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Printing Politics: *Sadhujanaparipalini* and the Social Movement of Slave Castes in Travancore

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The history of Indian journalism has been written with a mighty sword of exclusion. It follows either the dominant narratives of nationalism and the freedom movement or gets fixated on the individuated lived moments of journalism which showcase the pioneering doyens of the Indian press. What one misses from this history are the many cultures of journalism that various socially and politically assertive communities practised, elevating it to a modern cultural space of multiple expressions situated at the historical juncture of their encounter with colonial modernity.

The historical context of colonial modernity constituted a space for community reforms in colonial Kerala. In a society structured around caste and gendered social relations, these reforms shook the foundations of the existing societal structure. The emergence of journalism as a modern practice occurred along with these differing modes of communitarian reforms in the vernacular cultural geography of the region. The history of the shaping of journalism as a modern institution in India remains incomeplete without addressing the social and cultural specificities of linguistic

regions and the path of social reforms traversed for becoming a "modern" society.

Focusing on the single surviving issue of the *Sadhujanaparipalini*, the mouthpiece of Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham, an "untouchable" community organisation which spearheaded the anti-caste movement in the southern princely state of Travancore, this essay examines one of the significant moments in the social history of print journalism in colonial Kerala. This historical moment also coincides with the emergence of print in the social movement of slave castes in Travancore.[1]

These constitutive moments represent a fascinating account of the conjuncture of the political, as envisioned in the anti-caste social movement, and the cultural, as a new cultural practice of print and journalism in the early history of the Malayalam press. It should be noted that these moments also circumscribe the colonial history of Kerala, where Malayalam is spoken. Modern Kerala as a new sub-national region under the Indian Republic was formed by uniting the princely state of Travancore, the Malabar region and the princely state of Kochi as part of the linguistic reorganisation of the Indian states in 1956. As such, this print moment offers historical cues to understand the social tensions in the evolution of Kerala as a region and the emergence of journalism as a new cultural practice.

In colonial Kerala, late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries represent a radical historical period which enabled people from differing socio-cultural backgrounds to dream about the possibility of imagining a new society. This period witnessed many visionary social reformers who spearheaded social reform movements within different communities. It helped to restructure society through a communitarian reform process that resulted in 'en-gendering'.[2] Thus, the questions of native representation and sharing of power in bureaucracy and politics, though limited to the dominant non-Brahmin communities such as the Nair, the Syrian Christians and the Ezhava, have become central to the imagination of the new Malayali society.[3] While the exclusion of castes who were treated as "untouchables" continued, they have demanded equality, social dignity and freedom.

It is in this historical context that journalism emerged as a modern cultural practice and a space to articulate communitarian and political aspirations. The modern Malayalam press arrived with its own eclectic practices, but functioned predominantly as the mouthpiece of dominant communities.[4] Educated and enlightened members from different communities engaged enthusiastically with this new culture and enterprise of

journalism.[5] Though untrained in this profession, they engaged with the new space of journalism, which became an outlet for creative expressions such as literature and political commentary on issues of general interest, offering a space to voice both individual views and the interests of their own castes.

The early histories of journalism and literature in Malayalam overlap, since both evolved together in the cultural space of the press in the nineteenth century, as neophyte Malayali intellectuals, belonging to dominant communities, ventured out to express and explore literature and politics through writing and publishing. The press thrived as the voice of this period of enlightenment and functioned as a print public space for communitarian haggling and political debates. These developments paved the way for the advent of political journalism as a new profession with prolific writers and community activists assuming the role of political commentators and pioneering journalists. The new political discourse manifested itself as individual editorial voices, either representing a revolting and reforming community or as strong individuated political positions on various socio-political issues. The editorials became a textual print space for voicing dissent and political views on social issues and forging public opinion against the perceived wrongs of the princely state.

As a textual space for the formation of public opinion, the newly emergent cultural practice of journalism created a new print public in Malayalam. The political critique of the state, the literary and linguistic debates and the communitarian social reformatory deliberations, which revolved around the radical questions of caste and gender, found expressions within this emergent print space. While the dominant communitarian political articulations of slave castes adapted an altogether different form and content, such as community gatherings, prayer meetings, song and dance, there were also serious attempts to engage with the new cultural space of print. These minor discourses of anti-caste politics represented a conspicuous moment in the history of Malayalam print journalism. As a space for negotiating political assertions, the anti-caste print brought forth questions of representation and caste hegemony into the domain of public debate. The elite, caste intellectuals who engaged actively in the practice of journalism showed interest in vocation related issues such as professionalism and the moral turpitude of those in power, especially the Dewan of Travancore. On the other hand, the anti-caste print tried to open up a new space for debating social inequalities and demanding civic rights. It endured as an extended cultural space of the social movement, docu-

menting articulations of voices against caste inequality and seeking the possibility of imagining an egalitarian society.

