Subalternity and Religion: A Study of the Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha

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DECLARATION

I, **Anish V.R.** (13SPPH07), hereby declare that work embodied in this dissertation titled "**Subalternity and Religion: A Study of the Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha"** is carried out under the supervision of **Prof. Arun Kumar Patnaik**, Professor, Dept. of Political Science, University of Hyderabad for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Sciences. The dissertation is an original work of mine to the best of my knowledge and no part of this dissertation has been submitted in part or in full to this University or any other university or institution for the award of any other degree or diploma. I also declare that this is a bonafide research work which is free from plagiarism. I hereby agree that my thesis can be uploaded in Shodhganga/INFLIBNET.

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Further, the student has the following publication(s) before submission of the thesis/monograph for adjudication and has produced evidence for the same in the form of acceptance letter or the reprint in the relevant area of his research.

Parts of the thesis have been published in the following publication

1. Prathirodhathinte Nanarthangal: Ayyankaliyude Jativirudha Prakshobhangal (The many meanings of Resistance: Ayankali's Anti-Cast Struggles), 2020, in Sajeev P.V (Ed) *Chintha Charithram: Adhunika Keralathinte Boudhikacharithrangal* (*Intellectual History: The intellectual Histories of Modern Kerala*), Kottayam: D.C.Books, ISBN 978-93-5390-2964

And has made presentations in the following conferences

1)."Rethinking Subaltern Resistance: A Case Study of Ayyankali and His Anti-Caste Movements in Kerala, Chintha-Charithram: Intellectual Histories of Modern Kerala, Research and Postgraduate Department of Malayalam, Govt. Arts and Science College, Kozhikode, Kerala, 8-9 October 2018

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Further, the student has passed the following courses towards the fulfillment of the coursework requirement for his PhD

Course Code	Course Title	Credit	Pass/ Fail
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PS 802:	Research Methodology-II	4	PASS
PS 803	Individual Course	4	PASS

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To Achan and Amma, who dreamed over it more than me…

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Abbreviations

AKPMS:	All Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha
BJP:	Bharatiya Janata Party
CID:	Criminal Investigation Report
CMS:	Church Missionary Society
CPI:	Communist Party of India
CPM:	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CSDS:	Cheramar Sambava Development Society
DHRM:	Dalit Human Rights Movement
KCBC:	Kerala Catholic Bishop Council
KCHMS:	Kerala Cheramar Hindu Maha Sabha
KPMS:	Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha
LMS:	London Missionary Society
NSS:	Nair Service Society
PRDS:	Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha
SAMASTHA:	Samastha Kerala Jem-iyyathul Ulama
SC:	Scheduled Caste
SJPS:	Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham
SNDP:	Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam
SS:	Subaltern Studies

Glossary

Adi Dravida	The first Dravidians
Arukola	A mythological figure popular in Kerala
Brahmaswam	Property owned by Namboothiri Brahmins
Chera	A Kerala based ruling dynasty
Cheralam	Ancient name of Kerala
Cheraman Perumal	Last ruler of the Perumal Chera Dynasty
Cheramar/Cherumar	A designation used by a section of Pulayas.
Chola	A South Indian Dynasty
Devaswam	Property owned by Temples
Ezhyavas	A Backward caste in Kerala
Ira Cherumar	A division among the Pulaya
Jati	Caste
Kallumala agitation	Bead Necklace agitation
Karshaka Union	Agriculture labour union
Keezhayalan	Malayalam word equivalent subaltern
Kilakkan Pulaya	Eastern Pulaya, a division among Pulayas
Kudiyanmar	Tenants working on the land
Madan	A Folk male God popular in South India
Marutha	A mythological figure popular in Kerala
Matham	Faith
Nadu	Administrative division used by Cheras
Naduvalikal	Chief of Nadu
Namboothiri	Caste name of Kerala Brahmins
Navodhanam	Renaissance

Padinjaran Pulaya	Western Pulaya, a division among Pulayas
Pandya	A South Indian Dynasty
Parasurama	Sixth incarnation of Vishnu
Paraya	A Scheduled caste in Kerala
Praja Sabha	Princely State Legislative Assembly
Prathyaksha	Visible
Pulayar	A Scheduled Caste in Kerala
Raksha	Salvation
Sadhu Janam	Poor People
Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham	Poor People Welfare Society
Sahukar	Moneylender
Sarkar	Government
Thanta Pulaya	A division among the Pulaya
Thekkan Pulaya	Southern Pulaya, a division among Pulayas
Uralar	Proprietors of the village
Uzhiyam	Forced labour without payment
Vairudhyam	Contradiction
Varuna	Hindu God of Ocean
Villu Vandi Yatra	Bullock Cart agitation
Vishnu	One member of Trimurthi

CONTENT

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

"Saturday afternoon was the scheduled meeting time for me with Ayyan. He was referred to me by a friend for being an expert on Ayyankali, KPMS, and an amateur historian. I aimed to get some insight into the activities of Ayyankali and KPMS concerning the theme of religion. As per Ayyan, Ayyankali offered the most popular and importantly organized Pulaya movement within Travancore, which aimed to achieve a charter of demands addressing the socio-economic hardships of lower castes, such as lack of land, education, jobs, etc.

Religion figured within Ayyankali's numerous concerns only marginally even though increasing conversions, appeasements by the Hindu state of Travancore, and activities Kerala Hindu Mission had attracted Ayyankali's attention. However, as per Ayyan, unlike most of his contemporaries, Ayyankali was neither a believer nor was particularly inclined towards any faith-based resolution to social problems. He wanted salvation for all and was open to embracing religious resolution to the problem of caste. This objective made Ayyankali acknowledge the benefits of Christianity and raised the issue in Praja Sabha about how Pulayas were not to be blamed for converting as it offered transformation. However, Ayyankali was simultaneously receptive to the Hindu state, which appealed to Pulayas and other lower castes by nominating its leaders to Praja Sabha, distributing lands, assistance for education, and preferential treatment in jobs, etc.

However, one concern that bothered Ayyankali was the emergence of internal divisions among Pulayas on religious lines, such as Hindu and Christian Pulayas, and their formation of different organizations during his lifetime. Ayyan believes Ayyankali feared that his community would disintegrate into Christian and Hindu Pulaya and other sub-categories instead of standing together as Sadhu Janam. The experience of disintegration of SJPS into KPMS, Karshaka Union, and Cheramar Sangham proved the predictions of Ayyankali". In Ayyan's own words, "religion was both a boon as well as a bane. It strengthened as well as divides us. The conversion gave us mobility. We got a

new faith, education, jobs, and land, though not always accordingly, but for a beginning, it was crucial. Our conversion made the Hindu state fearful, and they also started listening to giving us land, jobs, Temple entry, and even Praja Sabha nominations. However, as we got more aware and organized, we had divisions.

