



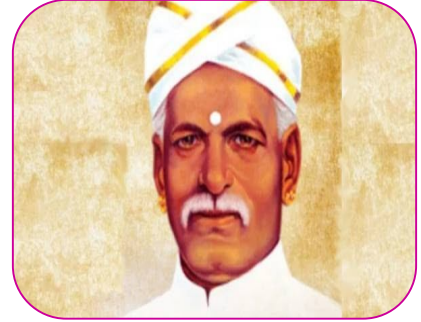
SADHU JANA PARIPALANA SANGAM

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ABSTRACT

The first quarter of the twentieth century was a remarkable period in the history of social progress in Travancore (present Kerala), marked by radical changes in the social, educational, political, economic and intellectual fields. A powerful instrument of social change was the caste associations. Caste associations were important socio-economic groups based on democratic principles. There was hardly any community or caste in the state without an association of its own for self development. These organizations tried to improve the status and influences of their respective communities by increasing their participation in education, government services and the various professions. They tried to create pressure groups by emphasizing caste identity in order to secure concessions or rights from the governments. Newspapers and periodicals established under their auspices helped in the dissemination of their ideologies. The caste associations called up on their followers to eschew their petty differences and unite for a common purpose. Another notable work of the caste associations was the creation of public opinion against spending money on wasteful ceremonies, which ate away a large part of the wealth of the communities. The Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam and the Nair Service Society succeeded in stopping such expensive ceremonies as talikettu and terantukuli in their communities through propaganda. Thus Ayyankali, the Depressed Class leader understood the necessity of an organization in bettering a lot of Pulayas and other Dalits. Thus he founded the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam in 1907. The Organization functioned actively under his leadership. He also started a monthly called Sadhu Jana Paripalini in 1913. Within the association he started a young troop called Ayyankalippada. Gradually SJPS weakened, the new organization, All Travancore Pulaya Mahasabha was formed by Ayyankali.



KEYWORDS: SJPS, Pulaya Mahasabha, Organization & Dalits.

INTRODUCTION:

The teaching as well as the activities of Sadananda Swami and Sree Narayana Guru indirectly influenced Ayyankali to form the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam. Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangam (SNDP Sangam) was organized by Sree Narayana Guru and Dr. Palpu for the advancement of Ezhava community aiming at attaining social emancipation of the community. The similarities in their names, policies and programs show that the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam might have been inspired by the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangam. The main aim of the organization was to bring the Dalit Christians and Dalits under one banner and work for their advancement. Ayyankali prepared the blue print of programme for social regeneration.

Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam

In 1907, Ayyankali founded the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam (SJPS) along with V.J. Thomas Vadiyan and Harris Vadiyan. Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam literally means the 'Association for the Welfare of Poor'.

Sadhu means poor, jana means people, paripalana means protecting and sangam means Society. The main objective of the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam was based on the idea of Sree Narayana Guru. He said, 'Liberation through education and unity through organisation'. Liberation not only means freedom from enslavement and slavery, but also means liberation from ignorance, illiteracy, untouchability and bondage. The organization was not meant for any single caste but it unified all the depressed servile people (sadhu janam). Thus, Ayyankali was successful in creating a platform for the Dalits for the first time.

Ayyankali traveled widely in the state to organise his people. To attract the people to his meetings and to popularize the message of the association, he made use of cultural activities. The Sangam specially organized performance of the rich folk arts of the Pulayas and similar other communities. All these helped in expanding and strengthening the organization. The organization functioned actively for a period of thirty years under the leadership of Ayyankali as its first general secretary. It established the units all over Travancore. Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam stood for the welfare of all castes such as Pulayas. Pulaya convert Parayas and other weaker classes.

The Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam had clear rules and regulations. The constitution of the Sangam emphasized cleanliness and discipline as the foremost object to be attained. At the same time Sree Narayana Guru too had stressed the necessity of observing cleanliness as a step towards the eradication of untouchability. It also emphasized the psychological, physical, educational, cultural, spiritual and material development of the depressed class people. The rules and by-law of this Sangam were drafted by Justice Govindan, a legal expert in those days in consultation with eminent personalities like Sree Narayana Guru, Kumaranasan etc. There were 'twenty four' sections of rules.

Programes of SJPS

One of the main activities of the Sangam was to organise meetings on the hill – sides or maidans in early stages because the Savarnas objected to public meeting of the untouchables. At these meetings, the leaders took classes and educated the audience on their rights and duties. The aim of the Sangam was to spread the importance of education to everyone. The leaders also urged the people to observe temperance and self control. Sangam also gave much stress to educational progress and possession of land for the landless, as the primary needs of the untouchables. Ayyankali was the first to raise the slogan 'land for the tillers of the soil'. So the formation of the Sadhujana Paripalana Sangam was a landmark in the history of the Pulayas or the outcastes in general.