Uday Kumar has noted that the idea of the public came into existence during this period, with political journalism as the anvil of public debate.[6] Kesari Balakrishna Pillai and Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai became the leading social and political commentators who fearlessly raised their voices against the perceived wrongs of the Dewans, whose administrative role had become more powerful than that of the Maharaja. The emergent phase of fearless political journalism targeted, by and large, the non-Malayali Dewans belonging to Tamil Brahmin communities who dominated the administration in Travancore.[7]

Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai, in particular, became a prominent figure of this phase of political journalism. Pillai attacked P. Rajagopala-chari, the Dewan of Travancore, in his editorials. However, his critical position towards the educational policy of the Dewan, which had given everyone, including the "untouchable" slave castes, the right to education, later brought infamy upon Pillai. His lack of empathy towards the struggling slave castes and their demands for equality and right to education was reflective of his ideological caste position. The following quote from an editorial written by him on the right to education for "untouchable" communities, demonstrates his insensitive political position:

> We do not find any logic in the argument of those who believe in the universal ritualistic equality and the insistence, based on the same, to teach children equally sitting together in school without making any distinction based on their communal merit. The act of uniting those castes who cultivate intellect for generations and those who work on the field for many more generations would be like putting the yoke on the horse and bull together.[8]

Although it is important to understand that Pillai's interest was to criticise the Dewan and his policies, here he seemed to stand in opposition to the progressive educational reforms initiated in favour of the "untouchable" communities. In the absence of any expression of solidarity, his stance remains to be read as intolerance born out of caste superiority.

Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai is regarded as a prominent cultural intellectual and an ideal journalist, even hailed as a fearless face of Malayalam journalism, who fought against the wrongs of the Dewan. To Pillai also belongs the rare distinction of translating the biography of Karl Marx into Malayalam, the first time ever someone had attempted to translate it into any Indian language.[9] His critical contribution to the

professional practice of journalism in Malayalam resulted in a book titled *Vruthantha Pathrapravarthanam* [Newspaper Journalism]. His abounding progressiveness in embracing a European intellectual like Karl Marx, the philosopher of the proletariat revolution, on the one hand, and the apathy towards the social movement of slave castes on the other, illustrate the complexity of his dominant intellectual persona, which was later idealised as a pioneering fearless stride of political journalism in the region. Print journalism in Malayalam thus arrived at the skewed cultural juncture of multiple discourses such as the restructuring of caste and gendered social power relations, communitarian cultural expressions and the socio-political changes occurring in response to colonial modernity.[10]

While intellectuals such as Pillai seemed to position themselves in opposition to the anti-caste social movements, another set of cultural leaders belonging to dominant castes can be seen to strategically engage with the movement, but with a covert reformist Hindu agenda. The efforts put forth by the Ayyankali-led movement had multi-prong objectives. On the one hand, as an anti-caste social movement it opposed the existing caste norms that prevented them from getting education and access to public spaces. On the other, it negotiated with various civic as well as statist bodies to achieve their radical goals. The leaders of the movement under Ayyankali's guidance sought to bring together differing communitarian voices in support of the emerging anti-caste politics. However, the caste system remained resistant to the minutest of changes, let alone a radical overhaul. The caste power equations, by and large, remained unaltered as majoritarian dominant communities refused to give up their caste privileges and opposed any move to thwart the traditional caste structure and norms. It became a Herculean task for the movement to fight caste inequality and bring forth larger social changes.

The communitarian reforms were imagined mostly as negotiations within the community and therefore, failed to break the larger structures of caste exclusion. Whatever small steps were initiated in order to break the prevailing caste exclusions, such as inter-dining, they were met with violent opposition from dominant communities.[11] The "untouchable" slave castes envisaged a radical rupture in the caste system. As they occupied the bottom of the imagined caste hierarchical structure, the reforms initiated by them envisaged a radical overthrowing of the system and of existing caste practices. This resulted in violent resistance from the dominant communities leading to occasional bloodshed. The incidents of violent clashes with members of dominant castes at Nedumangad market for

gaining access to the public space, uprises such as 'Pullat Lahala' and 'Perinadu Lahala', for access to school education, are some of the examples.[12] On all these occasions, members of the *Pulaya* community under the brave leadership of Ayyankali resisted the dominant caste violence and retaliated in the same fashion using their trained army of youth. The history of anti-caste movements cannot be written without such historically significant radical moments, which made possible the imagination of a modern egalitarian society.

The Anti-Caste Social Movement of slave castes

The anti-caste politics of the "untouchable" slave castes such as Pulaya and *Paraya* found a radical outlet in their social movements during the colonial period. One of the proponents of these social movements was Ayyankali, under whose leadership their organisation Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham spearheaded the anti-caste movement in Travancore, which had long lasting social and political impacts on the evolution of modern Kerala society. The social movement under Poikayil Appachan (also known as Poikayil Sree Kumara Gurudevan), also took a spiritual turn and challenged the domination of the Christian Church. Eventually, it evolved into another socio-spiritual movement known as *Pratyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha* (Mohan 2010: 357-90).