Ayyankali wanted us to be organized as Sadhu Janam, not under any other caste name. He feared that if we used the caste name, every caste would fight with others for being different. For Ayyankali, beyond these caste differences, our condition of being sadhu (poor) created a ground for unity. Divisions emerged, and eventually, Pulaya unity was lost. Today, numerous organizations, KPMS, KCHMS, CSDS, and AKPMS, all claim to represent Pulayas. Pulayas remain under the dominance of Hinduism and Christianity, unable to form an entire constituency of their own. The vision of Sadhu Janam is lost among these divisions".

As the meeting ended, I had the opportunity to look at the room I was sitting. It had a tall plastic banner of a Bow holding Ram (symbolic of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement). Ayyan pointed at it, telling me it was for a reception at Temple by the organization he was working for. Ayyan smiled and added that many KPMS and non-KPMS Pulayas now attach themselves to Temple activities. As I stood at the bus stop, I saw a rally demanding reservations to Cheramar Christians, accepting their distinct identity as Cheramars. Alongside the rally, there was a commemoration of Ayyankali's role in strengthening Dalits cutting across all denominations. It was pandemonium but illuminating.[1] The above description is part of a half-day interview with one of my respondents. In many ways, it revealed the contradictory shades present among the Pulayas. The mobility provided by Christianity, disappointment over religious divisions, and hardships in overcoming internal divisions among Pulayas-were all reflected in Ayyan's response. Though there is no claim of being exhaustive, the respondent indeed points to the contradictory nature of Pulaya politics. Pulayas benefitted from conversion and Hindu mobilization, but they were also separated and differently mobi-

1 Interview with Ayyan on 27-10-2018.

lized, weakening the future possibility for common anti-caste politics. Each of the Pulayas–Christian and Hindu were subjected to new controls of religion while achieving mobility and progress.

Thus, for Ayyan, religion produced a 'vairudhyam' (contradiction) - gave strength and weakness. The present study explores this particular contradiction faced by Pulayas by relating it to the category of subalternity and its association with religion. The study explores how these differing religious affiliations (particularly challenges brought in by conversion and anti-conversion sentiments) and other factors such as immediate political interests, Sanskritisation, sub-caste divisions, and KPMS's approach to Temple reform, renovation, etc. reflect the particular nature of subalternity. However, prior to this, it is essential to outline the broad background against which the terms such as subalternity and subaltern were formulated.

1.1 Background of the Study

The study emerges in the context of the increasing visibility and subsequent debates surrounding the themes such as subaltern/subalternity/subaltern movements and their struggle for autonomy, particularly during the post -70's. Though subaltern social groups and various subaltern themes have been the subjects of research, the theme of subalternity received international recognition with the inception of the Subaltern Studies collective.[2]

The critical attention received by the Subaltern Studies collective was crucial in bestowing a halo to terms such as subalternity or subaltern. The prominence and influence of Subaltern Studies in establishing the importance of the themes of subalternity and subaltern can be understood from the wide acceptance that Subaltern Studies received globally, particularly from Anglo-American academies. There has been a considerable clamor to include subaltern themes within the most prominent jour-

2 The term Subaltern Studies collective (hereafter SS) refers to a new historiographical school initiated in 1982 under the general editorship of Ranajit Guha. The term subaltern was defined by Guha as an indicator of the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society, whether expressed in terms of class, gender, age, office or any other manner (Guha 1982: vii). The objective of the SS collective was to publish on themes related to subalterns and the condition informing their condition. It has brought out 12 volumes touching upon themes as varied as tribal, agrarian, labour, gender, etc. The primary submission of SS was that the nature of Indian historiography - both liberal nationalist and liberal colonialist, has been elitist. It has concentrated either on the efforts of colonial administrators, generals, or missionaries or the efforts of organized anti-national movements such as associational politics or Gandhian politics. These historiographies constructed a failed hegemony for colonialism, capitalism, and modernity. For SS, the original problem for a genuine Indian historiography would recognize a structural dichotomy in Indian society dividing Indian society into elite and subaltern realms. The subaltern or popular realm had contributed independently to the anti-colonial efforts without any elite assistance. The objective of SS would be then to empirically bring out the efforts made by the people independent of the elite (Guha 1982:1-7).

nals. The influence of Subaltern Studies has contributed to the inauguration of a Subaltern Studies chapter in Latin America (Lal 2003:186-191).

The most important contribution of Subaltern Studies has been to state the untold story of colonialism as Ranajit Guha posits, i.e., the people's history that has been previously untold in the case of post-colonial societies through the theme of subalternity. These developments have also paved the way to establish Subaltern Studies as an essential mode to practice in post-colonial studies. For the relevance of the present study, however, the emphasis would be to understand the debates initiated and promoted around the theme of subalternity by the Subaltern Studies collective, particularly in the context of the history of colonial India. Subalternity as a theme emerged from the crystallization of a broad spread discontent in India around the 1970s within academic circles. Several factors contributed to this state of affairs. The marginalization of the peasant, tribal, lower caste movements by mainstream political parties, including the organized left; the Naxalbari uprising in West Bengal and the betrayal of this revolutionary movement by the Left government by spearheading repressive measures; the emergency period of 1975, suspending all constitutional rights, echoing the inherent unresolved contradictions within the democratic process pointing to the failure of consensual nation-building programme initiated under Nehruvian socialism (Upadhyay 2016:536-538).

The political turmoil of the 1970s and subsequent unfolding of events, particularly emergency, challenged the 'commonness' of the anti-colonial past on which the nation was grounded. There was a renewed interest to re-visit several of these received wisdom to reveal the reasons behind such a crisis. This inquiry construed and attempted to answer two questions: Firstly, was there something within the colonial modernity or even anti-colonial movement that could have led to the current predicament? Secondly, how far can our present problems be compatible and explained by what happened with our predecessor's engagement with the politics and culture of that period? (Chatterjee 2010:321).

An inquiry of this nature indeed questioned the hegemony of colonialism, anti-colonial struggle, and nationalist claims. Moreover, it probed into the nature of the colonial state, the role of capital in the Indian colonial context, and the practice of history as a power discourse to produce a particular understanding of the Indian past. The emphasis was to problematise the monistic picture of colonialism and national struggle and a systematic historiographical exercise involving liberal colonialist, liberal nationalist, and Marxist historians (Chatterjee 2010:318-326). Scholars such as Ranajit Guha, Gyanendra Pandey, Partha Chatterjee, and others who later constituted the Subaltern Studies collective responded to the above concerns. They argued that the post-independent crisis of the 1970s was a sign of a central contradiction inherent to the politics of India.

