

THE ROLE OF PRINT MEDIA IN DEEPENING SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN MODERN KERALA

(LATE 19TH TO MID-20TH CENTURY)

Dr. Shaji. A

Professor & Head
Department of History
University of Kerala
Kariavattom Campus, Thiruvananthapuram
shajideepam@gmail.com

Abstract

Modern Kerala witnessed many political agitations and social movements. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these movements were organised and led by the principal communities and their leaders. The caste and communal consciousness of Travancore found expression through numerous publications of various communities and in the first half of the 20th century there was an influx of community- oriented press and literature. The community organisations effectively utilised their newspapers and periodicals to educate their members, to express their grievances and publicize their programmes.

Key words: Vivekodayam, Mitavadi, Sahodaran, Desabhimani, Malayali, Nair Samudaya Parishkari, M.N. Nair Magazine

Introduction

Among the various factors that contributed for the progressive transformation of Kerala society into a modern democratic society, politicization of caste played a very crucial role. In Kerala, particularly in Travancore, the socio-political movements of the modern period were initiated by the principal communities. Through their protests many of the marginalised communities succeeded in transforming the pyramidal social structure of Travancore into pillar social structure. They achieved it through incessant conflicts and assertions and from the position of caste victims they could elevate themselves to the makers of their own destinies. They transformed the society from change resistant sacred outlook to change ready secular outlook. The shift of this change was from caste hierarchical structure to inter-personal relations.

Theoretically speaking caste and democratic political system stand for opposite value systems. It is because caste is hierarchical and the status of an individual is determined by birth in a caste oriented social system. On the contrary in a democratic polity there is freedom to an individual and equality of status. But it is to be noted that politics does not function in a vacuum. It operates in a society where it is influenced by social forces. The social structure of Travancore was based on a plurality of identifications such as communities, caste

groups and occupational groups. These communities and caste groups acted as organized pressure groups. Caste worked as the most powerful vehicle of dominance. At the same time the very caste was used as a powerful weapon against dominance. It was used as a weapon for social and political mobilization and identity formation. The caste system had given them not only identity but also status and security. The community organizations realized that the emancipation of respective communities lies in their capacity for social consolidation and political mobilization. The caste associations instilled consciousness among the members and strengthened their bonds. The publications of the communities served as a vehicle for communicating their ideas and objectives. In the Civic Rights movement, Abstention movement and struggle for responsible government in Travancore, we could see the alliance and common protests of the principal communities- Christians, Ezhavas and Muslims. Their publications served as mouthpieces for advancing their aims and objectives.

In Kerala almost all the community organizations had their own community oriented publications to boost the caste consciousness of their members and elevate their socio-economic position. The articles that appeared in these publications cautioned their members to emulate the examples of the people of other countries so as to elevate their social status. Among the various factors that contributed for the progressive transformation of Kerala society into a modern democratic society, politicization of caste played a very crucial role. In Kerala, particularly in Travancore.

Publications of Ezhava Community

For supporting the Ezhava communities there were publications like *Vivekodayam*, *Mitavadi*, *Sahodaran*, *Navajeevan*, *Sujanandhini*, *Desabhimani* and *Kerala Kaumudi*. *Sujanandhini* was the earliest Ezhava publication from Mayyanadu, Kollam owned by Paravur Kesavan Asan. Unfortunately the Sujanandhini Press was set on fire during the period of Nair- Ezhava riots of 1905. *Vivekodayam*, the official organ of S.N.D.P. Yogam was started in 1904 under the editorship of Kumaran Asan. *Mitavadi* was started in 1907 owned by T. Sivasankaran and edited by Murkothu Kumaran. In 1913 C. Krishnan purchased it and published from his Empire Press, Calicut. *Sahodaran* was published by A. Ayyappan from 1917. *Navajeevan* was published from Popular Press, Kottayam. *Desabhimani* was started by Kayyalakkal Narayanan in 1915. T.K. Madhavan took over it in 1916 and continued its publication. It was started on 15 April 1915 and published from Sree Krishna Vilasam Press, Kollam. In the beginning it was published as Saturday weekly. *Kerala Kaumudi* was started by C.V. Kunjuraman in 1911.¹