Central to the Ayyankali movement was the politicisation of the idea of self-respect and dignity and its ideological political imagination of radical social changes. Dalit thinker and writer K. K. Kochu has observed that the significance of Ayyankali's movement lies in its focus on the question of self-respect, dignity and the claiming of rights on the materiality of capital such as land, education and employment. As Kochu writes,

> More than any other social reform movement, the Ayyankali-led anti-caste movement is worth emulating for the downtrodden as it helped to democratise society. This is because of Ayyankali's open criticism of casteism and the domination of the *savarna* caste Hindus. He also fought for equal rights on material resources such as land, education, and culture.[13]

The Ayyankali movement originated in the erstwhile princely state of Travancore in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Travancore was under the patronage of the British colonial state although it was ruled by a Hindu king. In 1907, Ayyankali established Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham, keeping in line with the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana

(S.N.D.P.) Yogam (1904) which was formed under the spiritual leadership of Sree Narayana Guru. Ayyankali initiated many radical and reformatory steps and fought for the civic rights of "untouchable" castes.

W.S. Hunt, a missionary with the Church Missionary Society discussed these initiatives of the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham in the February 1914 issue of the *Church Missionary Review*:

> It teaches them that they have rights, and that, if they bodily claim them, those rights must be granted. Its claims do not stop short of absolute "equality of opportunity" with other castes, plus certain privileges to make up for past and present disadvantages.[14]

Under the leadership of Ayyankali, the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham mobilised slave castes and challenged the caste exclusion and inequality prevalent in society. These efforts gave a radical face to the movement and helped in imagining a new notion of the 'public' and 'public space' in a feudal caste-ridden colonial society. Ayyankali not only made a moral and ethical claim on the 'public space' but also went ahead and physically claimed public spaces, whether it was a public road or a public educational institution, which were otherwise denied to "untouchable" communities. His attempts to claim the notion of 'public' made possible imaginations of the public space as an egalitarian social space which everyone could access and seek equality and in which everyone could live with dignity.

Ayyankali used his strong leadership abilities to organise struggles and strategically engage with the state to achieve these goals. His approaches and strategies were multipronged. A labour strike of the agricultural farmers was organised in order to demand educational rights for "untouchable" communities which resulted in the *Perinadu Kalapam.*[15] The fights between Pulaya and caste Hindu Nairs at Neyyatinkara, Ooruttam-balam and Perinadu saw real bloodshed. The caste Hindus attacked Pulaya community members at Perinadu as a Pulaya woman refused to wear *Kallumala* (stone), a caste symbol. The Nairs burnt the school, but Pulayas rebuilt it and the tension prevailed for long.

Ayyankali also took to the public road, which had been hitherto banned for the use of "untouchable" communities. This was akin to a Rosa Park moment for the "untouchable" slave castes of Travancore, in which Ayyankali radically challenged the prevailing inhuman caste norms, amidst violent resistance and repression from caste Hindus. The *Villuvandi Yatra,* in which he wore a *Malmundu*, a white *dhoti*, and rode a bullock cart on a public road, breaking caste norms, was a valiant and radical multipronged

mode of protest. Ayyankali challenged the codified sartorial caste norm by wearing the white *dhoti*. He also broke the other caste exclusionary norm by riding the Villuvandi, meant only for the transportation of caste Hindu elites, that too on a road not meant for "untouchable" communities. Such radical protests became part of the anti-caste social movement, which were met with violent resistance from caste Hindus.

Ayyankali formed his own community army, known as *Ayyankali Pata* in order to resist the violent oppression from dominant caste Hindu Nairs. When Ayyankali brought Panchami, a Pulaya girl, to enroll her in a school at Dhanuvachapuram, feudal caste Hindu Nairs burnt down the school. Ayyankali rebuilt it with the help of his young brigade, but agitated Nairs burnt it down again. Such episodes were part of the history of struggles for claiming public spaces such as schools and public roads. With these radical anti-caste claims and attempts to occupy public spaces, Ayyankali worked towards a claiming of public spaces by "untouchable" slave castes. It was through such radical political initiatives, along with strategic negotiations with the native state, that Ayyankali tried to seek a social and political space for the "untouchable" castes as a political community. The category of "Sadhujanam" represented this larger political mission of Ayyankali's and resembled, in its political meaning the term "Dalit" that emerged later to represent the social and political emancipatory politics of Dalit communities.

The political struggles of slave castes created a new social space where the "untouchable" could enter and interact with the idea of a modern Kerala society. It was at this conjuncture of the problematic of the modern that the journey from a lesser human caste status of an "untouchable" to a newly envisaged communitarian identity of the "Sadhujanam" culminated. In other words, the subjectivity of the "untouchable" was transformed from a mere caste/varna slave subject to a new political subjectivity at this converging point of the emergence of a modern Kerala society during the colonial period. The Ayyankali-led movement carried forth the mission under the larger political identity of the "Sadhujanam", instead of the immediate caste identity of the Pulaya. However, one should note that this mode of political assertion and engagement took a backseat once the state patronage was extended to community representation in the Sreemoolam Prajasabha, the popular assembly of nominated members representing various caste and communities. The political identity of "Sadhujanam" became redundant and nullified through caste-based communitarian representation, in which Ayyankali was nominated as a repre-

sentative of the Pulaya community to the Prajasabha, although he raised his voice for the welfare of all the "untouchable" communities in the Prajasabha.