Subaltern Studies posited a structural split within politics of South Asia and the existence of independent initiatives of subaltern groups for autonomy determined by the subaltern consciousness (Chatterjee 2010:326-327). Their nature of organizations, instruments of mobilization, and idioms of political socialization and ideology differed from elitist politics. The dichotomy between elite and subaltern realms was a statement regarding a radically different history of power, a relation of dominance exercised through direct domination. This power relation was feudal or semi-feudal, sustained through a pre-capitalist material mode of production while sanctioned and legitimized through a traditional structure (Chakrabarty 2000:474).

Subaltern Studies argued that the contemporary historiography on India - colonialist, nationalist, or Marxist failed to understand the true nature of post-colonial Indian politics because they conceived of post-colonial politics as the unfolding of the universal forces of modernity. Thus, while liberal historiography considered Indian history a transition from pre-modern to modern society, attempting to adapt to modern liberal democratic institutions and practices, Marxist theories saw it as a transition from the pre-capitalist to the capitalist stage.

Instead, India's colonial and post-colonial history must be regarded as a history where modern existed with institutions and practices which appeared as pre-modern from the former's standpoint; the

presence of an independent subaltern consciousness and various subaltern struggles for autonomy outside the ambit of organized elite politics are examples for this. They are not an aberration in the history of colonialism but the unacknowledged grounds of 'difference,' the contradictory foundation, or if possible, the 'internal other' of colonial modernity itself, which both nationalist and Marxist historiographies have overlooked. However, this inherent contradiction is critical to understanding the nature of the anti-colonial struggle and post-nationalist politics (Pouchepadass 2002:85-88).

Thus exploration of the theme of subalternity is to be understood as narrating the untold story of Indian colonialism. It challenges the received wisdom such as the hegemonic legitimacy of the Indian National Congress-led nationalist struggle, designating subaltern movements as subsets of the former, lacking any independent or distinct agenda, and questions the hegemonic status of the Indian nation. Subaltern Studies produced an essentialist account of subalternity, focusing on the structural dichotomy separating elite and subaltern politics, stressing subaltern autonomous claims expressed at moments of dramatic upheaval.

However, SS scholars were not unique in holding this position. Scholars such as James C Scott reproduced arguments in a similar vein by emphasizing the domain of moral economy located within the everyday life of the subalterns existing beyond the hegemonic intervention of elites. However, all these scholars sidelined moments of subaltern collaboration and approval of privileged positions alongside moments of dramatic upheavals and everyday politics. Thus contradiction inherent to subalternity, the key to the Gramscian notion of subalternity, was never probed as a causal factor in understanding the variations within subaltern politics.

Contradictory nature of subalternity influences subaltern action producing moments of deference and defiance simultaneously. Subaltern struggles are marked by periods of collaboration with dominating groups against which they wage acts of resistance, indicative of a double consciousness mentioned in the beginning paragraphs. The present study attempts to draw from this position of subalternity as contradictory consciousness as a standpoint to discern the various features of subaltern

consciousness expressed during the struggle waged by subaltern groups like Pulayas. The attempt in the study will be to map the nature of subalternity (subaltern consciousness) and how it has been articulated through historically analyzing the experience of various struggles waged by the Pulayas via their organizational initiatives such as Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha in post-independent India.

1.2 Mapping the Field-A Historical Profile of Pulayas in Kerala

The study is based on the study of the Pulaya caste located within the former princely state of the Travancore region of Kerala, South India. The Pulaya caste (also known as Thanta Pulayan, Cheramar, or Cheruman) is currently categorized as a Scheduled caste (Singh 2002:1253). It is the largest among the eight scheduled castes in Kerala, constituting 33.3% of the total Scheduled caste population (Census of India 2001:1). They are present in Palakkad, Ernakulam, Alappuzha, Kottayam, and Pathanamthitta districts of Kerala.

Categorized as 'slave caste' in colonial documents, Pulayas were primarily agricultural laborers (Saradamoni 1980:44). Many historical documents confused the term Pulaya with Cheruman. This confusion emerged from the regional variation in the name of caste and sub-castes. For example, travelers like Buchanan used the term Cheruman in two ways, one as a reference to all slave groups in some parts of Malabar irrespective of caste. At the same time, in some places, it referred to a member of a particular caste known as Pulayan. However, within Travancore and Cochin, no distinction was made between Cheruman and Pulaya (Saradamoni 1980:48). By the 19th century, as the first colonial studies, especially censuses, ethnographic accounts, and travelogues became available, Pulayas and their sub-divisions, namely Thanta Pulaya, Kana Pulaya, Padinjaran Pulaya, Kilakkan Pulaya, Thekkan Pulaya, were categorized as agricultural laborer's (Singh 2002:1253-1255). While some subs–divisions were endogamous, some were further divided (Thurston 2009:45-50).

However, around 1900, the above divisions were categorized as sub-divisions within a master category, Pulaya. During the colonial period, Pulayas were one of the most critical communities subjected to missionary interaction. Social disabilities sanctioned by caste structure led to the conversion of many Pulayas into Christianity (Singh 2002:1262-1264). Currently, the community is com-

posed of individuals belonging to both Hindu and Christian denominations. This historical development offers a unique challenge for any researcher. Provided the demographic size, the time frame, and to ensure ample representation of various political, religious, and economic denominations, the present study would be located within South Kerala, previously the state of Travancore.

The fieldwork was conducted between 2016-and 2018, with the samples being drawn from the KPMS units belonging to the South Kerala districts of Pathanamthitta and Kottayam. The districts were selected based on historical and organizational reasons. The historical reasons are the active presence of KPMS units in these districts since the organization's inception in 1970. The organizational reasons include the active presence of the organization in the contemporary period. The districts of Pathanamthitta and Kottayam were part of the princely state of Travancore, where Ayyankali and his organization Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham were active. Kottayam and Pathanamthitta also witnessed the formation of KPMS as early as the 1970s. These districts were also a hotbed for Christian missionary activities. Thus, the field forms a perfect location to understand the complex nature of subalternity and its interface with religion.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The current debates on subalternity, advanced by Subaltern Studies collective and other scholars, have looked mainly upon the themes of subalternity and its relation to religion without thoroughly understanding their complexities. Religion helps decode the nature of subalternity- it reveals ontology, epistemology, and a practical code of ethics for the subaltern to act on (Chatterjee 1982:31). Thus understanding the religious domain reveals a lot regarding the nature of subalternity.