Publications of Nair Community

For protecting the interests of the Nair community there were publications like *Malayali*, *Nair*, *Kerala Samudaya Parishkari*, *Nair Samudaya Parishkari*, *Navya keralam*, *Subhashini*, *Samadarshi*, *Kerala Chinthamani*, *Swarat*, *Swabhimani*, *The Service* and *M.N.Nair Magazine*.² *Kerala Samudaya Parishkari* was started in 1904. *Nair Samudaya Parishkari* began in May 1916 from Tellichery published by Iruvanattu K.C.Narayanan Nambiar and Chandroth K.T. Kumaran Nambiar. *Navya Keralam*, started in 1918 from Suvarna Ratna Press, Kayamkulam was edited by M.P.Nair of Mavelikkara. As early as in 1903 *Nair Magazine* was started by Kainikkara Govinda Pillai. He also started another publication *Subhashini*, a daily published from

Changanassery. Later it was shifted to Thiruvananthapuram and edited by P.K.Govinda Pillai. *Samadarsi* was edited by Kunnathu Janardana Menon. *Kerala Chinthamani* was started in 1912 by Pallathu Krishnan from Thrissur. *Malayali* was started as early as in 1886 by Malayali Sabha and in the beginning it was edited by Pettayil Raman Pillai Asan. Later C.V.Raman Pillai became its editor. *Swarat* was started from Kollam in 1921 and A.K.Pillai was its editor. In the beginning it was started as a biweekly, but in 1926 it became a daily. *M.N.Nair Magazine* was started in 1935 in honour of the Nair leader M.N.Nair. *The Service*, the official mouthpiece of the N.S.S started publication from Kerala Santhanam Press Alappuzha in 1920. In the beginning K.Kannan Menon was its editor. Later it was published from Kamalalayam Press Thiruvananthapuram.

The Christian Publications

The Christians were the earliest to begin with their publications in Kerala. Their publications include *Sathyanadam*, *Paschimodayam*, *Sathyanadakahalam*, *Rajyasamacharam*, *Malankara Vijayithan*, *Malankara Sabha Patrika*, *Malankara Sabha Mitram*, *Pauradhvani*, *Christian Mahilamany*, *Syrian Church Message*, *Kottayam Patrika*, *Nazrani Deepika*, *Malayala Manorama*, *Dasan*, *Kerala Dasan*, *Sathyadeepam*, *Kerala Katholican*, *Kerala Mitram*, *Yuvabharati* and *Messenger*. *Rajyasamacharam* was published in 1847 from Tellichery by Basal Mission and edited by Herman Gundert. *Paschimodayam* was also started by Basel Mission in 1847 and its editor was F.Mullar. In November 1848 C.M.S. started *Jnananikshepam* edited by Benjamine Beyly. *Sathyanadakahalam* was published from Varapuzha. *Christian Mitram* edited by A.M. Satyanesan was published from V.V.Press, Thiruvananthapuram. M.M.Muthuswamy Reddi edited another publication *Christian* and published from the same press. *Malankara Vijayithan* was published from N.P.House Thiruvalla edited by K.V.Simon. *Malankara Sabha Patrika* was owned by Marthoma Syrians and published under the editorship of M. Mammen from T.A.M.Press, Thiruvalla. T.M.Abraham was the Proprietor and Editor of *Malankara Sabha Mitram* published from C.M.M.Press, Kozhencherry. *Kerala Katholican* was edited by T.V.Augustine Fernandus and started publication in 1921 from Kollam. M.M.Varkey was the editor of *Dasan*, *Kerala Dasan* and *Yuvabharati*.³ *Catholic Messenger* was the publication of the Catholic Mahajana Sabha. *Pauradhvani* was a publication of the Catholic community published from Kottayam.

Publications of other communities

The publications of the various denominations of Brahmin community include *Saraswatha Youth* (1891) *Veda Vyasam*(1913) *Jenmi* (1904) *Unni Nambudiri* (1919) *Sanathan Dharma*, *Bhagyodayam*, *Nirupakan*, *Yogakshemam*, *Mangalodayam*(Trissur) and *Sree Sankaracharyan*. *Sanathana Dharma* was published from Sanathana Dharma Press, Alappuzha as a monthly edited by Manjeri Rama Ayyer. *Bhagyodayam* was a monthly published from Thiruvananthapuram.⁴ *Muslim*, *Swadeshabhimani* and *Deepika* were published by Abdul Khader Maulavi.⁵ The lower caste Hindu organisations had their own publications. *Sri Rama Vilasam* published by Kanjiravelil. K.N. Krishnan from 1913 was the official mouthpiece of Ganaka Maha Sabha. Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam had *Sadhu Jana Paripalani* started in 1913. Araya community started *Arayan* in 1917 and *Sathyavathy* in 1925.