There was a larger communitarian political universe that the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham envisaged by introducing the category "Sadhujanam" in the public political discourse in colonial Kerala. It offered a more inclusive space for the political articulation of various "untouchable" castes and posed as an anti-caste political category that may lead their political struggle. Although the majority of the members were from the Pulaya community, other "untouchable" castes also took membership in the Sangham. They could also receive support from some of the progressive caste Hindu intellectuals. The only available copy of *Sadhujanaparipalini* stands testimony to this inclusive social and cultural space that the Sangham imagined. A close reading of the journal may throw open the underlying politics in the formation of such a space, hitherto impossible in a caste Hindu universe.

Sadhujanaparipalini, the print journal of the Sangham posed as a negotiated textual space between the anti-caste universe of the Sangham and the emergent public, dominated mostly by caste Hindu intellectuals and their aspirations. The Sangham tried to imagine a counter-political space taking an anti-caste political position in opposition to the existing caste hierarchical social structure and in the process, envisaged a modern egalitarian social space. The imagination of such an egalitarian social space is one of the greatest contributions of the movement.[16]

Ayyankali led the movement on two fronts: firstly, on the streets fighting tooth and nail against caste norms, especially in the early stages of the movement, and later as a representative of the Pulaya community in the Sreemoolam Prajasabha when he was nominated in 1912. He raised his voice in the Prajasabha to bring attention to various issues such as the right to education, the right to walk on public roads, and the right to possess land. He remained a member of the Prajasabha until 1933.

Sadhujanaparipalini documented an extended cultural terrain of the anti-caste struggle in print where differing communities participated in vouching their support for the movement of slave castes. It signified the strategic radicalism that the Sangham practised in garnering support for the movement.

***Sadhujanaparipalini*: print and community**

The emergent practice of print journalism provided a modern space for communitarian reformist debates and political haggling in colonial Kerala, mostly occupied by dominant castes and communities. The enlightened youth among dominant castes challenged traditional ritualistic practices and caste norms, which paved the path for communitarian social reforms.

What *Sadhujanaparipalini* offers to the history of social movements in Kerala and the social history of Malayalam journalism, in general, is opening a textual window to one of the most significant anti-caste social movements led by the most downtrodden communities of slave castes in Indian history. Thus, the single issue of the *Sadhujanaparipalini* available today represents one of the earliest anti-caste print journals in Malayalam. This is what makes it a unique text in the history of print and journalism in India. It reinvigorates the efforts to rewrite history from the margins of the nation and region. It should be noted that there existed no other journals owned by an "untouchable" slave caste community in the history of Kerala.

Malayalam journalism has evolved historically through differing but overlapping phases of early evangelism, community/social reforms, capitalist expansion, professionalism, and corporatisation at a later stage. While educational and evangelic missions, mostly led by missionaries, occupied the first phase, the second phase remained replete with vibrant communitarian social reforms. In the nationalist phase, it plays a key role in the formation of the nation and region as a vehicle of nationalism. It later gets restructured into a dominant capitalistic institution with corporate overtaking of the profession of journalism. The journal *Sadhujanaparipalini* appeared in the second phase, that is, during the period of community and social reforms, and was an anti-caste print produced by "untouchable" slave castes as part of their social movement for social change.

Front page of *Sadhujanaparipalini*

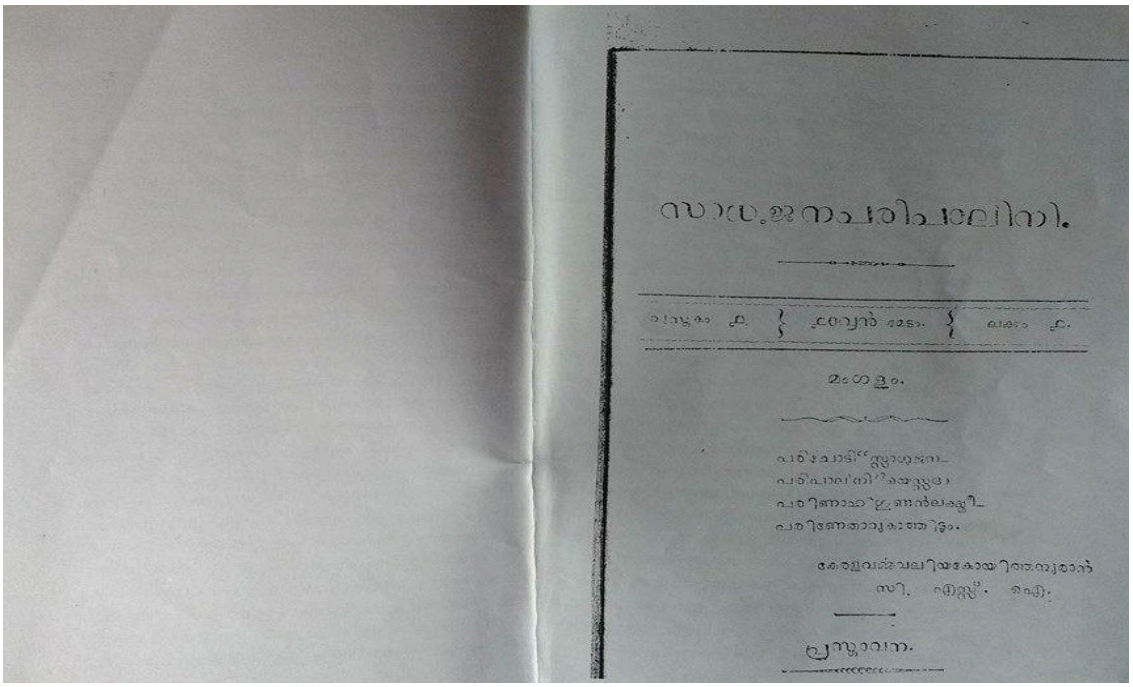

Figure 1, source: Book 1, Sadhujanaparipalini, Issue 1, May 1914 (Medam 1089).

