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Author(s) Sreekutty B.

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Social Reform and Resistance: Ayyankali Movement in Travancore

Sreekutty B.
Research Scholar
Department of History
Iqbal College Peringammala, Thiruvananthapuram
University of Kerala
Sreekutty13081997@gmail.com

History of the Travancore over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was marked by the rigid caste hierarchy, social inequality, economic exploitation and gradual social changes. Access to public roadways, schooling, jobs, market places, religious organizations, and other social resources was mostly determined by caste. Communities at the bottom of the caste hierarchy faced social exclusion in many forms including untouchability and unapproachability this historical context, Ayyankali rise to prominence as a pulya community leader and was combating discrimination based on caste. Public mobility, education, agricultural labour, political representation, social dignity and human right were just a few of the many subjects that his organization focused on. Ayyankali helped the depressed community in Travancore create a new social awareness through organizing, collective action, protests, petitions and involvement in legislative institutions.[1]

In Travancore traditional caste system, the pulayas were among the marginalized group. They played an important part in the agrarian and were primarily agricultural laborers they did not however equal social, economic, or political right as a result of their economic contributions. Depending on agricultural estates and landlords let to poor pay, challenging labour conditions, and little ability to negotiate. Generations of pulaya families continued to rely financially particular landlords in many places. By restricting changes to social mobility, education, work and involvement in society, caste restrictions exacerbated this reliance.[2]

Particularly every aspects of pulaya life were impacted by social mobilization. They were prohibited from accessing public roads, market place and wells, interacting with dominate caste groups, and being admitted to school, castes became physically and socially distant due to untouchability. These limitations were not just isolated cases

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of discrimination: rather, they were a component of a larger social structure that controlled social relationships and access to public recourses. Because it kept the pulaya people from creating alternative options and strengthened their reliance on farmers, the denial of education was especially significate. Additionally, caste stratification was evident in attire, decorations, public manners, and other costumes. Pulaya women experienced restrictions on their attire and social behavior which made the fight for equality and dignity and important part of the larger movement.

Ayyankali was born in 1863 at venganoor in southern Travancore and lived up within the Pulaya community. His leadership was molded by his personal encounters with caste prejudice and his intimate knowledge of the issues faced by agricultural workers. He saw that political marginalization, economic exploitation educational exclusion and restricted movement were all directly linked to caste oppression. As a result rather than concentrating on a specific reform issues his action involved into a broad fight for socio economic and political rights.[3]

The Villuvandi Agitation of 1893 was one of the notable reflections of Ayyankali movement. The limitations placed on marginalized community were directly challenged by his bullock – cart ride on public roads. This action represented the desire for equality freedom of movement and dignity during a period when pulayas were restricting from using public roads. Access to market place, work place, school, and other public institutions was directly associated with access to the road as a result the fight for road access played a significant role for social and civil right. The Villuvandi agitation proved that caste based restrictions on public space were unethical.

Education is a significant contributions of Ayyankali. He saw that dealing with poverty, reliance and social marginalization required education. Pulaya children were kept out of school, which ensured that the next generation would continue to work mostly own agriculture. As a result, Ayyankali advocated for children from marginalized group to equal access to government school. Acceptance of a pulaya girl, known as Panchami and educational fight connected to Oroottambalam were key moments in this movement. The scope of opposition to educational equality was demonstrated by

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opposition to the admission and the school's following attack. The experience showed that education was directly associated with the present social and economic framework.[4]

The agricultural labour movement and Ayyankali goals for education were crossly associated. He realized that strengthening the economic circumstance of farmers was essential to secure in educational rights. In Kerala history of labour opposition the 1907 agricultural protest was a significant turning point. In their collective effort farmers protested inadequate pay, unfavorable working conditions, harsh labour methods and the children's absence of access to an education. In apart from highlighting the economic value of agricultural work, the strike gave oppressed workers a new avenue for collective bargaining. It also demonstrated the close connection between economic exploitation and caste.

The agricultural strike's importance expanded beyond its immediate labour demand. It inspired farmers to acknowledged there common principles and power. Workers who had previously been violated on an individual bases started together. Because education could offer future generation alternative to reliance on farming, the desire for education was linked to labour rights as result Ayyankali's labour movement stood for both an economic conflict and a challenge to the social order that maintained caste based slavery.[5]

Ayyankali movement got organizational support in 1907 with the establishment of the Sadhu Jana Paripalna Sangham. The group established a forum for the Pulaya community's demand to be voiced and jointly pursued. It supported community organizing, education, labour right, social dignity and the advancement of disadvantaged people. The Sangham turned localized and personal complaints into an organized social movement gatherings, petitions, campaigns and group activities. In addition to it inspired community members to strengthen their feelings of belonging dignity and common identity.

