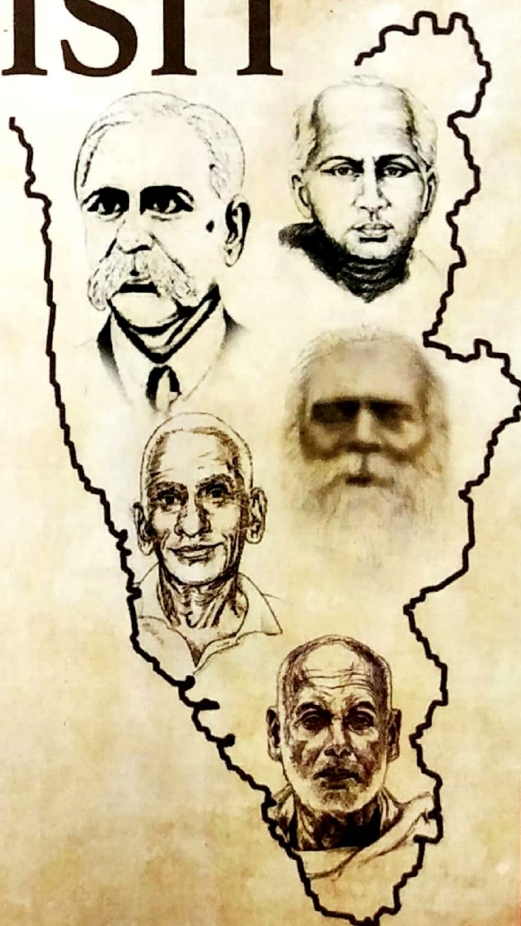




RENAISSANCE IN KERALA: A REVISIT

Edited by
Prof. S. Sivadasan



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RENAISSANCE IN KERALA: A REVISIT

About the Book

The present volume, 'Renaissance in Kerala: A Revisit', is a reflection of the collective efforts of a host of researchers, who study and reflect on the Social History of Kerala with great diligence to unravel its hitherto unexplored periods, personalities, and events, among others. The 'proprietary historians of Kerala' generally projected the 'contributions' of the dominant sections of people but ignored the roles of others in the social transformation of Kerala. Often, they were able to convert the authentic creators of history into 'absentees in history'. That is why there are people with lesser legacy playing a dominant role with great biographies, while people with greater intervention disappear without any biographical sketch. The present edition is a reaction to this 'marginalisation' in the history of the renaissance movement in Kerala and endeavours to revisit the movement in a broader and deeper sense.

About the Editor



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Born (1954) and brought up in the village of Kazhuvloor, near Somath-eeram, Vizhinjam, as the son of M. Somanadhan and B. Rajamma. After completing his secondary education in the rural schools, Karichal L.M.S.L.PS and P.K.S.H.S, Kanjiramkulam, he pursued his higher education at University College, Thiruvananthapuram. His teaching and research career span over 35 years in the various Government Colleges of Kerala, including University College and Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady, from where he retired as Professor and Head of the Department of History. He is blessed with a long array of research scholars, who gifted him the Festschrift, 'Faces of Social Reform in Kerala', the first edition of this book, edited by Dr. P. F Gopakumar, his first Research Scholar. Spouse: Preetha P.K,

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Sahodaran Ayyappan: the Rationalist and Critical Realist

S. R. JINCY

Many social scientists have argued that "research should be designed to perform a 'critical' function, in the sense of challenging the socio-political status quo". The dictum seems applicable to activists like Sahodaran Ayyappan as well. However, very often, the relationship between the political value judgments underpinning this commitment and the values intrinsic to inquiry, as a distinct form of activity has been left obscure. The validity of those judgments has usually been treated either as obvious or as a matter of personal commitment. But there is an influential tradition of work that claims to derive evaluative and prescriptive conclusions about current society directly from factual investigation of its history and character. In the nineteenth century, Hegel and Marx were distinctive in treating the force of ethical and political ideals as stemming from the process of social development itself, rather than as coming from a separate realm, in the manner of Kant. It is possible to derive negative evaluations of actions and institutions, along with prescriptions for change, solely from the premise that these promote false ideas, or that they frustrate the meeting of needs.

In this article, an attempt is made to introspect the career and activities of Sahodaran Ayyappan, the great humanist in modern Kerala against the theoretical frame above.

Sahodaran Ayyappan adorns a paramount position in the social and cultural history of Kerala. He was instrumental in effecting revolutionary changes that ultimately led to the uplift of the marginalised sections of the Hindu society, especially the Ezhavas and Pulayas. Ayyappan

was inspired by the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity as well as rationalism, secularism and humanism. The rational outlook and activities of this great humanist engraved out an immortal image in the history of social reform movements in Kerala.

As an ardent follower of Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyappan practiced the philosophy and principles of Guru throughout his life. He founded the Sahodara Sangham or Association of Brotherhood in 1917 and the journal *Sahodaran* and a newspaper to spread the idea of universal brotherhood.¹ This gave him the popular name, Sahodaran Ayyappan. He formulated a revolutionary message "no caste, no religion and no God for man" as against the famous message of Guru, 'one caste, one religion and one god for man'.

Available evidences show that the Hindu society of Kerala was parcelled out among innumerable castes and sub-castes at the beginning of the 19th century.² The society was based on categorizations of superior and inferior or pure and impure. This inferiority and superiority were marked by pollution attached to touch and approach one another. The casteism therefore kept the Kerala society fragmented into exclusive groups. It acted as a divisive force against the mobility of groups. A person of the low caste status thus occupied the same status in the political or economic hierarchy. Caste status, socio-economic status and political status were corresponding to each other. The social status of a Non Caste Hindu remained unchangeable by education, wealth, power or success. Several irrational practices and customs prevailed in the Hindu society. Hindu society was dominated by the upper castes, especially the Brahmins. The lower caste people were in a subordinate position and were denied social freedom and equality. The upper castes were the land-owning class and all political power and authority in the land were under their control. But the people of lower castes who had no voice or position in the society and government were oppressed, suppressed and marginalised by the higher echelons.

