

Destiny Changes

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Abstract

Always struggles generate within a society as responses towards the existing social order and that struggles lead the community forwards. Social Renaissance in Kerala was prominent during the 19th and early 20th century. In the field of Kerala's Social Renaissance, Mahathma Ayyankali employed his on method which created enormous influence on the Kerala society. Ayyankali was considered to be a courageous and an activist in the field of Social Reform Movements in India. Aggressive struggles of Ayyankali was compulsory for the downtrodden community of then Kerala society. He realized that the illiteracy among the Dalits is one of the main factor which makes them the downtrodden communities. Around the same period of time, the colonial government was making initiatives to develop a small group among the natives to go ahead with their diplomacies in that particular area. This article discuss about the struggles of Mahathma Ayyankali for the struggle for the Right to Education for the downtrodden community in Kerala.

Keywords: Social Renaissance, Ayyankali etc.

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Always struggles generate within a society as responses towards the existing social order and that struggles lead the community forwards. Aggressive struggles of Ayyankali was compulsory for the downtrodden community of then Kerala society. He realized that the illiteracy among the Dalits is one of the main factor which makes them the downtrodden communities. Around the same period of time, the colonial government was making initiatives to develop a small group among the natives to go ahead with their diplomacies in that particular area.

Mr Mitchell, was the director of Education in Thiruvithanore (Thiruvananthapuram or Trivandrum) was very much concerned about development of the downtrodden community. Ayyankali and his organization Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam, submitted many petitions to the government to allow their children to study in school with other children. As a result of Ayyankal's petitions, Resident pressurized the Diwan. Only then the Diwan realized that his order that he was signed in 1907 was hoarding. On 1st March 1910, Diwan's order of 1907 for admitting Dalit children into government schools it was released to public after three years. But the school

management comprising of the landlords refused to implement the order.

On 1st March 1910, Ayyankali reached Ooroot Ambalam School in Balaramapuram, Thiruvananthapuram with Panchami the five year old daughter of Poojari Ayyan, for admission, escorted by his supporters. There occurred an intensive fight between Ayyankali's army and the savarna diku hooligans. Nairs attacked Pulaya huts, destroyed many and took away fowls, goats and bullocks. They molested women and beaten the men folk. Many ran and hid in the fields to escape the fury. Those who fought back were crushed. After seven days of rioting, the smoke and dust settled down. Though riots ended, temporarily in Ooroot Ambalam created critical consequences in Marayamuttam, Venganoor, Perumbazhuthoor, Kunathukaal etc. As same as the Revolt of 1857, this riot came to be called as Pulaya Mutiny by the upper caste historians. But these suppressions made the struggle of Dalits for a free society became more vibrant.

Swadeshahimani ("The Patriot"). K Ramakrishna Pillai, the editor of the Desabhimani newspaper who always through his paper 'Swadeshahimaani'. Talked about the wide areas like equality, democracy etc... and who translated the biography of Karl Marx into Malayalam was strongly against the government's order to admit Dalit children into schools, he expressed his disagreement in the next day's editorial page including the statements like "... to put together those who have been cultivating their brain for generations with those

who have been cultivating their fields is like putting a horse and buffalo in the same yoke." (Swadeshbhmani 02/03/1910).

Ayyankali, Being the first dalit representative who was nominated to Sree Mulam Popular Assembly* in 1912 he addressed in front of the King as well as the Diwan about the aspirations of all the downtrodden communities towards education.

In spite of the best efforts of the government, Dalits were not given admission. Ayyankali found a way out--to build own schools hopping that one could study without depending on the dikus. They received the approval from the Department of Education. In 1904, the Dalits under his leadership made their exertions to start a school in order to admit their children. The first school in the history of Dalits was started at Venganoor, Thiruvananthapuram. But it was fired up by his antagonists. But their determination established another at the same place. They faced many hurdles to find out a teacher for the school. Among Dalits there was none educated enough to be one. No one who loved his life came forward to become a teacher in this school. The government paid Rs six per month. To encourage teachers to teach Dalits, the government offered Rs nine per month. After intense search one Parameshwaran Pillai, a Nair young man of Kaithamukku in Thiruvananthapuram decided to join the school. The new teacher entered the school reluctantly, as though he was entering a garbage dump. His socio-cultural reflexes took over when his progressive intellectualism came face to face with societal reality. He was afraid. He shown it. The situation was also quite tense. In no time hooting started from all around the school. There followed aggressive manhandling between the opponents and supporters of the school that turned to a riot. Some came to attack the 'master'. The 'master' was shivering like a leaf. Still the classes continued in spite of the fear stained atmosphere. That night the school was destroyed. In no time a new school structure came up. The opposition to the school increased, but the efforts to continue the school was not sacrificed. The master came to school and went to his home in Kaitha-mukku escorted by bodyguards. This went off for some time though the school was destroyed at least five times. Each time the school was destroyed, riots succeeded. When the master supposed danger to his life, he wanted to give his resignation. But Ayyankali calmed him and assured him security by giving body guards to him.

Ayyankali in Legislature

The Sri Mulam Popular Assembly was the first popularly elected legislature in the history of India. Its forerunner legislative council in Travancore in 1888 with eight appointed members. Sri Mulam Thirunal Ramavarma who became maharajah of Travancore in 1888 initiated the popular Assembly. Ayyankali was nominated to Sree

Mulam Popular Assembly in 1912. Ayyankali who can be called as the first Dalit representative who was nominated to a state assembly especially during the pre-independent period. As being a member of the India's first state legislature he raised the problems of the downtrodden in front of the King as well as the Diwan more especially for the right to property, right to education, right to reservation, right for wage and so on.