Broadly, there are two critical standpoints from which subalternity has been conceived. Firstly, subalternity as an 'empirical category' to denote a subordinate group, a state of being where the subaltern exists independent of the elite when placed in a structural relation; an oppositional realm running parallel to the realm of the elite, a position broadly subscribed by Subaltern Studies collective. For scholars, particularly Ranajit Guha, the structural dichotomy emerged from the failure of colo-

nial capitalism and liberal bourgeoisie politics to hegemonize and incorporate the subaltern domain that ensured such an existence (Guha 1982:4).

Secondly, the concept of subalternity is used as a position of critique or as a perspective to understand and problematise the various relations of power that produce the conditions of subalternity. This position, mainly, as argued by Gayathri Spivak, sees subalternity only as a location where all lines of social mobility are lost: It exists as a predicament structured by relations of power preventing access to autonomy or even resistance. Under such circumstances, autonomy, as a theme, is not within reach of a subaltern as the state of subalternity precludes all forms of autonomy (Nilsen and Roy 2015:13-15).

The present study attempts to draw and depart from the existing observations. The problem raised in this particular work is on the existing notions of subalternity with an attempt to offer an alternative understanding of subalternity based upon the understanding of subalternity as a state of 'contradictory consciousness,' an argument expounded through the works of Gramsci, extended by scholars such as Joseph Femia, William Roseberry etc. The primary contention is that understanding the contradictory nature of subaltern common sense is central to understanding subalternity.

The work, thus, attempts in an exploratory way to evolve an alternative theoretical standpoint to understand how subalternity became the position of the critique and the realm to ascertain autonomy simultaneously politically. The problem explored here is how both dissent and deference become integral constituents of subalternity; to delineate the contradictory nature of subalternity, particularly its articulation concerning religion, and how the 'contradictory' nature has structured the subaltern struggles.

The research questions are as follows:

1. How is the Gramscian category of contradictory consciousness helpful in understanding the interrelation between subalternity and religion within subaltern movements in India?

2. How are the interrelation between subalternity and religion conceived within lower caste movements like KPMS?

3. How does religion plays an important role – both as an object of respect and disobedience – in the life world of Pulayas, testifying to the contradictory nature of subalternity?

1.4 Research Methodology

The study is mainly based on Qualitative analysis. Extensive fieldwork was undertaken from 2016- to 2018. Samples are drawn from the hundred respondents through the purposive sampling method. The study has used primary data based on Participant observation, focused group interviews, unstructured personal interviews, and the Sunday Group Meetings. Samples are also taken from the office bearers of KPMS, amateur historians, activists, historians, etc. Besides Primary materials available in Vernacular Malayalam and secondary materials such as Books, Articles, etc., have been used.

1.5 Objectives of the study

1. The present study tries to understand and highlight some theoretical lacunae inherent within the existing definitions of subalternity.
2. The study attempts to explore how religion played an important role – both as an object of respect and disrespect– in the life of Pulayas.
3. The study would attempt to understand how Pulayas have conceived, interrogated, and negotiated their state of subalternity, especially in colonial modernity, via religion as a mode of articulation.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The nature of the field, particularly the size of the community and the geographical distribution of the population, has set a limitation on the study. The Pulayas are spread across fourteen districts of Kerala, which offers a regional variety. The study is primarily focused on the Pulaya experience of South Kerala, and hence the regional variations may not be accounted. Another limitation of the study is that the study is focused on the Hindu Pulayas associated with the KPMS. The study has

not been able to cover much on the converted Pulayas, those who were converted into Christianity, popularly known as Dalit Christians. Though the conversion was intended to overcome the caste inequalities, the converted Pulayas still suffered many problems, including caste discrimination from fellow Christians. The converted Pulayas remain a potential group, indeed need further studies.

Characterization.

The work includes six chapters, including an introduction and conclusion.

Chapter One: Introduction

The introductory chapter includes the background of the study, field profile, research questions, research methodology, research objectives, and the study's limitations. The chapter includes a brief description of the field detailing the location of the field, the reasons behind the selection of the field, and the details of the characterization.

Chapter Two: Understanding Subalternity: Subaltern Studies and Beyond

The second chapter attempts to map the broad theoretical context in which the questions of subalternity and religion have been raised. The chapter discusses the emergence of Subaltern Studies, the response by its critics, and an alternative definition of subalternity based on a Gramscian framework. The chapter will focus on the debates initiated and promoted by Subaltern Studies on the theme of subalternity, particularly arguments proposed by Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, etc., focusing primarily on the theme of dominance without hegemony and structural dichotomy within Indian politics, which formed the bedrock for the subalternist's formulation of the notion of subalternity as negation. The overall objective of the chapter will be to map the main contours of subalternity through a detailed sketch of the theoretical conception of subalternity as negation concerning the category of religion by focusing mainly on the works of Ranajit Guha. Additionally, the chapter includes responses from various scholars such as Javeed Alam, Ranajit Das Gupta, and Sumit Sarkar. They contested that Subaltern Studies formulation of subalternity as negation by outlining

its various limitations. The chapter highlights the shortcomings of both Subaltern Studies and their respondents by providing an alternative understanding of subalternity grounded within the Gramscian concept of contradictory consciousness.

This chapter shows how the conception of subalternity as contradictory consciousness draws and departs from previous conceptions of subalternity, showing how the nature of contradictory consciousness is expressed across different domains, most evidently religion. Based on the Gramscian notion of contradictory consciousness, the objective of this chapter will be to evolve a broad though tentative theoretical framework to understand the notion of subalternity in relation to the category of religion.

Chapter Three: Contextualizing Subalternity and Religion in Kerala: a case of Ayyankali and the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham

The chapter provides a background to the rise and development of KPMS by tracing its origin, particularly within a string of activities such as Ayyankali and his organizational initiative, the SJPS, the intervention of Christian missionaries, the emergence of a reformed Hinduism, and the enthused interventionist state aiming to reinforce a Hindu majority. The chapter explicitly covers three aspects- conversion, reformed Hinduism, and the role of the princely state of Travancore, focusing on how Ayyankali approached each of these aspects, appropriating and contesting them, which in turn shaped Ayyankali and SJPS's politics. The chapter attempts to understand the use of religion in construing subalternity among Pulayas by Ayyankali, particularly his response to conversion and religious-centered reform, such as Temple entry, and the establishment of temples will be discussed to reveal the intersection of subalternity and religion. Besides this, the role of Ayyankali in the Princely state legislative assembly and his exchanges with other social reformers like Sree Narayana Guru, Pandit Karuppan, the efforts by Ayyankali to negotiate with colonial authorities and native elites to establish educational institutions, the legislative struggles to obtain civil, social and economic rights will be covered in detail.