The hegemonic class of Brahmins dominated all the means of production. The Nairs, who occupied a higher position in the society, were the chief tenants of Brahmins. The twin role of the Nairs as a serving class of the Brahmins and the protectors of land enabled them to enjoy a respectable position in the society.³ All other groups below the Nairs, like the Ezhavas/Thiyyas, the Pulayars/Cheramar and Parayar were considered as the *avarnas* or inferior.

Though British rule made some changes in the 19th century, the conditions of the lower castes did not change basically. They were the victims of social tyranny for centuries. The social evils like untouchability and unapproachability led to segregation of Hindus of one caste from another. The practice of pollution was widely observed in the Hindu society. The lower castes were denied access to temples, schools and public places and were subjected to social humiliation.

Apart from being one of the untouchable castes in the Hindu society, the Ezhavas were educationally, economically and socially backward. Majority of them were uneducated. A few of them constituted an elite section within the community like soldiers, scholars, Ayurvedic physicians, traders, martial artists etc. but majority of them were engaged in cultivation and other labours like toddy tapping, manufacturing of country sugar etc. At the same time, they followed many traditional religious and social customs. They even practiced animal sacrifice in the centers of worship owned by them. There was the paradox that though the Ezhavas were treated as untouchables by the upper castes, they considered themselves superior in relation to the other lower castes and treated them as untouchables.⁴ The Pulayas and the other lower castes were denied entry into the temples of Ezhavas. There was hardly any free social relation between them and other backward castes. There was no inter-dining and inter-marriage not only between castes but also between the different sub-castes.

Against this context, many social reformers emerged in the society with several revolutionary ideas. But the purpose of this paper is limited to identify the role of Sahodaran Ayyappan, the social reformer, revolutionary, renaissance thinker, writer, rationalist, politician, journalist, poet, the multi-faceted humanist.

K. Ayyappan, (Kulambathuparambil Ayyappan) was born in Cherai near Cochin on August 22, 1889. He was born as the ninth child of Kochavu Vaidyar and Unnuniliyamma. His father, an Ayurvedic physician by profession was not like a typical Ezhava and had a keen interest in literature, especially Hindu Puranas and epics. He used to invite the writers of his time to his home and spent money and time to translate the ancient Hindu scriptures. While he was an Ayurvedic physician he had passion for Sanskrit language and literature, which motivated Ayyappan to become a renowned writer. Ayyappan was greatly influenced by his elder brother Achuthan Vaidyar, who was a progressive

thinker, who taught him English language and gave him progressive education. By virtue of his brother, Ayyappan acquired good association with Sree Narayana Guru and Kumaran Asan.

Ayyappan received basic education from the Kalari and English education from the Cherai English School. During his high school days, he learned the basic lessons of inter-dining from his school and inter-marriage from the books. After high school education he received college education with the help of Guru. During his college life he was also inspired by Swami Vivekananda and his philosophy. He was a scholar in both Sanskrit and English. He was the first Ezhava to become a graduate in the Cochin State. The financial burden forbade him from getting higher education further. However, with the support of Guru and financial help of Kumaran Asan he joined the Maharaja's college, Trivandrum for B.A, which was a turning point in his life.⁵ During these days he used to visit the S.N.D.P office at Trivandrum. His constant association with Sree Narayana Guru and Kumaran Asan helped him to get sufficient internal and external strength to herald a new social revolution in Kerala.

Ayyappan was a true follower of Guru. He had great affection and admiration to the character and teachings of Guru and even practiced it throughout his life. From his childhood he was attracted towards Guru. His stay at Trivandrum helped him to be closer with Guru and his activities. He decided to propagate the teachings and philosophy of Guru, for which he joined the SNDP while he was at Trivandrum. When Guru started a night school for the deprived castes like Parayars, Pulayars and Kuravars Ayyappan was stimulated by it. He also had a close connection with Kumaran Asan, the disciple of Guru. Though Asan had diverse opinions regarding the activities of Ayyappan, he never disliked Ayyappan. After returning to Cherai, Ayyappan continued his activities. He established wider appreciation and support from his people.

The *varna* system, which had been rooted deeply in the minds of the Indians for centuries, could not be easily eliminated. In Kerala, untouchability and unapproachability made the life of the people deplorable. The idea of oneness of all humanity and universal brotherhood could not be easily comprehended by the Hindu rulers of Travancore and Cochin. This made the eradication of untouchability a herculean task for leaders like Ayyappan. In his opinion caste had to be eradicated for the attainment of brotherhood. Irrespective of caste and creed, it was the duty of

everyone, who had moral consciousness and patriotism, to endeavour for it.⁶

Sahodaran Ayyappan persistently fought against casteism and untouchability as well as for communal representation. He wanted to eradicate the caste discrimination and inequality in the Hindu society. He upheld the anti-caste principles of Guru and for that he formulated various programmes. As part of the social struggle, he advocated the inevitability to get rid of caste by the twin means of inter-dining and inter-marriage, for which he launched the second or modern phase of the Ezhava movement started by Guru.⁷ He preached and practiced the concept of equality among the castes. For the fulfilment of his aim he founded the Sahodara Sangham, an association of brotherhood. Throughout his life he fought against caste and social inequality and was against caste hierarchy and Brahmin hegemony.