Community Press and the Civic Rights Movement

The dawn of the 20th century witnessed the steady growth of political consciousness in Travancore. Colonial modernity and western ideas released a sense of civic consciousness among the various sections of the society. This awareness led to new political alliances between communities. In Travancore, the partners of this alliance were the Christian, Ezhava and Muslim communities and the Civic Rights they demanded was in one sense their community rights. Since the appointment in the land revenue department was prohibited to the non-caste Hindus and non-Hindus due to its attachment with the Devaswom department, the agitators demanded the early separation of Devaswom from Land Revenue department. During the Civic Rights movement in Travancore the community leaders of the Ezhavas prepared to assert civic rights and initiated a campaign for educating their people, the value of civic rights through their publications. Quoting the case of the class struggle in Rome between the Patricians and Plebeians, *Sahodaran* argued, “What shows the story of the Patricians of Rome? They monopolised the liberty and civic rights for a long time claiming tradition and aristocracy. Plebeians, who constituted the majority of the population were humiliated and forced to do menial labour for the Patricians. But once the Plebeians realised the importance of civic rights they began to think about the intensity of slavery enjoyed by them. They started a passive resistance, which lasted for about two hundred years. This struggle ultimately resulted in the victory of the Plebeians. The Patricians adopted the same methods of the Travancore savarnas. They used the same arrows like ‘the Devaswom claim’ of the Travancore higher castes.”⁶ In another issue *Sahodaran* exhorted that “the period of feudalistic dictatorship has given place to civic rights. Civic equality is the only ideal of modern governmental policy. The world war (First world war) taught a lesson in favour of democracy and people’s power and the governments should work for the welfare of the whole subjects instead of a selected few. The movement of civic rights has elevated the prestige of Travancore outside. This is the movement of 26 lakhs of loyal citizens.”⁷ *Nazrani Deepika* in an editorial published in 1918 severely criticised the savarna Hindu domination in Travancore civil service. It pointed out that as per the census of 1911, in the Revenue service out of the 34 lakhs of citizens in the state only the communities constituting 8 lakhs got employed and they were the men belonging to Brahmin, Nair, Vellala and Chetti communities. The fate of other communities was only to remit revenues to the state and not to serve in the Revenue Department.⁸

In a leading article in 1918, *Mitavadi* criticised the Devaswom administration and the savarna dominance in the society and polity. It pointed out that in Travancore there were 380 major Devaswoms and 1165 minor Devaswoms. But these Devaswoms were not beneficial to majority of the Hindus. The article pointed out that in 1917 the government spent rupees 3,18,142 for uttupuras and suggested that such amounts be earmarked for educational advancement.⁹ In an editorial in 1918 *Mitavadi* argued that for getting revenue the government needed the avarna communities but in the case of appointments in Revenue Department they were being neglected. Even the highest tax payers from the Ezhava community like Alummottil Channar was prohibited from serving the Revenue Department.¹⁰ The newspaper *Malayala Manorama* in an editorial in 1919 pointed out that the system of recruitment to public service followed in Travancore was wholly unsuitable

to a so-called Dharma State. Debarring a large section of people from Revenue Department by alleging its connection with Devaswom Department is a grave injustice towards them.¹¹ *Deepika*, in an editorial requested the members of the three communities to unite and strengthen their struggle for civic rights and freedom and alleged that religion should not be an obstacle for civil freedom.¹² T.K.Madhavan wrote in *Deshabhimani* that people must not permit the religious, caste and class differences that affect the self respect and civic rights of the citizens.¹³ *Sahodaran*, a publication of A. Ayyappan wrote, “It is impossible for anyone to obstruct the course of the man that pleads for equality of civic rights. Justice and reason support him. Neither the cannon nor the sword nor imprisonment nor the gallows can deter him in the least... In other countries that plea has overcome difficulties by the shedding of blood.”¹⁴

Because of the seriousness of the situation consequent to the strength of which was growing day by day, the Government of Travancore decided to sort out a solution at an early date. The government entrusted Krishna Ayyangar, the Forest Settlement Peishkar to study and report on the issue of the separation of Devaswom Department. He recommended the separation of all government and private Devaswoms from the Land Revenue Department including charitable institutions. Dissatisfied with this report the government appointed a committee of both Hindus and non- Hindus to study and report the problem.¹⁵ As per the report of the committee, the government issued a proclamation separating the Devaswom from Land Revenue Department on 12 April 1922. The Dewan reported in SMPA that, “After a careful consideration of the report of the Devaswom separation committee, Government have decided to place the administration of Sirkar Devaswoms under a separate Devaswom Department and simultaneously with the creation of this department the age long grievance of the non-eligibility of certain classes of the people of this country for admission into the Land Revenue Service of the state will disappear.”¹⁶ Through the separation of Devaswom from the Land Revenue Department, the main obstacle for the employment of the aggrieved communities in the Revenue Department was relieved.