"As a representative of the Pulayas I convey to the government that our gratitude for the help regarding admission of our children in Venganur Elementary School. In Southern Travancore, only seven schools have allowed Pulaya children admission. I submit that all schools in the state admit our children."

"The Pulayas can get admission in all school where the Ezhava (BC) students are allowed," the Dewan clarified. "New students may be given fee concessions."

Ayyankali continued.

"Fee concessions given to Mohammedans, who are comparatively ahead of us, may be given also to Pulaya children."

Dewan: "Are not Pulaya children getting the Concessions available to Mohammedans? I think it can be done." This revealed the Dewan's ignorance about the depressed classes.

Ayyankali: "Pulayas could be appointed in Engineering, Health, Medical departments. There are capable people who could be employed in Education department too. Though the Royal Decree has been announced to public giving Pulayas the right to walk on streets and to use public courts, they are harassed and obstructed. Steps be taken to give us relief."

"I salute the earlier order of the government to allow Pulaya children to government schools. But officials in the schools find some or other excuse to prevent their admission. There is no problem where admission has been given already. The situation in Neyyattinkara, Pulladu and Venganur will justify my words. The main perpetrators are assistant teachers in the school, not the public. So I appeal to the government to give strict orders to the Directors of education to oversee implementation of the orders of the government." (On 4th March 1912)

By the end of 1914 orders were received checking strict submission with the government's admission policy regarding Dalit children. Knowing that the Savarna are burying government orders, the director of education Mr Mitchell himself visited schools to get first-hand information.

When the education officials were admitting the Avarna students, the situation turned critical. The Savarna men set fire to Mr Mitchell's jeep. Still, the officials did their best to make the government policy a success. The students also came forward with determination. Even 16 year old child who came for admission to first standard. Eight Pulaya children were admitted that day.

The children who were admitted also suffered mental torture. When they entered the class, the Savarna kids walked out the other door (*from the autobiography of Mooloor S Paadmanabha Panikkar*). As a result admission were denied to Dalit children. When admission was refused to Dalit students, communal riots erupted all over the state, worst affected being Balaramapuram, Chenganoor, Kaniyapuram, Kazhakkootam, Kavaalam, Pulladu, Perinadu, Chennithala etc.

To prevent untouchables from entering school, the upper caste men made every effort. But it ended in a bloody revolution.

"...this year only one person has been nominated from my community in place of three in the previous years. Last years' progress in the Pulaya community is a proof of Pulayas being capable of making improvement in their literacy with the help and permission of the government. In all public places, most departments, schools allow us entry. Still, in truth only not more than 25 schools only admit my people in the state.

"Among the Ezhava community one section joined in the attacks on Pulayas. This has pained Sree Narayana Guru very much. This was the reason why the Swami suggested that SNDP should work for the uplift of all oppressed and depressed people." (Mayyanattu K Damodaran states thus in the biography of the Swamy.) The incidence in question took place in Oorootambalam in 1914. This incidence was also mentioned by PK Govindappilla in Praja Sabha.

"Obstructions to progress of Pulayas are placed mainly by uneducated upper caste persons. No Pulaya child lacks cleanliness. Their dress may not be up to date but neat. So lack of cleanliness, the most common excuse for not admitting a Pulaya child will only chase them into the lap of some other faith. Conversion will make Pulayas ineligible for admission and concessions, and, and, the fear of shortage of labour in the fields due to higher literacy among Pulayas and subsequent higher wages were some of the baseless fears because with the end to slavery, trade and agriculture made progress. To make separate schools for Pulayas is not appropriate. That would deny admission to Pulaya children in other schools. Half fee concession is also not beneficial since only 30 boys and one girl have joined school. Scholarships for higher education would help Pulaya children. To ask for full fee concession for children of my community when the well of Mohammedan community gets half fee concession is not asking for too much.

"Admission for my community in girls' schools is more difficult. I appeal for Pulaya children to be given vocational training along with education."

This was the best speech made by Ayyankali in the Sabha. He intended to acquire his community's rights step by step. He approached the problems of social progress from the psychological angle. He was also aware of the desire of Pulayas to have their own schools while recognising the disadvantages. His practical expertise in economics was another facet of his intellect that was revealed that day.

"There is no doubt that this community has had an awakening. If they proceed at this pace, they would reach great heights. In spite of burning their schools, destroying their huts, cutting off their women's ears, they could not be stopped. The more they are harassed, the more they get helped by God..."

Interestingly, there was an overall rise in the number of students of all communities in the period 1913-1916. Nairs by 45 per cent, Christian students by 50 percent, Muslims by nearly a 100 percent, Parayas more than 400 per cent and Pulayas by almost 600 per cent!

Ayyankali vanished from public memory for quite some time. It took about 40 years to evaluate his service to the society. Speaking on March 1980 at the Kumaran Asan Memorial Lecture, Comrade EMS Namboodirippadu, Kerala's Chief Minister spoke about the historical agricultural labour strike of 1907 led by Ayyankali thus:

"...in 1907-8 Ayyankali organised the agricultural workers' strike. He brought together the unorganised and splintered people and made them conscious of organisational power." (Asan & Malayala Literature, pp 54.)

Ayyankali was the first labour leader of Kerala, as well as most certainly in India too. Those who forget even Ambedkar's role in India's history, wakening up after decades and keen to rewrite history including a great legend in the field of redesigning the Kerala society whom they freely forgot once.

March 1st of 1910 had changed the destiny of Dalits in Kerala. From the life of slaves to the status of positions in upper strata of the society including doctors, engineers, civil servants, academicians etc. We can evaluate the how their destiny changed while living in the 105th year after the School Entry Bill had passed.

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