Sadhujanaparipalini was published as the mouthpiece of Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham. The single extant copy discussed here is believed to be the first issue published in 1914 May (1089 Medam). The journal functioned not only as a printed textual mode of intra-community communication, but also remained a political signifier of anti-caste struggle in the history of early print and journalism in colonial Kerala. It evolved as one of the print spaces instrumental in initiating a public debate on caste, apart from publicising its mission across castes and communities.

The first reference to this journal is found in the Ayyankali memorial volume edited by Venganoor Surendran, Ayyankali's grandson, and published on the occasion of Ayyankali's 111th birth anniversary in 1974.[17] However, it is with the efforts of G. Priyadarsan in documenting the history of early Malayalam magazines that the public has come to know about the existence of the journal. In his work on early Malayalam magazines, Priyadarsan quotes Surendran to describe the origin of the journal. According to this version, Ayyankali travelled across Thiruvalla, Changanassery and Kottayam Taluks as part of the activities of Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham between the Malayalam era 1089 and 1107. He established the journal for the purpose of enlightening the downtrodden, a decision taken during Ayyankali's stay at Thrikkodithanam in Changanassery Taluk. It is observed that after interacting with Chembumthara Kali Chothikuruppan, he appointed him as the

editor (Priyadarsan 2007: 100). With T. K. Velayudhan Pillai as the acting manager, Kerala Bharati Vilasam Press in Changannassery was entrusted with the responsibility of printing the journal. Cherai Ramadas[18], known for his work on Ayyankali and Kerala history, has pointed out that the journal was instrumental in strengthening the anti-caste movement under the Sangham (Ramadas 2009: 35).

The editor of the journal was successful in bringing together intellectuals from dominant communities who extended their support in favour of the movement. The single issue of the journal stands testimony to this inclusionary aspect of the movement. The caste Hindu and Syrian Christian intellectuals wrote for the journal on various issues and forms. The journal carried a wide range of writings—from 'mangala asamsakal' (greetings) and poems to essays eulogising the Pulaya community and their emancipation. By and large, it tried to address the dominant caste public, who wielded the power of public discourse in the region.

The size of the journal was demy 1/8 and consisted of 20 pages. The front page featured a Mangala Slokam written by Kerala Varma Valiakoyi Thamburan, a renowned Malayalam poet and translator who wrote both in English and Sanskrit, known popularly as 'Kerala Kalidasan'. His strong presence in various literary groups of that time and literary movements such as the *Bhashaposhini Sabha* and early Malayalam magazines such as *Vidya Vinodini* has been well acknowledged. The editorial statement clarified the aim of the journal as follows:

> […] we have engaged in bringing out the journal with the objective of uplifting the Pulaya *community* from backwardness, by making her realise the real modern status that they assume with the help of the educated and enlightened thinkers from other communities. (*Sadhujanaparipalini*: 3, emphasis added)

As the above editorial suggests, it is clear that the attempt to claim the universality of the category "Sadhujanam", which was enshrined in the nomenclature of the sangham, materialised from the communitarian caste space of the Pulaya. The predominance of the Pulaya community members in the activities of the Sangham testifies to this aspect of communitarian caste dimension.

Sadhujanaparipalini published essays which, by and large, addressed the dominant castes of the region, such as Nairs. They were mostly reformatory in nature and critiqued the general approach of the dominant Nair communities towards "untouchables". In his essay, K. Paramu Pillai M. A.

welcomed the first issue of the journal and elaborated on the plight of the Pulaya community in Travancore. The highlight of the issue was a satiric piece written by P. Anantha Pillai. Titled "Nayarodu Oru Vaakku" [A word to the Nair], it critiqued the dominant casteist attitude of Nairs towards the Pulaya community, as the following excerpt (*Sadhujanaparipalini*: 10) exemplifies:

> A magazine for Pulaya community? What non-sense? The untouch-ables! Can we touch the paper they touched? Can't there be untouchability for the magazine too? What is this Sadhujanaparipalini? If all the sadhujanam are treated equal who will be there to work? How can one forget the smrti norms? Great punishment. It is all because of "Kalikalam"! What all one needs to see and experience? Only God knows. […]
>
> Fellow Nairs, we made a mistake right from the beginning. We should not let it continue forever. See there is an opportunity now. Let us move with the wind. The Pulaya community has awakened from sleep like the marginalised community of American Negros. One of the important ways for our emancipation lies in supporting them and become the servants of the Sadhujanam. (*Sadhujanaparipalini*: 10, translations are by the author)

However, after this paragraph, Pillai immediately moved on to condemn religious conversions. His anger and anxiety about the religious conversion of "untouchables" to Christianity speaks volumes about the nature of liberal caste Hindu intellectual support to the anti-caste movement of the slave castes. Pillai writes: 'Aha! How happy the missionaries are! How easy for their mission! No need to conquer the forest or hills. Travel through the paddy fields and there await hundreds of people to fall into your hands.' (ibid.)