Constitution of SJPS

The executive authority of the Sangam was vested with the general Secretary. Ayyankali himself was the first general secretary and all branches working in different parts of Kerala, functioned under his control. The general secretary of the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam was called Kanakkan. Thomas Vadhyar was given the responsibility or organization correspondence. The first Executive Committee of the Sangam consisted of Thavilakattu Kali, Moolayil Kali, Thomas Vadhyar, the brothers of Ayyankali named Chattan, Gopalan, Velayuthan and Velukutty. The Sangam started functioning very secretly far away from public places. For the mobilization of funds, Ayyankali followed the method of Sree Narayana Guru and SNDP Yogam. From small amounts to pidiyari everything was welcomed. Some of the important decisions of an early meeting of the SJPS are:

1. To reduce the number of working days from seven days a week to six days a week. The labourers demanded oneday of rest a week.
2. All the depressed caste members (Sadhu Janam) should attend the weekly meeting held every Sunday to discuss their problems.
3. Male and female members should remit $\frac{1}{2}$ chakram and $\frac{1}{4}$ chakram as membership fees respectively.

Soon after the formation of SJPS, Ayyankali tried to extend its activities to the whole of Travancore. Thus, within eight years of its inception, several branches of the SJPS were established different parts of Travancore. Nearly fifty four branches were opened in Changanassery Taluk alone. The headquarters of this

rapidly growing organization was established at Ayyankali's native village Venganoor. It was also equipped with a library and conference hall.

An elected body that consisted of a president, vice president, secretary, joint secretary, treasurer and manager, controlled each branch of the SJPS. The local committee of the various branches of the SJPS influenced the everyday life of the Dalits. The 'Sunday gathering' of the Dalits organized by the SJPS was widely – attended by both men and women. The managers of each branch played an important role in the organization's development. These managers were top leaders of the Ayyankali pada. Some of the prominent managers of the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam were: Mathu Manager, Nayanar Manager, Panchana Manager, Pappu Manager, Kuruncheri Manager, Vellamkolli Manager, Ayyappan Manager, Kali Manager, Chennan Manager and Putharkanam Rama Manager.

Thus, within a short span of time, there were branches of the SPJS all over Travancore. It is noteworthy that these branches acquired properties. In some instances, even the progressive caste – Hindus donated lands to the SPJS for the purpose of building their branch office. The participation of Dalit women gave a new impetus to the activities of the SJPS. They raised money for the smooth functioning of the organisations by selling pidiyari.

Sadhu Jana Paripalini

Ayyankali had a far – sighted vision. As a part of his organizational activities, he started a Malayalam monthly called Sadhu Jana Paripalini in 1913 with the help of his associates from Changanassery. The chief editor of the magazine was Kali Chodikkaruppan. It was printed at Sudarshan Press in Changanassery. The regular contributors of the articles to the monthly were C.C. Pappen, M. Gopalan Nair etc...Sadhu Jana Paripalini was perhaps the first magazine to be brought out by untouchables. It was indeed a bold venture for an illiterate man like Ayyankali. He collected a band of devoted friends of his caste who pooled their meager resources and kept magazine going.

The magazine served dual purposes. It made Dalits conscious of their rights and it also drew the attention of the enlightened sections of the other communities to indignities and degradation to which Dalits were subjected in Kerala. This is the way he gained the support of some upper class Hindus. He got genuine support from enlightened Nairs like Swadesabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai, the great patriot and journalist.

Ayyankalippada

Under the auspices of the SJPS a youth organization of the Pulayas known as 'Ayyankalipada' was formed by Ayyankali. It rendered valuable services conducive to their future programmes. Whenever the honour and self respect of a Pulaya was challenged the Ayyankalipada intervened effectively, creating tension and law and order problem. This youth organization under the leadership of Ayyankali defied the caste restrictions and walked along the prohibited roads in his native place, Venganoor. Besides, the Sangam interfered in many places, for settling issues, and led many agitations in places like Manacaud, Kazhakuttam, Pallippuram, Kaniyapuram, Kandala and Uruttambalam. Ayyankali was present in the Sri Mulam Praja Sabha in 1914 and 1915 during the tumultuous years. The Pullattu Riots and Perinadu Riots between the Nairs and Pulayars shook the whole of Travancore. In both these riots, the Nairs targeted the leaders of the SJPS who were mobilizing the Pulayars.

Thus, Ayyankali raised many critical issues pertaining to land, housing, education, stigmatised conditions of the Dalits, and issues of agricultural labourers and so on in the Sri Mulam Praja Sabha. And his efforts attained moderate success. Soon after 1912 many other members of the various Dalit castes found their way into the Praja Sabha. They were Charakan Soloman (Dalit Christian, 1913), Vallikkara Chothi (Pulaya, 1914), Kandam Kumaran (Paraya, 1915), Paradi Abraham Issac (Dalit Christian, 1916) and Kurumban Daivathan (Pulaya, 1917). Though this process played a significant role in defining the political identities of Dalits, it internally weakened the emergence of Dalit consolidation that integrated all of them under one umbrella organization. Parallel to the process of increased representation to the Dalit communities was the

process in which they no longer came to be seen as a homogeneous group. The representatives soon began to argue the case of their respective jatis. It led to friction in the solidarity of the organization.