The focus on Ayyankali is crucial from the point of the study as it was Ayyankali who historically articulated the experience, exploitation, and suppression suffered by Pulayas, Parayas, and other agrestic slave castes as an oppositional state of consciousness, challenging the elite dominance. The struggles of Ayyankali, such as Villuvandi Yatra, the demand for state financial support to establish schools, and the demand for state intervention to ensure access to public resources like roads, ponds, etc., will be empirically analyzed to show how subaltern consciousness was constituted in the course of struggle.

However, there were shifts within the course of Ayyankali's politics, mainly owing to positive overtures of the princely state of Travancore, the progressive change offered by missionaries, and newfound mobility via a reformed Hinduism. These measures, however, made Ayyankali shift more towards an accommodative position, even while being less interested in the question of conversion or the Temple Entry movement. Thus, Ayyankali and SJPS present an example of a contradictory politics by which Ayyankali accommodated ruling interests while simultaneously contesting its upper-caste dominance. Dominance and resistance found simultaneous resonance within the Ayyankali movement, which in many ways foresaw the contradiction that would come to mark many subaltern movements such as KPMS within future Kerala.

Chapter Four: The Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha and the Question of Conversion: A Case of Contradictory Politics

The chapter follows from the notion of the contradictory nature of subaltern consciousness exhibited by Ayyankali and SJPS discussed in chapter three. The focus of this chapter is to historically understand how a contradictory condition exists in the case of KPMS while engaging with the issue of conversion. Supplementing this argument with the field data gathered from personal interviews with community historians, KPMS office bearers, KPMS unit members, and amateur historians associated with KPMS to assess how this thread is visible even in the case of an organization such as KPMS. The chapter attempts to understand the historical background that led to the conversion

process, focusing on how conversion with its potential for social mobility led to significant changes in the socio-economic conditions of the Pulayas. The chapter has also discussed the continuing caste-based discrimination against converted Pulayas, their growing discontent, and how the missionaries managed to contain it via their mechanisms. Thus the chapter attempts to demonstrate how conversion while ensuring mobility led to divisions among Pulayas preventing the formation of any common alternative movement.

Chapter Five: The Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha and Reformed Hinduism: Crossing A Contradictory Terrain

The emphasis will be to contextualize and understand how growing divisions along religious lines reveal contradictions inherent to Pulaya politics, particularly trends where Hindu Pulayas members within KPMS associate themselves with a reformed Temple religion even while attempting to resist the machinations of the BJP. The KPMS members, even while attempting to contest the upper caste political intervention by BJP, continue to appropriate religious symbols offered by them. The chapter also focuses on why there are no larger alliances between KPMS and other subaltern groups? The attempt is to answer this question by looking at the relation between Christian Pulayas and Hindu Pulayas and the trends of Sanskritisation among Hindu Pulayas. The chapter explores similar tendencies within KPMS concerning conversion and reformed Hinduism to prove how KPMS represents a contradictory location where dominant and subordinate interests coalesce.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The chapter summarizes the argument presented in previous chapters. The chapter attempts to compare and contrast the existing understandings regarding subalternity against the data obtained from the field materials to provide some tentative answers to the questions about the nature of subalternity, particularly with religion, and how changing conceptions of subalternity from negation to contradictory consciousness is reflected in religious idioms. Drawn from the previous chapters, the con-

clusion sums up how dominant and subordinate interests together constitute the condition of subalternity.

The most evident domain where this is expressed is religion. Religious upheaval in the form of either reforms or conversion is to be read as moments of the struggle between dominant and subordinate interests where each struggles to impose their respective conception. This struggle is never one-sided, and the entangled nature of these two interests constitutes the condition of subalternity. The chapter summing up the argument made from the above chapters concludes how contradictory consciousness is the key to subalternity. One should focus on this feature in exploring the religious dimension among subaltern organizations such as KPMS.

CHAPTER 2

Understanding Subalternity: Subaltern Studies and Beyond

This chapter aims to understand the category of subalternity and how it has been historically related to the category of religion. The terms subalternity and subaltern have been in vogue for the last few decades within the academic circles, particularly since the inception of Subaltern Studies (hereafter SS). Though the term subaltern was present within the works of Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci, the emergence of Subaltern Studies as a historiographical school in the 1980s gave it a new thrust.

Ranajit Guha, founder of Subaltern Studies, observed that previous inquiries into subaltern movements in the context of colonial India (including studies on Tribal, peasant movements, lower caste movements, and labour movements) had failed to acknowledge the significance of subaltern's agency or their contribution to the anti-colonial struggle (Guha 1982:3). Subaltern movements were either designated as sporadic spontaneous responses to economic hardships or as primitive forms of social protest inspired by a pre-capitalist state of consciousness that was unable to discern the true objective nature of the conditions of its subordination. Nationalist historiography conceived all types of subaltern movements within the shadow of the anti-colonial struggle led by the Indian National Congress. In contrast, Marxist historiography replaced this teleological nationalist account with a totalizing version of class consciousness. For Marxist historiography, all movements within India's anti-colonial struggle were incorporated into a transition from a pre-capitalist feudal mode to a capitalist mode of production (Pouchepadass 2002:85-86).

Thus subaltern movements were expressions of subalternity (subaltern consciousness or mentality), which was essentially a pre-political consciousness characterized by spontaneity, religiosity, and subordination to elite leadership. This definition was the point of contention for Ranajit Guha and other SS scholars. Guha and, subsequently, SS scholars argued that the historiography of Indian nationalism was dominated by elitism, colonialist and nationalist-bourgeoisie (Guha 1982:1). This elitism has influenced the analysis of Indian history leading to an inept and incomplete understand-

ing regarding India's colonial past. The objective of SS will be, as Ranajit Guha argued, to develop an alternative narrative based on the rejection of spurious and un-historical monism characteristics of its view of Indian nationalism and the recognition of coexistence and interaction of the elite and subaltern domains of politics (Guha 1982:7).