The emergence of general awareness was greatly aided by Ayyankali's organizing initiatives. Conditions of social isolation, economic dependence and fragmentation had been brought about by centuries of caste persecution. Oppressed people were

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pushed to acknowledge their common interest and experiences by community organizations and helped them overcome this isolation. As a result the movement called for both an internal shift in the community's consciousness as well as visible reform. The growth of self respect, solidarity, dignity and confidence were essential foundations for organized struggle.

Ayyankali participation in the parliamentary process booster his cause even more. He was elected to the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha, Travancore's representative body in 1912. His participation in this organization gave him to chance to address suppressed population issues in an official political setting. Within the state political framework issues related to education, agricultural labor discrimination and accountability from the government might be brought up. His involvement highlighted how important it is to combine institutional political activity with popular mobilization. Ayyankali used community organization, petitions, public resistance, labour action and political participation instead of depending only on protest or legislation.[6]

Economic interest and powerful caste groups strongly opposed the campaign. Pulayas opposed established structure of authority by trying to use public highway obtain access to schools, demand higher pay and assert social dignity. Social boycotts, threats, violence and resistance to labour and educational reforms are all possible forms of opposition. Conflicts about farmers and school burnings showed that caste hierarchy was upheld by social and economic power in addition to customs and beliefs. While the traditional system of dependency was threatened by educational advancement, landlords had a great stake in keeping control over agricultural workers.

Women had an important part in the movement related to social transformation. The combined influences of gender and caste led to prejudice towards Pulaya women. Agricultural labour and limitations on their rights of movement, attire, accessories and public conduct impacted their life. Requiring appropriate attire was a declaration of equality and self respect. Women's involvement in communal and educational issues showed that Ayyankali movement had an impact on the wider community and

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was not limited to male political leadership. Women's involvement and support bolstered the movement in social foundation.[7]

The Pulaya Community' cultural identity transformed as a result of the initiative. Pulaya were generally regarded as low and undervalued by caste society. By highlighting dignity, self respect, solidarity and group strength Ayyankali challenged this notion. Members were able to strengthen their feelings of shared identity through social groups and events. This shift in social consciousness was essential to political mobilization since a more unified and self assured group was better able to demand participation and rights. Ayyankali movement and the state of Travancore gradually became stronger. Caste practices were deeply rooted in the social framework in which the state first functioned. However, the ad, dispute over education vision was under growing pressure due to persistent mobilization labour dispute and request for public access. Eventually the state started to get increasingly involved in issues related to marginalized communities welfare and education. The relationship among caste society and state power witnessed a significant shift as the claim of oppressed people were more acknowledged regardless of the disparate implementation of reforms and continuing local resistance.[8]

It is an important to assess Ayyankali movement in a wider concept of Kerala's social change. Caste inequality was challenged by reformers like Sree Narayana Guru, Chattambi Swamikal and Kumaran Asan using a variety of literary, spiritual, intellectual and cultural strategies. The everyday struggles of marginalized communities and farmers were especially crucial to Ayyankali's contribution. Direct action labour organization, educational campaigns, community mobilization and political participation were all incorporated into his movement. Because of these factors it became an important representation of Travancore's grassroots opposition to caste injustice.

In addition to the specific reforms relating to his lifetime. Ayyankali's movement is significant strategically. His battle led to more comprehensive concept of citizenship, equality, social rights and public participation. The assumption that a person's caste should determine their rights in public life was challenged by the demands for access

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to road, schools, jobs and political institutions. Ayyankali assisted oppressed populations redefine what it meant to be member of society by connecting social dignity with public access, labour rights, education and political representation.

The Pulaya Community developed a greater political consciousness as a result of the movement. Previously caste oppression promoted reliance of the dominant social groups and limited collective action. Ayyankali' s organizational efforts contributed to a stronger sense of cohesion and shared purpose. Social mobility goals were fostered by education, collective bargaining was enhanced by labour organizations, and community demands could be communicated to the government through political engagement. A more structured type of Dalit political consciousness developed in Travancore as a result of these events considered together.[9]

Accordingly, Ayyankali's historical significance is found in both the wider change his movement brought about and the particular actions of protest. The Sadhu Jana Paripalna Sangham provided organizational strength the Villuvandi agitation contested limitations on public transportation educational struggles challenged school exclusion the agricultural strike contested economic exploitation and involvement in the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha brought the problems of oppressed communities into official political institutions. These changes demonstrate how caste, labour, education, public rights and Electoral representation.

The Ayyankali movement is an important part of Travancore's history and also the larger history of Dalit opposition in India. Ayyankali, who emerged in a highly hierarchical social culture, turned the Pulaya community's mobility, education, traditional farming, social dignity, women's experiences, community organization and political representation were all topics addressed by his movement. He helped oppressed communities develop a new awareness by focusing institutional involvement, collective organizing and direct opposition. His movement shows s how caste inequality was strongly associated with political marginalization, educational isolation and economic reliance. It illustrate s how important group activity is transforming long standing social system. As a result, Ayyankali plays a significant role in the development of social reform and Dalit movements in Kerala.

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