Ayyappan launched the anti-caste discourse against Hinduism and Hindu society. By challenging Hindu religion, he indirectly rejected the discourse of Guru. As against the meta-physical nature of Guru, Ayyappan, who was a revolutionary, created by modernity, turned against Hinduism.⁸ While Ayyappan criticized Hindu religion for its anti-human aspects, Guru upheld the humanitarian and ethical role of religion across culture and society. He modified the message of Guru, 'one caste, one religion and one God for man' into 'no caste, no religion and no God for man'.⁹

Ayyappan viewed inter-dining to achieve the destruction of caste system, which undermined the ideal of brotherhood. In his opinion, demolishing the caste was essential for the welfare of the society. He was putting emphasis on the dictum "ask not, say not and think not caste", given by guru. He said further, caste was an evil and a superstition, and inter-dining and inter-marriage were the only means to bring an end to caste competitions and hatred. The abolition of untouchability was the birth right of the lower communities. "To achieve it, caste should be destroyed for the reason that untouchability and unapproachability should be abolished", he held.¹⁰

He intensified his activism in 1917 by launching the anti-caste agitations and organizing a movement for inter-dining at Cherai. It marked the beginning of a social revolution. In a meeting held at Thundiparambu at Cherai on May 29, 1917, Ayyappan recommended inter-dining to eradicate caste system. Only three people accepted it as

a challenge, Koru Vaidyar, Raman Pillai and Naikan Aandi. Gradually, many people joined the venture. Though it was a success it created controversies that had far reaching impact in the society. Initially he received reverse response from his people as it was a new one for them and they opposed and criticized him. The organizers were outcasted. It earned him the derogatory titles 'Pulayan Ayyappan', 'Pulayachan' etc. Ayyappan was labeled an outcaste and rebel.

But the initial harsh treatments did not stop Ayyappan. Further he strongly advocated for inter-dining as the only way to eradicate caste distinction. He proclaimed inter-dining as a movement against social inequality and casteism. But the entire society opposed him. Some criticized that he was against Guru. At this moment he appealed for the advice of guru. Guru wrote to him that 'whatever may be the religion, language, custom, caste or dress of individuals, there is nothing maleficent in inter-marrying and inter-dining between them since they belong to one caste'.¹¹ The support of guru was the best example of the success of the movement.

The movement began at Thundiparambu has continued in different parts of the state. Later the movement received wide appreciation, and many joined in it. Though it was partially successful it could reduce the disparity between different castes like Nair, Ezhava and Pulaya. It further eliminated the distinction among the sub-castes of Ezhava. Though the movement lost the relevance in the later period it could bring significant changes in the society and could alter the entire Hindu society of Kerala.

Ayyappan advocated intermarriage for several reasons. It was essential for promoting friendship and co-operation among different communities. Ayyappan argued that religion, science, reason and experience - all attested to the fact that intermarriage was advantageous to man. He advocated intermarriage as a solution to the communal differences which generated communal problems in India.¹² Popularization of intermarriage was a difficult job. What could have been successfully done to achieve the goal was to prepare the way for it by removing the taboo by law. That was achieved by Ayyappan by putting pressure for the passing of the Cochin Civil Marriage Bill in 1931 and as an Act in 1935. The act provided legal sanction for intermarriages between members of different castes and religions as well.

Ayyappan laid a platform for the deprived for affirming and articulating their fraternity. He developed an idea of social equality, without

the distinction of religion, caste, gender, class and sexual orientation. He wished to uplift their rights and to align them under the banner of universal brotherhood. He was a humanitarian and preached the philosophy of love and fraternity. With a view to practice it he founded the *Sahodara Sangham*, an association for brotherhood. He formed it mainly to organize the social reform activities and to propagate the ideologies of Guru.

Ayyappan conducted speeches and circulated pamphlets and articles to popularize his vision. He got many followers. They began to propagate the ideas of Guru and Ayyappan. He began to publish some revolutionary writings through the newspapers. Later, some newspapers rejected his revolutionary articles. Realising the situation he decided to launch a publication of his own, which resulted in the beginning of a journal and a newspaper in the same name *Sahodaran* in 1917 and acted as its editor till its end by 1956.¹³ This was a turning point in the history of *Sahodara Sangham* and social reform movement of Kerala.

On the very first issue he stated the vision and mission that "*Sahodaran* doesn't have any caste or religion". Brotherhood is the only caste and religion according to Ayyappan. He further stated that "everyone should think and act above the caste and should love and respect each other". It covered diverse topics which show his wide knowledge over various subjects and his aim of bringing social equality. He advocated secularism through *Sahodaran*. Some texts from the *Rigveda* and Upanishads were included in it along with contemporary issues. To stir up the logical level of the readers he published articles like 'Ramayana Rahasya', Rajaram Mohan Roy, Chaturvarnya, 'Hindu Daivangal', 'Kerathile Hindu Matham' etc.¹⁴

Sahodaran laid stress on the greatness of principles of truth, liberty, equality, fraternity etc. Once he made a statement in the editorial of *Sahodaran* that "the only way to eradicate the caste is to practice inter-dining and inter-marriage". The Daily also popularised the principles of inter-dining and inter-caste marriage and asked to practice it. Personalities like Rajaram Mohan Roy, Sree Narayana Guru and E. V. Ramaswamy Naiker were admired through the newspaper. *Sahodaran* attacked caste and social issues like untouchability and superstitions. In his editorial he envisioned the modern Kerala through the abolition of the zamindari system, granting of titles for farmers and tenants, equal wages for men and women, compulsory free education till the age of

16, nationalization of large industries and transport etc.