2.1. The Meaning of Subaltern and Subalternity in Subaltern Studies

The significance of Subaltern Studies (hereafter SS) in narrating an Indian version of history from below with the subalterns as the subject of history, instead of being objects of analysis of Indian history, has instituted SS as a distinct form of Postcolonial criticism (Dube 2004:130). The SS project has evolved as a critical perspective questioning the overarching theoretical Eurocentric assumptions, which have attempted to disregard all cultural and historical specificities and have subjected these differences to a pre-destined a priori direction categorized as progress or modernization (Dube 2004: 149). In the course of the development of Subaltern studies, the meaning of subaltern and subalternity has also evolved. In general, a broad definition was agreed upon whereby subaltern was the empirical category used to refer to subordinate sections/ social groups such as Adivasi, peasants, labour, lower castes, etc., subalternity referred to their state of consciousness.

Logically, the evolution of subaltern and subalternity categories could be traced in two phases. The first phase involved the study of various subaltern movements such as Adivasi, labour, or peasant movements, all of which were referred to as subaltern owing to their subordinate position within their respective power relations (Guha 1982:vii). This phase was characterized by attempts to delineate some general contours of subalternity through extensive and meticulous reading of colonial archival material on peasant insurgency, such as official dispatches, CID Reports, Officer's diaries, daily dispatches, Home department records. Subalternists successfully affirmed how the discourse on counter-insurgency was inherently a discourse of power that stereotyped the peasant insurgent as a fanatic/unruly/trouble makers/ insurgent/ dacoits.

This approach attempted to locate subaltern as an empirical identity, a designation used to identify the groups which occupied a subordinate position in a relation of dominance and subordination. The term subaltern was used to express the general attribute of subordination in South Asia (Guha 1982:vii). Accordingly, subalternity represented the mentality of a subordinate group, a state of mind that informed all the activities of the subalterns. SS scholarship's distinction from previous historiographical approaches lies in the interpretation that the primary characteristic of subaltern mentality was resistance rather than subordination or mindless reaction. Subalternity was characterized as a state of negation of dominance of elites, expressed in various forms such as rebellion, dacoity, jacquerie, and hools. Subaltern scholars interpreted subalternity as a 'pure oppositional agency.' It was autonomous pure consciousness characterized by the characteristics of negation of elite attitudes and values. This pure state of subalternity resided within an autonomous domain of subalterns, which was neither derived nor dependent on elite consciousness for its existence (Guha 1982:1-7).

This definition of subalternity pointed to two crucial notions. The first is categorizing politics into two domains, i.e., elite and subaltern. Dichotomy theoretically implies a distinct realm of politics that exists independently outside elite influence without integrating into their hegemony. The existence of an autonomous field postulates the presence of the relation of power as domination characterized more by coercion than persuasion (Guha 1997:13-20). This existence the subaltern domain independent of the elite directives questions the general liberal narrative of Indian colonialism as a shared culture, either as an alliance between colonial and native elites proposed by liberal colonialist historiography or the prevalence of anti-colonialism as a generally shared sentiment presented by liberal nationalist historiography (Guha 1982:1-2).

The second notion extends the above point of dichotomy to search for empirical examples that domination has been exercised differently across colonial periods to illustrate the elitist nature of historiography. It is impossible to analyze and delineate the nuances of dominance through general analytical categories of nationalism-colonialism or feudalism-capitalism. Ranajit Guha implied that the

practice of Indian historiography was elitist. It limited politics as a realm composed of the collective activity of elites, both British and Indian, or as that of organized institutions or associations, ignoring the existence of structural dichotomy within the realm of politics. This myopic vision reduced politics to the aggregation of activities ideas between the colonial and native elites, which were enunciated through a maze of institutions or a set of laws introduced by the British government (Guha 1982:2-4).

Guha argued that this myopic vision concerning the Indian past was derived from the existing historiographies appropriation of universal models of stagist theories to explain the historical transition in the case of former colonies like India. The Liberal nationalist and Marxist historiographies have tended to interpret Indian history in terms of universal narratives of bourgeoisie feudal opposition or terms of national-colonial resistance (Chatterjee 1983:61). These accounts failed to acknowledge the existence of an autonomous subaltern consciousness and the popular anti-colonial initiatives led by people on their own.

Contrary to the current historiographical accounts of 'subalternity' as archaic and pre-modern, Guha argued that 'subalternity' represented the unacknowledged history. Subalternity is the consciousness (mentality) of the popular or the subaltern masses demonstrated at moments of rebellion or insurgency. Through a careful mapping of the subaltern insurgencies, Guha argued that the subalterns were not repositories of pre-political, archaic consciousness unaware of their enemies (Guha 1982:3-4). Still, they were conscious actors aware of their enemies, the nature of domination, and various structures through which dominance was exercised. Subalterns were conscious agents who, through multiple forms of struggle -from everyday symbolic protests to organized rebellions and insurgency - identified, discriminated against, and attempted to undermine the structures of domination. Thus subalternity for Guha was an oppositional consciousness existing separately from the elite domain (Guha 1982:4).

The second phase of the shift in the meaning of subalternity emerged around 1985, characterized by an emphasis on shifting from the study of peasant or Adivasi movements to the representation of subaltern subjectivity (Ludden 2002:16-17). This phase began with the publication of Subaltern Studies IV volume in 1985, which attested that the primary concern for Subalternists was the nature of subaltern consciousness and defined subalternity as a composite culture of resistance to and acceptance of domination and hierarchy (Chakrabarty 1985:376). Despite the emphasis on the composite nature of subalternity, Chakrabarty added that, "there need not have any standard agreement over the definition of subalternity as the subalternists were more united in rejecting some academic tendencies than agreeing over some" (Chakrabarty 1985:376). The composite nature, which comes closer to the Gramscian notion of the contradictory nature of subaltern consciousness, was never entirely integrated by Subaltern scholars except for a few. Thus broadly, the meaning of subalternity continued to be equated with a state of oppositional consciousness existing opposed to the elite domain. However, an overview of the phases within SS suggests moments of contestation where the subalternists doubted affirmation of the term subalternity as an oppositional consciousness (Ludden 2002:16-18). This doubt stems from the contradictory nature inherent within subalternity, a problem which, even though touched, was never sufficiently addressed by SS scholars, particularly their crucial figure Ranajit Guha, who tended to restrict the meaning of subalternity to opposition or resistance. Before understanding the limits of the notion of subalternity and its relation to religion, as proposed by Ranajit Guha, it's essential to understand its formulation.

The following section will detail the broad elementary features of subalternity identified by Ranajit Guha. Compared to the rest of the subalternists, Guha's works made a concerted attempt to evolve a general schema of subalternity, eventually determining the broad boundaries of thinking on subalternity. An examination of Guha's work will be helpful to map the contours of subalternity proposed by Ranajit Guha, i.e., how it has been imagined and what are the essential aspects Ranajit Guha has considered (or left out) in presenting such an elementary schema on subalternity.