It should be noted that the missionaries played a significant role in the reconstruction of the society during the colonial period by introducing English education and other social reform activities. The act of religious conversion of "untouchables" needs to be seen in this context.[19] The above passage, although it seems to proselyte caste rigidity, is infused with hidden tensions about religious conversions in colonial Kerala. On the one hand, there existed an overarching anxiety about the growth of Semitic religions such as Christianity and Islam because of the conversion of lower caste Hindus and "untouchables", and on the other, the caste norms had become stringent, which in turn necessitated such rebellious emancipatory acts of embracing the universality of Semitic religions. The reformist caste Hindu Nairs' opposition to the latter seems to be a direct consequence of

the fear of religious conversions, which in turn weakens the larger communitarian fold of the Hindu, a loosely imagined modern communitarian space in which graded caste hierarchies are negotiated and re-invented on the condition of being treated 'partially equal'. This 'partially equal' social status was exemplified in the temple entry declaration in which the lower castes and "untouchable" castes were allowed entry as a strategy to keep them into the Hindu fold, at the same time maintaining the hierarchical power structure by adhering to the practice of caste norms. Many a time, anti-caste leadership made use of this caste Hindu fear of religious conversion as a counterstrategy to demand equal rights with the Hindu rulers of Travancore.[20] This problematic aspect of the reformist caste Hindu's fear of losing caste hegemony was reflected in the prose written by caste Hindu intellectuals in the journal.

The journal also sought textual solidarity in the form of prose and poems from caste Hindu intellectuals. Poonjattil Avittam Thirunal Thamburan's poem titled 'Pulayar' and Keerikkattu Ayyappan Pillai's essay elaborating on the modern status of the Pulaya testify to this dimension extended solidarity. Panthalathu Kerala Varma Thampuran, A. R. Rajaraja Varma Koyi Thampuran, Mooloor S. Padmanabha Panicker, Thrikkodithanam V. Narayana Pillai, Kondoor K. Krishna Pillai and Thottasseril C. Mathew also contributed greetings in the form of poems.

Sadhujanaparipalini thus inaugurated the entry of slave castes into the print public in colonial Kerala. Its significance lies in the fact that these communities were socially regarded as "untouchable", a position sanctioned by the existing socio-legal norms and religion, and denied basic rights, including the right to education. One of the important agendas of the Ayyankali-led movement was to fight for the right of the slave castes to be educated. In this context, entering the already populated print public dominated by community magazines that catered mostly to the dominant communities such as the Nair, the Nambudiri, the Syrian Christians, the Muslims and the Ezhava was as a significant step. The textual world of words opened up through the journal added an anti-caste political potential to the medium of print and the newly emerged modern institution of journalism.

The essays in the journal, by and large, elaborated on reimagining and thereby reinstating the Pulaya slave caste by strategically advocating an appreciation of the labour harboured by the community and challenging the Nair community's caste dominance head on by invoking the need to change caste mindsets. The long poem "Pulayar" served that purpose, while the

essay by P. Anantha Pillai ("Nayarodu Oru Vakku") criticised the exclusionary caste mindset of the Nair community. Another piece in the journal dwelled on the modern social position of the Pulaya community. Keerikkattu Ayyappan Pillai's essay "Pulayarude Aadhunika Sthiti" [Modern condition of the Pulaya] bestowed accolades on the hardworking nature of the Pulaya community and compared it to that of the status of the Afro-American community. Ayyappan Pillai reminded the readers that the Pulaya community had met with both support and hatred from Nairs. Pillai suggested that the former was a wise act and the latter, the act of a vicious mind. Later, Pillai referred it to the achievements of the upwardly mobile Afro-American community and his own work on the biography of Booker T. Washington in order to understand their social condition. By pointing out the social mobility and progress of the Afro-American community, Pillai tried to hint at the possibility of the Pulaya community attaining a similar feat with a little support from other communities.

The journal is believed to have lasted for more than a decade, although other surviving issues are yet to be discovered.[21] However given the nature of the first issue, it is possible to state that the journal functioned as an important anti-caste print space during the colonial period.

Politics of print: textual strategies

There are two critical notional grids that act as textual strategies embodying the politics of print as narrativised in the single issue of *Sadhu-janaparipalini*. These suggested grids are: (i) the textuality of history and (ii) the language of affect. The journal documents history as a text in printed form, invoking it as encompassing two different but significant events in history. i) The first one registers the social history of slave castes (the Pulaya community, to be more specific, as they dominated the Sangham in terms of numbers) and their struggles. ii) The journal also renders visible another emergent history—that of the many cultures of print and journalism which became available for the cultural consumption of a public constituted through a historical encounter with colonial modernity.

