouchability and it created a storm in the country.Mr. P.Gangatharan while addressing a public gathering, asked the people "is there any untouchability in Kuttamkulam shall we go and look into it".The people under the leadership of P. K. Kumaran Master, Saratha Kumaran, K .V. Unni, P.K.Chathan Master. The strength of the people raged.

The police under D. S .P. Simon Manjuran and inspector Sankunny stood with gun and lathi. The crowd rushed towards them. Then the police fought with them. In the evening; what has happened in Ayyankku ground people proclaimed a hartal and it affected the life of the people. The King ordered the partial responsible administration in the country. The political prisoners were released from the prison, but the organization was not in a position to carry on its activities in a normal way. As a result the untouchable's classes got the right to walk along the kuttamkulam road. One of the most important struggle connected with the campaign for the eradication of untouchability was the Paliyam Samaram in 1948, they demand for not right to entry in to the temples in Cochin, but for the right of the untouchables to walk along the public road in the Paliyam.(paliyam estate belonged to the Paliyath Achans, the hereditary ministers of the Cochin Maharajas and the biggest land lords of the state) Paliyath Achan Chief Minister of Cochin, was not open to the road to Avarnas and non Hindus. The main political parties and social organizations of the state formed an action council to organize a Satyagraha to force the Paliyam family to throw open the road to all people, irrespective of caste or religion ,the Sathyagraha went on for hundred days during the period December - April 1948.The volunteers who took part in it were subjected to repressive measures like arrest, lathi-charge etc.Willing to participation of even the princes of the royal families of Cochin and Kodumgallore as well as of several members of Namboothiri families. One of the major incidents connected (the hundredth day) with satyagraha ,a freedom fighter by name A.G Velayudhan met with tragic death in a police lathi- charge. The satyagraha was suspended. Mean while in April 1948 all temples in Cochin were thrown open to all Hindus, irrespective of caste. As a result the Avarnas and non- Hindus got the right to walk along the paliyam road and it had helped to create a climate infavour of the eradication of untouchability.

Education is the pulse of the progress of any community. Kerala was a land which denied education to the untouchable's classes. Main goal of Ayyankali was to empower his community, 'literate through education'. He started first famer's struggle of Kerala, was related to school entry agitation.Ayyankali's movement produced a deep impact on the social life of the depressed classes in Cochin State. School entry agitation was not reported in Cochin State among the depressed classes. But Christian missionaries were at first forced to establish separate school for the education of the depressed classes. After the formation of the Cochin Pulaya Maha Sabha leaders of the Pulayas realized that petitions and welfare measures did not solve the problems of low caste people. They believed that education was an important weapon for the emancipation of the community and carried on intensive campaigns among the Pulayas to send their children to school.Pandit Karuppan and K.P.Vallon raised the problems of the depressed classes in the Cochin legislature. One of the important issues was the education of the depressed classes. Taking this aspect in to consideration government has adopted a liberal policy in the matter of giving educational concessions to depressed students. They are exempted from payment of fees at all levels of education .Lamp sum grants for the purchase of books, clothes and free meals are given. Night schools, social welfare centers were opened in areas where depressed classes live in large numbers. In 1931 the government appointed full time protector to look after the literacy programme meant for the depressed classes. As a result of these steps taken by the government there was a remarkable increase in the number of depressed pupils. K.P.Vallon introduced a resolution seeking government help to students of the depressed classes which the govt accepted. His efforts led to the establishment of a government hostel for dalits in Ernakulum and the government gave free food and accommodation to the students. Spread of education even among the lowest strata of the society created great demand for employment in the government service.

Concluded my paper Ayyankkali brought forth immense changes in the lives of the people of backward community. His Sathujana Paripalana Sangham for the first time in the country brought all the depressed classes under one banner and gave them a political identity of their own. They were not allowed to use public roads – the struggles shows that the emergence of strong will and determination among the dalits to protest and assert their rights .Literacy movement among dalits has played a significant role in bringing behind about awareness among the downtrodden. caste stratification predominately in every aspect of life, such as food, dress and houses of various castes and the groups which were once static, ignorant and superstitions has now transformed themselves in to dynamic and energetic groups and also shift in their attitude, mentality, styles and human relations. In short dalit mobilization programmes act as tool for social and economic mobility of depressed classes in Cochin State.

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