Ayyappan founded the public journalism and mass media cultures in Kerala. As a part of it he supported the new writers ideologically and financially. P. N. Krishnan Pillai, Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, Ketamangalam Pappukutty, M. P. Varkey, P. Kesavadev etc. were important among them. He introduced the modern philosophies of Communism, Socialism, Secularism and Nationalism to the youth of Kerala through his writings.¹⁵ Through its publications his name came to be associated with the great journalists like Mithavadi Krishnan, Desabhimani T. K. Madhavan, Swadesabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai, Yukthivadi M. C. Joseph etc. and came to be called as 'Sahodaran Ayyappan'. He was one among the few who advocated for the betterment of Malayalam language and made a revolutionary step by speaking in Malayalam in the legislature.

Buddhism became popular among the Ezhava social reformers. The prevailing casteism, with its horrible feature of pollution prompted many to seek the ideology of Buddhism as against Brahmanism. Kumaran Asan, the most renowned leader of SNDP Yogam was an admirer of Buddhism. C. Krishnan, a prominent Ezhava social reformer, was a zealous advocate of Buddhism and had made commendable service to spread Buddhist teachings through the press and platform. In his search for values to bring about an egalitarian society, Ayyappan was more fascinated by Buddhism than the teachings of guru. To Ayyappan, Buddha was the 'herald of universal brotherhood'. No wonder that the *Ashtanga Marga* and non-injury as preached by Buddha and his denunciation of the authority of scriptures and casteism, the silence on the existence of god, and the emphasis on universal brotherhood made an appeal to men like Ayyappan in the context of an awakening against the evils and superstitions and the struggle for democratic values.¹⁶

Ayyappan believed that Buddhism would bring great moral benefits to man as a religion that inculcated a higher moral consciousness based on the values of humanism and egalitarianism. Ayyappan felt the Buddhist dharma as capable of leading man to achieve international co-operation and peace and the establishment of human greatness and human freedom. It was against this background that Ayyappan was induced to Buddhism as an ideological base for his struggle against casteism and discrimination. The challenge of Buddhism to Hinduism and its negation of casteism were the bases of his rational approach.¹⁷

He reformed language, culture and society of Kerala through his radical political democratic interventions and rationalist practices and questioned the social evils existed in the society and even challenged it.

Ayyappan was one among the pioneers of the rationalist movement in Kerala. While he was a student, he began to think and doubt about the traditions and caste system. He used to ask several questions to himself and Guru but never accepted the reply of anyone, including Guru, until it satisfied his thirst. He followed a critical approach to everything and was a liberal thinker in the true sense. He had his own opinions regarding every matter, and he used to change it.

'Sahodara Sangham' begun by Ayyappan was a rationalist organization in a true sense. Even the *Sahodaran* published some writings against superstitious beliefs and evil practices in the society. Ayyappan took initiative to begin another rationalist journal *Yukthivadi*, along with K. Ramavarma Thampan, C. V. Kunjuraman, C. K. Krishnan and M. C. Joseph in 1929. The meaning of rationalism and the purpose of the journal had been explained in the first volume of the journal by Ayyappan as "rationalism is not a dogma but a philosophy. It is a mental attitude of accepting only knowledge based on religion".¹⁸ The journal was continued till 1960. Religious reform was not his target, rather he stressed on social reform by eradicating the discrimination and social evils. He even advocated that the objective of all religions should be equality. He was an ardent advocate of free thinking. Rationalism and free thinking were advocated as the prerequisites for the progress of the community.

The first target of Ayyappan was to fight against the *Bharani* festival in the Kurumba Bhagavathy temple at Kodungallur. He led a campaign against the obscene songs and animal sacrifices at Bharani fest. Ayyappan, along with hundreds of followers marched towards it with a slogan "don't go to Bharani". He made a speech against it and blocked them. The angry devotees tortured them by throwing the blood and pieces of the animals upon them.¹⁹ Even after the incident he continued this mission and gave a petition to the King of Cochin to pass legislation against it.

Through *Yukthivadi* he criticized the religious perceptions of Gandhi and Tagore. He openly criticised Gandhiji for his positive attitude towards the *varna* system. Ayyappan never accepted and vehemently criticized the 'Hindu Mahamandal', formed by Mannath

Padmanabhan and R. Sankar. *Yukthivadi* openly mocked the habits and nature of the '33 crores' and more gods of the Hindu religion. Through his editorials, Ayyappan also criticized the intermediary role played by the priests. He wrote some poems on rationalism and published it in the first volume of *Yukthivadi*. He used pen as a weapon against inequality and social evils. Poetry was his medium to spread his message of equality and wrote many poems to propagate it. From 1917 to 1940 he wrote about 70 poems, half of dozen of which were on freedom like *Swathantrastavam*, *Swathantra Gadha*, *Ujjivanam* etc.²⁰ His poetry covered variety of topics like Dharma, Kingship, Freedom, Rationalism, Buddhism, Onam, Death etc. Through these works he shaped the literary culture of Kerala.

The revolutionary move launched at Cherai was the beginning of his political career. Through several hardships and criticisms, he emerged as a strong activist. He regarded S.N.D.P. Yogam as the platform for his social reform movements. In order to strengthen the organization, he decided to expand the activities of Yogam in different parts of the State. As a part of his activities he decided to construct orphanages, old age homes, hospitals, schools, libraries etc. which made him more popular. He advocated that the political activities should be free from caste/religious activities. Ayyappan cautioned his followers not to have blind faith in him.