There exists a documented history of the slave caste movement, but due to lack of documented material resources, many nuances of this history remain fully unravelled. This *lacuna* in the existing historiography may be compensated, to some extent, by the discovery of the journal as it provides ample textual evidence. The content of the journal illustrates the politics and counter politics that determined the social power equations prevailing in colonial Kerala. The anti-caste history of the movement blended with the

history of the emergence of print and journalism, thereby creating a rare amalgamation of the textuality of history. In this sense, discovering and reproducing the history of the journal is a significant event as far as the historiography of the region is concerned.

M. S. S. Pandian, in his discussion of lower caste engagement with modernity, has used the phrase 'one step outside modernity' to explain the antagonistic nature of their negotiations that have expounded "difference" and made possible the visibility of caste as a critical analytical social category. Pandian finds these lower caste engagements not as a rejection of modernity, but rather as being 'one step ahead of modernity'. [22] Furthering it to the realm of print in the anti-caste slave caste movement, the one step into history is indeed a step ahead of history, which, in other words, guides us into another possible history and even to the extent of taking us outside of it. The social history of anti-caste print in colonial Kerala is situated within the scope of this new history.

The second critical grid that signifies the politics of the print with respect to the content of the journal is the language of affect. This formed the primal political motif of the textual content—the anti-caste politics. These functioned as signifiers of obfuscating power relations under which the encounter of slave castes with colonial modernity took shape. Both these grids interconnect and communicate in help constitute an ideological constituency of the movement. The antagonistic and contesting nature of this peculiar engagement need not necessarily evoke a linear narration of history. Rather, it requires the mapping of differing complexities and multiplicities through which social events and experiences occur. Therefore, it may help one to break away from the hierarchical mode of historiography and the monotony of narrating a linear history by adapting to a method that seeks, say for example, to identify and illustrate the social history of print and journalism from the perspective of the movement. This also opens up a new window into newly emergent practices, explore its deep connections with the other side of history, say, social movements of slave castes, and understand how the notion of "modern" undergoes series of negotiations in the interstices of history.

The use of the language of affect as a textual strategy of negotiation as reflected in the content of the journal may be interpreted as strategic and embodies the anti-caste politics of print. In retrospect, it looked like a perfect strategic entry point for the journal to make a mark in the emergent print space. The cautious use of applause, admiration, sympathy, along with carefully worded satire entrusted with the task of making the caste

Hindu Nairs self-reflect on their discriminatory caste attitude towards the Pulaya community, represented the affective strategies employed in the journal for the possible rendering of their anti-caste politics. The presence of acclaimed caste Hindu intellectuals as authors gave more visibility to the content, and the journal, in the emergent print public.

When it comes to the social front of the movement, one gets to see an altogether different political language of assertion that the movement adopted in contesting the stringent caste norms prevailing in Travancore. The language of affect became more or less confrontational and assertive and the movement carried forth it vigorously, and never shied away from taking up arms, when necessitated, to counter the caste Hindu violence. However, it need not be seen as a permanent mode of engagement as the movement did, at different occasions, strategically negotiated with various political actors to achieve immediate as well as long-term goals. The print moment represented by the journal *Sadhujanaparipalini* functioned as a strategic cultural space of negotiation, which the movement invented in order to make themselves visible in the colonial public space. Thus, in the wake of colonial modernity, the Pulaya slave castes ventured out to create a negotiated space of print which, by and large, produced inclusivity and political assertion both in terms of content and form. It offered the caste Hindu Nair intellectuals an opportunity to be self-reflexive and critique their own community and to exalt the Pulaya, thereby inaugurating a possible historical moment to imagine an inclusive cultural space for all during the colonial period and thereafter. This was unheard of in the feudal communitarian modes of social communication structured around the institution of castes. In other words, it was a radical historical event which inaugurated the birth of the public in colonial Kerala.

The negotiated print space of the journal may have also acted in favour of the reformist caste Hindu, which offers another covert dimension to the content of exteriority in the journal. It may also be read as a clever use of the anti-caste print space of slave castes by caste Hindus for advocating their reformist political agendas. While heaping praise on the Pulaya community, they never hesitated to hide their displeasure at Christian missionary activities that sought to convert the "untouchable" slave castes. Their concerns for the cause of Pulaya community may be read as arising in the context of this hidden anxiety about religious conversion, which, allegedly deprived the community of Hindus of a sizeable number of "untouchable" and lower castes. This negotiated print moment enabled the slave castes to extend an affective strategic bond towards the reformist

caste Hindu, while fighting for their rights with the native Hindu princely state. For the reformist caste Hindu, this was a moment when they sought to recapture the lost community of slave castes back into the Hindu fold, at the same time seeking solidarity for the same from the dominant Nair community.

Later, after achieving independence from the British colonial state and subsequent efforts to nationalise various regions, all these socio-political movements were eventually integrated into the modern Indian state and its nationalist imagination. The politics around the temple entry proclamation of 1936, apart from the nationalistic assimilation and patronisation of social reform movements, points towards the fuzziness in the reformatory, but contesting nature of communitarian reforms in colonial Kerala. The print moment of slave castes thus offers an opportunity to revisit the social history of the region, its tradition of anti-caste politics and emergent print public and the practice of journalism which functioned not only as a negotiated space, but also as a significant performative site in shaping modern Kerala as a region.