2.2. Historical Background to Ranajit Guha's conception of Subalternity

Guha's interest in subalternity was part of the larger project of rectifying the elitism prevalent in academic research, particularly in History (Pouchepadass 2002:85). Guha contended that through the practice of history, the narrative of the hegemony of British colonialism or later Congress-led nationalist movement was attempted. Guha specifically challenged the colonialist historiography's assumption of Indian nationalism as a response to the stimulus of colonialism. Guha argued that the Indian elite, in their negotiation with various institutions, opportunities, and resources generated by colonialism, produced the anti-colonial struggle for colonialist historiography. The probable reward in terms of power and political positions encouraged the Indian elite to invoke the politics of anti-colonialism rather than any genuine concern for the masses. The colonized have no voice for themselves. Thus, Indian nationalism becomes an echo of imperialism (Guha 1997: 86).

Guha argued that by presenting Indian nationalism as an echo of British colonialism, colonialist historiography produced a monistic image of Indian nationalism devoid of any form of ideology, the involvement of the masses, and its influence in determining the course of anti-colonial struggles (Guha 1982:3). Contrary to the colonialist historiographical arguments, the nationalist historiography attempted to portray Indian nationalism as an idealist venture in which the indigenous elite led people from subjugation to freedom (Guha 1982:2). Similarly, while supplementing the nationalist narrative, the Marxist historiography interpreted Indian history as an account of the transition from the pre-capitalist feudal period to the capitalist transition (Pouchepadass 2002:87).

Underlying all these narratives is a consensus to interpret Indian history as a continuation of universal binaries of colonialism-nationalism or feudal-bourgeoisie (Chatterjee 1983:59). Additionally, politics is reduced to the total interaction between colonial elites and a section of native elites; politics is defined as the domain of governmental activities involving institutions and promulgation of legislations and the native elite's response to these acts either as competition to acquire the governmental resources or to imitate them (Guha 1982:3-4). For Guha, this story of colonialism missed two important interrelated points. These are, one, colonialism as a condition of Dominance without

hegemony and second, the autonomous existence of a subaltern domain of politics. Negation was the characteristic feature of subalternity, which made the subaltern domain exist distinctly and opposed to the elite domain. This condition of subalternity as negation was supplemented by Guha by further arguing that Indian colonialism was a case of Dominance without hegemony.

For convenience, the first point considered is the notion of 'Dominance without hegemony.' Guha argues that Indian historiography, in both Liberal colonialist and Liberal nationalist genres, has accepted the career of colonialism in India as a case of hegemony. In this condition, persuasion outweighed coercion as a condition for the existence of the colonial state. On the contrary, colonialism represented a state of dominance where coercion superseded persuasion (Guha 1997:13-20). Guha's reasoning for the failure of colonialism and nationalism is anchored on the inability of the Bourgeoisie to assume hegemony over the non-bourgeoisie masses, create an anti-feudal coalition leading as a vanguard, overturning feudal privileges and institutions to establish a new order of guaranteeing freedom, equality and rights to individuals and institutions to implement them, a function performed by it in England in 1640 and France in 1789 (Guha 1997:15-19).

The emerging Bourgeoisie leads a political struggle to pass legislation nullifying feudal privileges, ensuring state support for economic competition, refashioning the state to create juridical structures that align with multiplying capitalist enterprises, and ending rights protecting feudal interests (Guha 1997:13-15). This condition was possible owing to the nature of the Bourgeoisie to rise above sectional outlook and create a common interest to rally the support of the masses, particularly workers and peasants. Thus Bourgeoisie successfully universalized their interest as common interests and achieved hegemony of the anti-feudal coalition without resorting to coercive measures.

Post to acquiring hegemony, Bourgeoisie in England and France embarked on creating a new political community, a nation based on universal principles of rights and the idea of citizenship (Guha 1997:13-14). This transformation of economic and political order, replacing the feudal period with a bourgeoisie politico-economic culture, set the standard against which Guha argued that the Indian

experience was a case of dominance rather than hegemony as both European capital and its Indian counterpart failed to initiate a transformative role similar to their counterparts in Europe. Guha interpreted the Indian experience as mediocre liberalism where the Bourgeoisie failed to integrate the subaltern masses into a common national culture via consent (Guha 1997:4-5). Thus Indian experience of colonialism and anti-colonial nationalism was a case of dominance where coercive and disciplinary practices were used to control the crowd rather than their consent. However, the proposition of Dominance without hegemony remained a highly formulaic representation of dominance and subordination without understanding the complex nature of colonialism (Arnold 2015:268).

The most systematic critique of Dominance without hegemony was offered by Vivek Chibber, who contested Guha's very assumptions regarding the English Revolution of the 1640s and the French revolution of 1789. Chibber challenged Guha's conceptualization of British and French cases of the perfect Bourgeoisie revolution, which installed a new socio-economic order legitimized by a hegemonic model of power based on consent rather than coercion. Chibber argues that Guha formulates an ideal picture of the universalization of capital across Western Europe, particularly England and France, whereby capital universalized via expansion across territories and replaced all pre-capitalist relations–both economic and political, creating a new order. This was the picture against which the Indian scenario was sentenced as a case of Dominance without hegemony. Chibber argued that Guha's dominance without hegemony drew on a careful reading of the English Revolution of the 1640s and the French revolution of 1789, which prevented further exploration into the details and contradictions inherent to these events. As explained above, three tenets are crucial to measuring the hegemony of the Bourgeoisie in English and French contexts- Dismantling landlordism, securing hegemony of the anti-feudal coalition, and shifting from coalition hegemony to social hegemony to create a consensual, liberal post-revolutionary order (Guha 1997:14-20; Chibber 2013:81). These three features account for the quantum of evidence provided by Guha to argue the successful universalization of capital in Europe and its ascendance to hegemony. However, Chibber argued against these tenets questioning Guha's reading of the English and French revolutions.