In the opinion of Ayyappan, granting of jobs to the lower caste Hindus was not merely to reform those communities but to reform the whole society. Ayyappan was pointing to the real issue at stake, namely, a share in the governance. In his opinion, communal representation was not antagonistic to nationalism, but would foster nationalism by eliminating communal discrimination, by providing equality of opportunity for all in the government services. In other words, the argument of Ayyappan was that natural justice would be ensured to all only when all communities would get representation in the administration. According to him, communal representation was required till the communal system was eliminated. The ideal system of casteless society could be achieved only through the elimination of caste differences after strengthening all the communities by providing temporary safeguards. Communal representation was such a safeguard.²¹

The Abstention movement was organized jointly by Ezhava, Christian and Muslim communities to destroy the monopoly of Brahmins

and to secure their rightful representation in government services. Ayyappan was the president of the S.N.D.P. during this time. Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the then Dewan threatened to cancel the license of S.N.D.P. Ayyappan criticized it through his editorials and finally Dewan withdrew it under popular protests. He became the president of Yogam for several times. Being the president of Yogam he got many chances to act more politically. He played a prominent role in the course of the struggle for responsible government in the princely State of Cochin. He took the leadership of the historic 'declaration of human rights' meeting held at Cochin in 1945 and published this incident in his *Sahodaran*.

Ayyappan also contributed to the development of trade unionism and literacy movement among the working classes. He spread the activities of the Yogam among the working-class communities and organized associations like 'Adi Vypin Thozhilali Sangham', 'Ochanthuruthu Thozhilali Union', 'Thruvithamcore Labour Association' and 'Cochin Labour Union'. In 1933, he started a newspaper called *Velakkaran* for the labourers at Alappuzha. But it was short lived. He was inspired by the Russian revolution and shared the communist ideologies among his followers. He popularized the ideology of communism in Kerala. Ayyappan was one of the pioneers in disseminating the revolutionary message of the October revolution and introduced the term 'comrade' in Malayalam. But his radical attempts were deliberately marginalized in the later period.

Ayyappan became a member of Cochin Prajamandal and a minister in the ministry of Paravoor T. K. Narayana Pillai. He was elected to the legislative assembly of Cochin and became the voice of the depressed classes. Very soon he became a popular politician and got continuously elected to legislative assembly without opposition.

As a great man and a great politician, Ayyappan was against the new power politics and never acted against the law and never misused his position as politician and as minister. Ayyappan acted as the minister for Public Works Department and resigned from it when some issues after the Peringalkuthu Hydro Electric project. He made some notable programmes to the development of Cochin, especially by taking initiative in the construction of Cochin-Vypin Bridge. But later, his radical steps were deliberately silenced.²² Many constitutional reforms introduced in Kerala were the results of his hard work. He became instru-

mental in the enactment of a series of legislations, including the Cochin Ezhava Matriarchal Bill and Cochin Ezhava Patriarchal Bill, Adult Franchise in the Panchayats and the Civil Marriage Act.

After his retirement from active political life, Ayyappan dedicated more on social welfare programs. Ayyappan founded the 'Sree Narayana Sevika Samaj', along with his wife. As a part of his activities Ayyappan planned to make Sree Narayana Giri, a place near Aluva (where guru used to meditate) a holy place and placed Sreenarayana Giri as the centre of Sree Narayana Sevika Samaj. He constructed a *Gurumandir* at the hilltop and started a school for the poor children. Later, it became a major pilgrim centre. Ayyappan passed away on March 6, 1968. His body was taken to Sreenarayana Giri and buried there. His social services were continued even after his death by his wife Parvathy Ayyappan and his followers. By his words and deeds, Sahodaran Ayyappan was a rationalist, an Avant Grade critical Realist, in the true sense of the term.

Notes and References

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Herman Gundert and the Evolution of Print Movement in Kerala

S. R. JINCY

Hermann Gundert was a German missionary scholar, reformer, educationist, linguist and Indologist, known for his pioneering contributions to the development of Malayalam language and culture. Gundert came to India for missionary work and as a part of Basel Mission he reached Malabar (north Kerala) and settled down in Illikkunnu near Thalassery. Though Gundert was a missionary he has made remarkable contributions in diverse disciplines such as language, history, journalism, literature, science, religion, geography, astronomy etc. Gundert played a prominent role in Kerala's cultural development.

Hermann Gundert was born in Stuttgart, the capital city of Baden-Württemberg, Germany on 4 February 1814.¹ Till the Second World War, Baden and Württemberg were two different states. The place was rich in culture, education, science and technology. The cultural conditions existed in Baden-Württemberg also contributed to the development of Gundert family. Hermann Gundert was the third child of Franz Ludwig Gundert and Christiana Enalin. Ludwig by profession was merchant but later changed into a religious person. He established a bible society 'Württemberg Bible society' in 1812 and became a strong advocate of religious movement in Germany. Hermann's mother Christiana was a pious religious woman. Hermann was named after the strong national sentiments of Ludwig and Christiana. Hermann Der Cheruaker was a national hero of Germans who fought against Romans during the 1st Century A.D.² As an honor, Gundert family named their third child as Hermann.

Gundert family was very closely connected with the Württemberg pietism.³ Hermann groomed up as god-centric and religious and was highly influenced by the religious principles of his family, especially his father. Ludwig was the secretary of the Bible Society. Hermann used to visit the office which helped him to learn more about Bible. In 1820, Hermann joined the Latin school at Stuttgart along with his brother Ludwig. By 1823 Hermann began to learn the first lessons of printing and publishing as his father started the publishing of a magazine named 'Stuttgart Mission Magazine'.⁴ This experience laid the foundation of the knowledge on printing and writing from childhood onwards. His experience with the magazine also helped him to know about Asia, especially India. The sudden death of his younger sister in 1827 was a tragic incident in his life. This incident turned Hermann to become more religious-centric and he tried to inquire about the meaning of life and death.