Endnotes

[1] The term 'slave caste' is borrowed from Sanal Mohan's seminal work *Modernity of Slavery*, in which he uses it to denote the untouchable *Pulaya*, *Paraya* and *Kurava* castes in the princely state of Travancore. The princely state of Cochin had slave castes such as the Pulaya and Thanda Pulaya. Mohan writes, "From 9th century AD to 19th century, the term "slave castes" was used to refer to Dalits in several source materials. I have retained the term in the text within this historical context." See Mohan 2015: xi-2.

[2] See Devika 2007, for an in-depth account of the process of en-gendering in colonial Kerala.

[3] Malayali Memorial (1891), a memorandum submitted to the Maharaja of Travancore demanding adequate representation for various non-Brahmanical communities in government employment, was spearheaded by the Nairs. Later, Ezhava community members under the leadership of Dr. Palpu submitted another memorandum, the Ezhava Memorial (1896), demanding government employment for his community members.

[4] See, for example, one of the first newspapers, *Nasrani Deepika*, which is still in circulation. It was established in 1887 and named after the 'Nasrani', the Malayalam term for Christians. Community magazines such as *Malayali* represented the *Nair* community.

[5] Robin Jeffrey describes this phase as the 'print-elite mode'. The political significance of this phase lies in the fact that it prompted the British officials to pass the *Vernacular Press Act (1878)* and the Native Newspaper Reports to keep track of the native print debates. Jeffrey 2010: 223.

[6] Udaya Kumar observes that the first newspaper in the modern sense of the term in Malayalam was *Keralamitram*, under the ownership of the Gujarati businessman and printer Devji Bhimji, with

Kandathil Varghese Mappila as an editor. The aim of the newspaper was to bring to the attention of the public notices about corruption in public offices. See Kumar 2007: 413-41.

[7] However, one should note that it was also the context in which dominant caste communities were demanding their representation in bureaucracy and as such vehemently, opposed the Tamil Brahmins occupying key power positions in the native state. Kumar notes that Ramakrishna Pillai took part in community consolidation among the Nairs, and C. Krishna Pillai, a prominent leader of the Nair movement in Kerala, was an important influence on him. See Kumar 2007: 418.

[8] Editorial of *Swadeshabhimani*, 2 March 1910. Quoted in Chentharassery 1997: 42.

[9] Pillai's biography of Karl Marx is the first book on Karl Marx in Malayalam and spread across 45 pages and 25 chapters.

[10] Jeffrey (2010), Sam (2003) and Priyadarsan (2007) throw light on the early history of Malayalam journalism. See also Mochish 2014: 37-62.

[11] *Panthibhojanam* [Interdining] organised by the Ezhava intellectual Sahodaran Ayyappan had met with violent opposition from conservative Ezhava community members and caste Hindus alike. See Sekhar 2012.

[12] In the first case which took place in 1912 at Nedumangadu market, Ayyankali had to confront the violent crowd who opposed the entry of an "untouchable" to the public space. If at *Nedumangad* the opposition came from Muslims, it was the dominant caste Hindus who confronted Ayyankali at other events.

[13] See Kochu 1989: 57.

[14] Quoted in Kawashima 2000: 160f. Also, Ramadas 2009: 12.

[15] Chentharassey has mentioned in his book that the strike lasted from June 1913 to May 1914. Quoted in Ramadas's 2009: 78.

[16] One should note here that colonialism provided the enabling context for the movement. For example, the right to travel on public roads and enroll as students in schools had been granted legally to all by the colonial administration. However, the implementation of the same had been obstructed by feudal caste Hindu society. See the letter written by the Travancore British Resident to the Dewan of Travancore on 28 July 1865, and the draft declaration from 9 July 1870 regarding the right to travel on public roads. Also, the letter written by the Education Director Dr. A.E. Michel regarding measures to curb caste-based discrimination in school admissions. Ramadas 2009: 48-51.

[17] See Ramadas 2009: 35.

[18] The author collected the rare copy of the journal from Cheraayi Ramadas, an independent researcher who obtained it from the personal collection of the late G. Priyadarsan.

[19] See Kawashima 2000; Mohan 2015; Devika 2007; Jeffrey 1994.

[20] Ayyankali had written such a letter citing caste rigidity as a reason for religious conversions and the Ezhava leader Dr. Palpu warned about *en masse* conversion if not granted civic rights.

[21] Based on his conversations with G. Priyadarshan, Cherai Ramadas writes that the journal *Sadhu-janaparipalini* might have lasted for 15 years. See Ramadas 2009: 40. Priyadarshan uses the Ayyankali Memorial Volume published in 1974 and edited by Venganur Surendran, Ayyankali's grandson, as a reference.

[22] Paul Gilroy uses the notion of 'antagonistic indebtedness' while discussing black politics. See Gilroy 1993: p. 49. M. S. S. Pandian refers to Paul Gilroy to elucidate this aspect while analysing the lower caste engagement with modernity and writing life narratives. See Pandian 2002: 1739.

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