Abstention Movement and the Community Press

The Princely state of Travancore in the 1930's witnessed a turbulent political agitation initiated by the aggrieved communities like the Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims for the purpose of adequate representation in the legislative bodies and public service, which produced consequences of far reaching magnitude. This agitation was in a sense, a continuation of the Civic Rights Struggle of the 1920's and the movement started by the aggrieved communities came to be called in Travancore history as Abstention Movement or Nivarthana Prakshopanam. The new agitation was started when a Legislative Reform Regulation was passed in 1932. The main feature of the reform was the constitution of a bicameral legislature- the Sree Mulam Assembly and Sree Chitra State Council.¹⁷ The legislation enfranchised only about 3% of the population of Travancore. Without the creation of the communal electorates, a certain number of seats were guaranteed to Ezhavas, Muslims and Latin Christians by a scheme of what was known as facultative election. Travancore in the 1930's witnessed the unprecedented growth of caste consciousness and communal rivalries in connection with the electoral politics in the state and the politics began to revolve around the castes.¹⁸

During the period of Abstention movement a fresh newspaper campaign broke out descending to fresh depths of scurrility. The aggrieved communities utilised their publications to advance their claims, keeping in view the socio-political changes happening in Travancore. Among the Christian leaders who worked strenuously for making the Abstention movement a full success, two persons deserve special mention. They were M.M. Varkey and K.C. Mamman Mappilai. Both of them were journalists who used their publications for popularising the movement. While the tone of criticism used by M.M. Varkey was very harsh, Mamman Mappilai used a polished language. A fearless journalist, M.M. Varkey used his publications, *Dasan*, *Kerala Dasan* and *Yuvabharati* for popularising Nivarthana agitation. To start with he attacked C.P. through an article published in *Dasan* entitled 'The Knight Errant' on 25 March 1933. As per the newspaper regulation act, government sent a memo to M.M. Varkey, the printer and publisher of *Dasan* asking him to stop its publication. He submitted a declaration on 10-01-1108 M.E in which he declared that he had changed the publication from the City Press Thiruvananthapuram to Subhodayam Press, located in Alummottuvilakam Building, Puthenchantha, Thiruvananthapuram.¹⁹ Government became furious on the publication of another article in the same issue entitled 'Abstention by itself Not Sufficient'.²⁰ In this article M.M. Varkey argued that "The agitation started by four-fifths of the population of the state aimed at establishing their rights for equal justice to one and all and at destroying undue predominance of a particular community in the legislature." Through another publication, *Yuvabharati*, M.M. Varkey tried to prove that the Travancore government followed a systematic course to injure the Christian community and adopted a partisan policy favouring the Savarna Hindus. In an article entitled *Akalekandanenkilum* (Looking from far off) Varkey argued that the new constitutional reform was a trick to make 80 percent of the population slaves of a dominating community."²¹ Following these, the Government of Travancore cancelled the licenses of *Dasan* and *Yuvabharati*.

Mamman Mappilai not only used his publication *Malayala Manorama* for popularising the Abstention movement but also richly financed for the success of the movement. He became the Chief Editor of *Malayala Manorama* in 1904 after the death of its founder Kandathil Varghese Mappilai.²² In an editorial published on 3 August 1933 Mamman Mappilai explained the aims and objectives of the Nivarthana agitation. He argued that communal feeling was very rampant in Travancore that at the time of election people would think only communally. He was very critical of the policy of repression followed by the government and he argued that "It is impossible to destroy the civic rights of 16 lakh Christians, 9 Lakh Ezhavas and 4 lakh Muslims through the policy of repression."²³ *Malayala Manorama*, *Kerala Kesari*, *Nasrani Deepika*, *Muslim Mitram* and *Kottayam Patrika* and *Kerala Kaumudi* published articles supporting the Nivarthana agitations.

Conclusion

The community oriented press functioned effectively in the struggle for responsible government in Travancore as well. In this respect the role of Mamman Mappilai and his publication *Malayala Manorama* deserves special mention. When the news about the release of C. Kesavan came, *Malayala Manorama* published an editorial showering enormous praise on him. The editorial runs thus: "We are proud and happy to publish the news of the release of C. Kesavan for which the public were looking with excitement. We do not know what

to say when Mr. Kesavan came out after overcoming the hardest examinations in his life. The name of Kesavan will ever remember, especially by the lovers of democracy and particularly the joint political communities. He came out as a glittering jewel by opening a new chapter in the history of Civic Rights.”²⁵ However the license of *Malayala Manorama* was cancelled and the press and office was sealed on 10 September 1938. Thus it is very clear that the community oriented journalism played a very crucial role in transforming Travancore into a modern democratic state.