Maulbronn Life

In 1827, at the age of 13, Hermann joined the Maulbronn Latin school, a very famous school founded in the 12th C. A. D.⁵ Hermann was only an ordinary student, learned history, geography, mathematics from this seminary school. History was his favourite subject. Along with that he had mastered different languages like Hebrew, Greek, Latin, English and French. Hermann was very much impressed with the subject of history especially the war history of Europe. Hermann's first literary work was also a historical study. The article about the 'Thirty years war' in Europe was really an outstanding work which clearly indicates the historical sense and observation skills of Hermann. He also held a speech on the 30 years of war in 1830.⁶ He wanted to become a history teacher. As a teenager Hermann showed some distress against the strict culture prevailed in the school. Sometimes he wanted to leave the school, but his parents never allowed him to do so. During this period, he showed some interest in music. He found music as a medium to channelize his stress and troubles. He was more interested in the musical instruments like violin, piano and organ.⁷ Hermann used to attend the music concerts and wrote about music and songs.

Though he was interested in history, he never left his interest in Bible and theology. It was during his Maulbronn school life he made the

first attempt to translate Bible. At first, he translated some parts from the book of Ezekiel into German.⁸ Interactions with David Friedrich Strauss, a new teacher at Maulbronn School changed Hermann's attitude towards theology and philosophy. Like most of the other students, Hermann was very impressed with the abilities of Strauss, who motivated him to lead his students to a higher level.

At Tübingen University

After Maulbronn, Hermann joined the famous Tübingen university for theology on 24th October 1831. Hermann was more attracted towards the philosophies of Hegel and Strauss. His principles were different from that of his father who showed some dislike towards it. Hermann started his literary career by 1833 soon after the death of his mother on January 20. About the memories of his mother Christiane he wrote, 'In the memory of Christiane'.⁹ Later he translated some great works including Sophocles' *Antigone* and *King Oedipus* into German. During these days he himself turned into a teacher who taught languages like Greek and Hebrew as well as Bible to the fellow students at University. This increased the popularity of Hermann as a scholar and teacher.

Tübingen was a well-known center of theology, philosophy, history etc from 15th century onwards. From here Hermann was exposed to the ancient Indian history and Sanskrit. He was impressed with the rich cultural heritage of India and wished to visit India strongly. During this time, he got an opportunity to travel to India as a part of Basel Mission activities in 1835. For that he was invited to Switzerland, headquarters of Basel Mission. He was assigned the duty to teach Hebrew and Greek to the sons of Anthony Norris Groves, an English missionary and to accompany them in their journey to India.¹⁰ At that time, India was an important Centre of their missionary activities. Hermann was delighted to hear the news because he wanted to visit India and was waiting for an opportunity for a long time. Before his mission to India, Hermann secured doctoral degree in theology from Tübingen University in 1835.¹¹

Hermann Gundert in India

On 2nd October 1835 at the age of 22, Hermann started his journey to India from Stuttgart. 'Perfect' was the name of the ship which carried Hermann and others to India.¹² During his journey he spent more time

to learn about Indian native languages like Bengali. Unlike the plan to go to Calcutta, the ship moved towards Madras due to the adverse climatic conditions. By July 7, 1836 Hermann reached Madras, the southern part of India and thus fulfilled his dream. He visited several places in Madras like fort St. George and stayed there for one month. From there he travelled to Tirunelveli to meet Karl Theophilus Rhenius, a missionary.¹³ This was a turning point as he decided to start his missionary life from Tirunelveli. Hermann was very much impressed with the personality and knowledge of Rhenius which he utilized to extend his literary knowledge. He stayed with Rhenius and through the interactions Hermann learnt Tamil, native language of Madras. It was during this period that Hermann started writing of world history till the birth of Christ in Tamil language.

As a part of missionary activity Hermann moved to Chittor, a village in Tamil Nadu-Andhra border along with Grove and family. His passion for languages helped him to learn Telugu, another south Indian language. During the journey to Chittor he met two lady missionaries Julie Dubois, a French-speaking Switzerland missionary and Hanna Tome of Baghdad.¹⁴ They worked together in the missionary activities at Chittor which finally changed the life of Hermann. He was attracted with the loving and pleasant Julie Dubois and decided to marry her. They got married on 23 July 1838 at Chittor with the support of Mr. Lesley and his family. They decided to continue their missionary life and joined the Basel Mission.

While he was in the missionary work in Tiruchirappalli, Hermann was invited to Mangalore by Hermann Mugling, a missionary friend from Tubingen. Then the Gundert couple moved to Mangalore on 1 October 1838.¹⁵ During the journey to Mangalore they reached Nagercoil and later entered Kerala.

Gundert in Kerala

It was on 6th October 1838 that Hermann and Julie reached Travancore, the southernmost state in Kerala. They stayed there for some days and visited some nearby places. His experience in Kerala was described in his diary as "a gifted land with rich greenery and beautiful hills". From there they travelled to Mangalore by covering Kollam, Alappuzha and Cochin, where they met with an accident due to

heavy wind. Fortunately, all the passengers survived and finally Gundert reached Mangalore by November. He was welcomed by Hermann Mugling and Samuel Hebic, the founder member of Basel Mission in Malabar (north Kerala). Gundert started his missionary activities at Mangalore with Samuel Hebic, Hermann Mugling and Gotford Wyglee (from Wyglee, Gundert learned Kannada).¹⁶

While he was in Mangalore, Gundert heard about the missionary activities of Michael, a missionary from Ancharakandy, Thalassery (in Malabar). Hermann wanted to visit Michael as he was attracted by the missionary activities of Michael in the field of education. Gundert came to Thalassery to meet Michael in February 1839. After his interactions with Michael at Ancharakandy, Gundert explored the possibilities of missionary activities at Thalassery. Very soon he decided to shift to Thalassery which later became the major centre of his missionary as well as social life. He got the permission to begin a mission center at Thalassery.