Disintegration of SJPS

The organization was accused of being interested in the all-round development of only a section of the society. One should also examine the role of the state in creating internal schism among the Dalit jatis. Although he did not realize it in the beginning, Ayyankali was nominated to the Sri Mulam Praja Sabha only as a representative of the Pulayas and not as a representative of all the Dalits.

Gradually, other Dalit members, representing different castes were also nominated to the Sabha. There was mutual contest among the various representatives. In this context, Ayyankali and his organization could not form collective opinion among the Dalits. Towards the end of his career, even Ayyankali was heard arguing for the Hindu Pulayas in particular, in the Sri Mulam Praja Sabha. Moreover, towards the end of his career he expressed his soft corner to Brahmanical organizations like Arya Samaj, Hindu Mahasabha, Kerala Hindu Mission and so on. The state was giving its patronage to various Dalit groups at the same time and because all of them began to depend on the royal patronage for sustenance, it adversely affected the noble interests of the SJPS (and other groups) because their efforts and struggles were co-opted by the state quite easily: it created competition among the different Dalit representatives for acquiring its patronage.

Pratyaksha Raksha Daiva - Sabha was an organization, which got established for the welfare of converted Dalits. Poliyayil Yohanam mainly attempted at constructing a Dalit identity and provided organizational base. Dalits in the pre-independence Kerala as elsewhere in India were highly differentiated. Conversion to Christianity further compounded the matter. Infact conversion itself was the product of such an identity outside the Hinduism. They tried to flee their past and risk new and liberated future away from centuries of caste and class oppression. They tried to erect a new identity on the place of negative identity. But paradoxically identity still remained elusive. This, therefore, forced many to search elsewhere for that even eluding identity and the more enlightened among them even attempted to come out of the Christians order – Yohanam and John Joseph were clear instances in this regard.

Yohanam was a Pulaya convert who after brief flirtation with Christianity deserted it due to caste based discrimination within it. In 1908 he founded an organization called Pratyaksha Raksha Deiva Sabha (PRDS). He felt that the untouchable converts were not treated equally with the other Christians, therefore, he came to a conclusion that if a particular religion doesn't provide any solution for the problem of Dalits, then it is not meant for them. There was no justice and solace either from Hinduism or Christianity. Finally he himself founded a new faith called PRDS. The principles of PRDS were (1) to reject Christianity and Hinduism, (2) to believe that God will incarnate to liberate the untouchables, (3) to believe in liberty, equality and fraternity and (4) To pray in the name of the creator but not to offer sacrifice. The head office of PRDS was at Tiruvalla in Pattanamtitta District. This Sabha worked for the moral and spiritual development of the downtrodden in Kerala.

'Cheramar Mahajan Sabha' got established at Travancore on 14th January 1921. Along with other dalit organizations this organization also fought for the right to walk on the roads, education and temple entry. Padambi John Joseph had set up this organization after he and his followers got disillusioned with the Pulayas organization. John Joseph was a Pulaya convert who sought to bring Pulayas of all hues and shades under the banner of Travancore Cheramar Maha Sabha. John Joseph had deep sense of history and realized its importance in identity formation. Joseph had in his custody a rich collection of government records and from these Joseph learned that Pulayas lineage was linked with ancient Chera dynasty of Kerala. He even located a family call Aykara Yajmanas then living in a village called Kunnathunadu in central Travancore belonging to this lineage. John Joseph described the Pulayas as landlords, poets and ruler of Kerala in antiquity. On this basis he even changed his caste name to Pulayas to Cheramar so that his people could be filled with pride about their ancient heritage. Efforts were made by Sabha to get their name Pulaya changed to Cherumar. John Joseph arranged a memorandum and submitted it to the Legislative Assembly and a copy of it was given to the Pro-Vice Chancellor of Travancore University for remark. Thus, the Sabha tried to wipe

out the caste name Pulaya which was synonymous to slave and he named it Cheramar which means 'sons of the soil' of Kerala. This organization tried to bring the sense of self-respect amongst its caste members.

The converts in Kerala did not receive the facilities as their non-converts counterparts. So the Charmer Christian Mahajan Sabha was formed and fought for the right of converted Pulayas to Christianity. In a meeting held by the organization under the presidentship of Pastor H.J. Philip on 27th January 1924, a resolution was passed by the council members who demanded more representation to Pulaya scheduled caste in Legislature. The Charmer Christians Mahajan Sangam attracted the converts Pulayas towards it. It gave a new awakening to Dalits in Kerala.

By 1938, there were many Pulaya organizations all over Kerala. Hence, with a view to unite all the organizations, into one banner Ayyankali took initiative to form an organization called 'All Travancore Pulaya Mahasabha' in Travancore in 1938. According to the rule in Travancore, Sabha was registered in T.T. Keshavan Sastry's name. Ayyankali became its first secretary. The organization was established for whole of Travancore hence its objectives were much broader based than those of SJPS. The objectives of Mahasabha touched upon socio-economic and political uplift of Pulayas. It contributed to a great extent for the liberation of the Dalits in Travancore.

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