References

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2. The Statistics of Travancore 1932-33, Thiruvananthapuram, Government Press, 1934; N.Sam, *Samuhika Navodhanavum Samudayika Patrangalum*(art.), Aruvippuram Pratishta Sadabdi Smaranikam (mal.), Thiruvananthapuram,1988,pp.154-58.
3. M.M.Varkey served in the Nazrani Deepika as editor in 1922.He started Kerala Dasan in 1924.Two years later he started Dasan. But its license was cancelled on 5 April 1933.He started Yuvabharati on 29 April 1933, which was also proscribed on November 1934.
4. *Desabhimani*, 18 December 1920.
5. K.Ramakrishna Pillai who later became famous as Swadesabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai worked as an editor under Abdul Khader Maulavi who published Swadeshabhimani. But later Ramakrishna Pillai took over this publication.
6. *Sahodaran* (mal.), Book.3, Vol.3, 1920, pp.93-94.
7. Ibid, Book.2, No.1, 1918.
8. The editorial alleged that it was Col. Munroe who merged the Devaswoms with the Revenue Department and in the beginning the Devaswom administration was performed by Christian Tahsildars. In Cochin the government showed no hesitation in appointing Christians in the Devaswom Department. Moreover the Devaswom expenses were meted from public money and hence the tax payers enjoyed the right to get the appointments in Devaswom Department; *Nazrani Deepika*, 19 March 1918; *Mitavadi*, Book.6, Vol.4, April 1918, pp.4-5; P.Bhaskaranunni, *Keralam Irupatham Nuttandinte Arambhathil* (mal.), Trissur, Kerala Sahitya Academy, 2005, pp. 391-92.
9. *Mitavadi*, Book.6, Vol.3, March 1918, p.2.
10. *Mitavadi*, Book.6, Vol.12, December 1918.
11. *Malayala Manorama*, 1 April 1919.
12. *Deepika*, 18 November 1919
13. *Desabhimani*, 1 January 1919.
14. *Sahodaran*, February-March 1919.
15. The official members of the committee were K.Ananta Narayana Iyer, Dewan Peiskar, Kottayam(President), R.Krishna Pillai and John Kurien. The non- official members were P.K.Narayana Pillai, John Nidhiri and S .Sanku Iyer; Report of the Devaswom Separation Committee, 1921; See also Travancore Devaswom Mannual; Travancore Devaswom Hand Book; TAR 1922-23;K.Vijaya Mohan, *Devaswom Administration in Travancore*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Thiruvananthapuram, University of Kerala.
16. SMPA Proceedings, 1922, p.166; *Regulations and Proclamations of Travancore*, Vol.V, pp.322-27.

17. TAR, 1932-33, p.16.
18. In Travancore demands for proper representation was raised in SMPA and Legislative Council by the members of the aggrieved communities. For instance in 1928 in SMPA, Ezhava members like Kunjukrishnan, Muloor. .S. Padmanabha Panicker and K.P. Marthandan Vaidyan raised their complaints. Muslim members like Pir Muhammed, M. Muhammed Husain, H.B. Muhammed Rowther, Abdul Rahim Kutty and Bapukunju Moideen and Christian representatives like D. Francis and E.N. Eipe raised demands. For details see SMPA Proceedings 1928
19. File.No.4464/1944,Bundle No, 134, Confidential Section, KSA, Nalanda, Thiruvananthapuram.
20. Ibid.
21. Through these articles the author tried to prove that the Travancore government was anti-Christian in their attitude. He also alleged that government followed a policy of repression to appease the Nair community; File.no.970/1933,Bundle No.27, Confidential Section, KSA, Nalanda, Thiruvananthapuram.
22. Mamman Mappilai was born on 4 May 1873 at Niranam. He became the Chief Editor of Malayala Manorama on 6 July 1904 when its founder Kandathil Varghese Mappilai died. He started the Travancore National Bank. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer cancelled the license of Manorama in 1938.C.P.was also instrumental in destroying the Travancore National and Quilon Bank. Mamman Mappilai died on 31 December 1953.
23. *Malayala Manorama*, 5 June 1933.
24. Geore Joseph, *Utharavadithva Bharanam* (art.),Kerala Kaumudi,20 June 1937.
25. *Malayala Manorama*, 25 September 1937;G.Priyadarsan (ed.), *K.C. Mamman Mappilayude Thiranjedutha Mughaprasangangal* (mal.), Kottayam, Malayala Manorama, 2004, pp.494-96.
26. *Malayala Manorama*, 6 July 1938