By receiving the permission from Basel Mission, Gundert couple moved to Malabar and settled at Thalassery in April 1839.¹⁷ They found a good place to settle down in Thalassery. Illikkunnu was a calm and a beautiful place near to Thalassery town; there Gundert lived for twenty years. The house where they stayed was contributed by Mr. Stainge, District Judge, which later came to be known as Gundert Bhavan, the birth place of his literary works and all his children (Herman, Samuel, Ludwig, Marie (mother of Nobel prize winner Hermann Hesse) Christiana, Frederic Powel and David). Through the efforts of Gundert Thalassery emerged as the literary centre of Kerala. From 1836 to 1859 Gundert served India and in 1859 he returned due to poor health conditions.

Literary and Cultural Contributions of Hermann Gundert

Though missionary work was his prime concern, Hermann Gundert also made outstanding contributions in the field of language and literature. He had a great passion for language and showed great interest in literature. Gundert was proficient in many languages especially south Indian languages like Malayalam, Tamil, Telegu, Kannada etc. His passion for Indian culture and heritage motivated Gundert to learn Sanskrit. For

that he appointed a Sanskrit scholar (Munshi) at a salary of Rs 10/ per month. Very soon he started writing in Malayalam. He dedicated himself for a systematic study of Malayalam language and culture.

Literary contributions

From 1840 onwards Gundert began writing in Malayalam. He spent much time to learn the cultural differences, especially the differences in language, pronunciation and usages. Gundert became an influential writer in Malayalam by publishing some books including one on grammar (*Malayalabhaasha Vyakaranam*) and the first 'Malayalam-English dictionary', highly acclaimed two major works of Gundert. His other major works are *Keralolpatthy*, *Kerala Pazhama*, *Pazhanchol maala*, *Muhamad Charithram*, *Polukarppa Charitham*, *Lokacharithra Sastram*, *Krishthu Sabha Charithram*, *Loka Charithra Samkshepam*, *Malayala Rajyam*, *Nasranikalude Pazhama* etc.¹⁸ His works covered diverse topics such as history, folklore, proverbs, place name history, Christian studies, grammar, biography, travelogue, memories etc. Gundert also made some Malayalam translations of famous works such as pilgrim's progress of John Bunyan's into 'Sanchariyude Prayanam'. He also made a translation of bible in Malayalam. Gundert made notable contributions for the development of Malayalam prose and grammar.

Suvisesha Samgraham, *Sathyaveda Samkshepa Charithram*, *Suvisesha Kadhakal*, *Smarana Vidhya*, *Prarthana Samgraham*, *Sahithya Veda Ithihasam* etc were the notable works based on bible and religion.¹⁹ The translation of Question-answer book of Martin Luther and Christian Henric Celler and 'Nasranikal Okkeyum Ariyendunna Samkshepa Vedhartham' (the translated work of Clement Pianiyus) etc were used as catechism text books.

Gundert showed interest in the history of Kerala. *Lokacharitham*, *Keralacharithram*, *Krishthusabha Charithram*, *Keralolpatthy*, *Kerala Pazhama*, *Malayala Rajyam*, *Loka Charithra Samkshepam*, *Muhamadiya Charithram*, *Polukarppu Charithram* etc were the major historical works. The folk culture and traditions of Kerala also influenced the writings of Gundert. Local usages, myths, stories, songs etc were included in his writings. *Pazhanchol Maala*, *Arunooru Malayalam Pazhanchol*, *Orayiram Pazhanchol*, *Aayirathiorunooru Pazhamchol* etc. were the major works on local proverbs.²⁰ These works consist of great

collection of local proverbs. Gundert made tremendous effort in the compilation of these works.

Hermann Gundert devoted himself intensively in research of Malayalam language and grammar. His *Malayalabhaasha Vyakaranam* is considered as the first and prominent work in Malayalam grammar. The initial part of the work was begun by 1851 and was completed by 1868 (the work was completed by Rev. E. Diaz). He incorporated the grammatical elements of Tamil, Sanskrit and the popular styles existed in the 19th century Europe into Malayalam and formulated a new style. For the completion of his work he referred several palm-leaf documents. Among his contributions, the introduction of the crescent moon sign (*Chandrakala*) in Malayalam language is considered as the most reasonable one.²¹

Gundert also engaged in linguistic research which further led to the publication of the first Malayalam-English dictionary. It was not a mere dictionary but a rich source of words and all related references. Historians considered this attempt of Gundert as the biggest contribution to the Malayalam language. Gundert collected and documented several words and their meanings along with similar/related words. Though there existed several other dictionaries in Malayalam, Hermann's dictionary is considered as the most accurate and scientific one. In his dictionary Gundert incorporated the common words and dialects used by the local people, especially the fishing and tribal communities. Gundert made a massive effort to collect and document various common words used by different castes and communities with its regional variations (but compared with the northern usages the words from the southern parts of the state were very rare).²² For a comparative analysis he referred several literary works such as *Kundalatā* and *Indulekha* along with the available government/official records. The dictionary was not just 'mechanical' meaning-making equipment' but also included the names of animals, plants and trees in it. This clearly shows the versatility of the work and reached the level of an encyclopedia (the dictionary was completed in Germany).

According to Scaria Zacharia, Gundert was able to popularize the word 'Malayalam' and made it the standard name for the language.²³ It was through his publications that the name and content of Malayalam language became flourished. In addition to the grammatical and literary works of his own, he also collected and edited some old literary texts

also.

In the field of Journalism

Hermann Gundert is also credited with the development of Malayalam journalism. He was involved in the beginning of the first Malayalam newspaper, *Rajyasamacharam* in 1847 from Illikkunnu in Thalassery.²⁴ Till its end in 1850, 42 issues of the newspaper were published. *Rajyasamacharam* was printed at the printing press established by Basel Mission at Illikkunnu. Instead of literary language, he used popular or common language in the paper. Besides *Rajyasamacharam* he launched another newspaper/journal named *Paschimodayam* in 1847, with an intention to popularize the western ideas and thoughts among Keralites (his friend Frederic Muller was the editor of the paper). Unlike *Rajyasamacharam* there was a fixed price for the newspaper (two paise per issue and $\frac{1}{2}$ rupees for annual subscription)²⁵

If *Rajyasamacharam* was aimed in religious propagation and missionary works, *Paschimodayam* mainly for the propagation of western knowledge. The name itself denotes the aims and objectives of the paper. General knowledge, scientific and technological knowledge, geography, history, astrology etc were included in *Paschimodayam*. For the completion of this task he received assistance from the local experts like C. Kaniyan Kadu, Mooliyil Ramettu Gurukkal, Urachery Gurukkanmar, Yakob Ramavarma, Paval Chandran etc.²⁶ The primary lessons on printing and publishing acquired from his father helped Gundert in the development of Malayalam literature and journalism.

In the field of education

Gundert learned the value of education from Tübingen life which further expanded during his missionary life. His life proved that Hermann was an eager educationalist who worked hard for the development of education in Kerala. As a part of Basel mission Gundert couple began the mission of educating the illiterate people of Thalassery. They realized that education is very important for the socio-cultural development and so they popularized the importance of education through their missionary work. Both played a prominent role in the expansion of education in Kerala, especially in Malabar. They took initiative in the establishment of several primary schools like girls' school, night school for workers and school for orphans.

Gundert started an English pre-school at Thalassery in 1839 as a part of Basel mission. Though the school was a part of missionary work, Gundert maintained a secular culture in the school by providing modern sense of knowledge. The school proved successful till August 1942. He started a Malayalam school on the porch of his bungalow at Illikkunnu in 1839. He also brought several scholars and pundits to discuss and learn Indian history and culture.²⁷ Later he started another Malayalam school near Thalassery Fort. In 1840 he started another one at Kohiroor. Very soon he expanded his activities to the nearby places like Anjarakkandy, Mahe etc. Furthermore, Gundert introduced German model seminary schools which gave importance to physical activities (gymnastics) as well as technical education (handicrafts). Julie taught some handicrafts to the girls at their bungalow school.

Hermann Gundert himself acted as a teacher and taught English grammar, history and theology. He frequently visited the schools in Thalassery to inquire about its functioning. All these led to his appointment as the Government's school inspector for Malabar and Canara in 1857.²⁸ His appointment as the school inspector helped in the development of the system of education in Malabar. As school inspector he worked for the upliftment of education for two years. Though he worked only for a short period his contributions in the field of education were outstanding. He gave more importance to the quality of the textbooks for schools. He himself wrote some tutorial books for students. *Patamala*, *Malayala Vyakaranam Chodyotharam*, *School Pan-chathanthram*, *Malayalarajyam* etc were the main among them. Thus, he laid the foundation for the making of 'syllabus' by including all the subjects like history, geography, proverbs, stories, songs etc with a view to enrich the knowledge level. Gundert aimed at the moral, mental, physical development of students. According to him a textbook should be prepared based on the learning level of the students. His contributions have proved that Gundert was an excellent educationalist with a futuristic vision. Later his works were used as 'models' when Kerala Varma Valiakoi Thampuran started a board of textbooks in 1868.²⁹

Later phase

In 1859, a serious case dysentery forced Gundert to go to Germany. His wife and children initially left India. Gundert slowly recovered from

illness but going back to India was unimaginable. He continued his missionary work with the Basel mission. Mission sent him to Calw in 1860, to work with Christian Gottlob Barth, the founder and director of Calwer Verlagsverein (Calw publishing association).³⁰ There he took 10 more years to complete the work of Malayalam- English dictionary and completed it in 1872. There he worked as clerk till the death of Barth in 1862 and Gundert took over the duty of director of the printing association. Under his able guidance, Calw Publishing Association gained more popularity and grew considerably. He was assisted by his son Frederic, who joined him in 1875 as managing director of the publishing house.³¹ In 1877 a new branch of Calwer Verlagsverein was opened in Stuttgart, the hometown of Gundert.

On 15th September 1885 his wife Julie passed away which was a shock to Gundert. Soon after that he fell ill and was bedridden for a long time. Gundert died on 25 April 1893 at the age of 79. Gundert spent nearly two decades in Kerala and made great contributions to Malayalam language and literature. He did a lot for the enrichment of our culture. Undoubtedly this great lover of language and literature is still being remembered for his commitment to the language culture of south India especially Kerala. His rich literary legacy was carried over by his grandson Hermann Hesse, the Nobel Prize winner. Hermann Hesse learned the rich cultural heritage of India through Gundert which further helped him in writing. Gundert bungalow at Thalassery is now preserved as a historical monument.³² As an honor to him a large Gundert memorial statue was erected in Thalassery. Even today Hermann Gundert is remembered for the outstanding contributions made for the cultural development of Kerala.

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