In the case of the English revolution, the event emerged from a power tussle between Parliament and the monarchy in 1640 over the sharing of power. While the Crown pushed towards an absolutist monarchy and more centralization, the Parliament as a representative of landed nobles, opposed this move to lessen their control over fiscal policy (Chibber 2013:56). The Monarchial faction, termed Royalists, supposedly represented feudal nobility against the parliamentary forces, who were agents of the rising capitalist class. Thus the clash was seen as a triumph of the Bourgeoisie over the out-dated feudal order; however, Chibber disputed the anti-feudal claims of Guha because, by the period of 1640s, there was no structural division between the landed feudal class and emergent capitalist class (Chibber 2013:56-57). By the 17th century, the feudal agrarian relations were weaker, feudal loyalties and production relations were replaced with market-dependent forms of production, and feudal dues had been replaced by capitalist rents or profit (Chibber 2013:57). Thus, the conflict between Royalist and Parliamentary factions was not anti-feudal since no strong feudal structures were left. Instead, it was a conflict among agrarian capitalists; the struggle was not to replace the feudal order with a capitalist order but to decide which capitalist order needed to be installed (Chibber 2013:58).

Both factions attempted to further their interests. The Parliamentary faction's response was against the centralizing drive of monarchy, which was not inspired by any revolutionary spirit to transform the social condition radically but to preserve the feudal privileges guaranteed via parliamentary legislation. The parliamentary faction feared the monarchial intervention and consolidation would lead to a diminution of their influence. Hence, they were ready to attack the prevalent agrarian capitalist order to prevent such fallout. The English revolution at no point was aimed at an anti-feudal struggle. Instead, it was a struggle between agrarian capitalists (Chibber 2013:56-66).

Supplementing this argument, Chibber argued that besides not being anti-feudal, the Bourgeoisie never attempted to stitch an anti-feudal coalition seizing leadership via proposing a general programme that represented the interests of popular classes' mainly urban labour and peasants. Even though the revolution opened popular initiatives expanding political order, it was not the outcome

of any conscious coalition building. The conflict between Parliamentary and Monarchial factions was meant to be an elite affair involving limited struggle without the involvement of the masses (Chibber 2013:60). The imminent threat of a Scottish invasion forced the Monarchial faction to concede to most of the demands of the parliamentary faction, particularly to restrict its absolutist consolidation and provide legislative-executive positions to leaders from the parliamentary faction (Chibber 2013:59-60). Thus in the early phase of the struggle parliamentary faction successfully consolidated its interests without force.

However, at a later stage, the attempt of the monarchy to reassert the power disrupted the balance. Thus the Parliamentary faction responded to defend its interests militarily. But, the increased demands from the London crowd changed the character of the conflict. The presence of the masses shifted the focus of conflict as the crowd demanded more reforms beyond the aspirations and intentions of feudal lords. This was against the interests of the Parliamentary faction, who had always intended to maintain the tussle as a conflict of interest between the Crown and Parliament, keeping masses outside this struggle. The disputes, negotiations, and settlements were held between the Crown and the Parliament. This restricted struggle was now being broadened deliberately through conscious involvement from below.

The discomfiture to mass involvement is evidenced by the defection of nobles from the Parliamentary camp to the Royalist camp. They were more comfortable with a resuscitated monarchy rather than the mass involvement, which potentially threatened the interests of the lordly classes. Though not all aristocrats switched sides, the popular element drove a division among the lords, reiterating no radical inclination among the nobles towards the masses (Chibber 2013:60-61). However, they differed from the defectors in terms of their approach. The Parliamentary faction treated mass involvement as necessary but an element to be contained.

The lordly class desired to push back the absolutist interests of monarchy without resorting to popular radicalism, which made them negotiate with the Royalist camp to reach an agreement guarantee-

ing gentry interests in return for allowing the return of the monarch. But eventually, these attempts failed to lead to the escalation of the conflict culminating in the beheading of the monarch, Charles I (Chibber 2013:61-62). The English revolution throws up some interesting insights. First, even while challenging the monarchy, there was no radical expansion of the political base. The involvement of the masses forced the incorporation of demands such as the abolition of feudal privileges and political representation. These were never realized, and the failure to recognize popular needs points to the limited influence of the masses (Chibber 2013:63-64).

Despite its best interests of democratization, the popular agenda never extended beyond urban centers such as London and failed to capture rural imagination. Second, the involvement of people didn't diminish the hold of the gentry over rural institutions. They retained absolute rights over property, continued to hold sway over county and parish juridical institutions, hegemonized local church, and ensured political representation via Parliament. However, the involvement of the masses influenced and polarized the gentry against the masses, forcing them to restore the monarchy, ensuring old hierarchies and privileges, rolling back absolutist measures, and stamping out radical claims by people (Chibber 2013:61-64). Thus by the 18th century, England mutated into a fiscal-military state with a narrow political base concentrating powers in the hand of agrarian capitalists and feudal lords, avoiding popular masses.

Therefore unlike Guha, Chibber argued English revolution was an elite conflict that failed at all three litmus tests proposed as a qualification to be a hegemonic and radical bourgeoisie. One, it was never anti-feudal, although it raised some concerns regarding landlordism. Second, the revolution never intended to construct an inclusive hegemonic coalition to incorporate subaltern interests and enlist their support. It was essentially an elite affair that never aimed to accommodate subaltern demands. On the contrary, the anti-feudal effort came from the masses forcing the Lordly class to incorporate the latter's interests. Thirdly, the revolution never constituted a liberal political order. Instead, it excluded and disenfranchised masses to create and preserve a Bourgeoisie oligarchy rather than an expansive political space (Chibber 2013:64-66).

Similar assumptions are raised by Chibber while analyzing Guha's assessment of the French revolution of 1789. Chibber contends that a close analysis of the French revolution reveals how fiscal pressures and military threats forced the Bourbon monarchy to collapse (Chibber 2013:67-68). The crisis was building over a long period, culminating in a series of events in 1789. The events of 1789 resulted in the abolition of absolutist monarchy, providing privileges to non-feudal wealthy classes such as shopkeepers, merchants, traders, professionals, especially officials but stopped any further devolution of power to the masses.

Chibber argued that despite the radical shade of the French revolution, Guha misconceives its meaning and objectives on several grounds. Unlike Guha's assessment of the anti-feudal commitment of the French revolution, it was not led by Bourgeoisie. The Third estate, called Bourgeoisie, was not a class involved in capitalist productions. It consisted of shopkeepers, traders, state officials, various professionals, etc., who had nothing in common with peasants or laborers (Chibber 2013:69). Thus the current meaning of Bourgeoisie associating it with industrialist or any capitalist producer was absent. It was used to refer to non-nobility, moneyed middle-class whose aim was to expand their politico-economic interests.

The Third estate had no interest in advocating political rights for peasants and workers in the early stage of the struggle. Still, at the later stage, demand for legislation to abolish feudal privileges and guarantee suffrage rights for peasants and workers was born out of the pressure and threats from the mass rural uprisings. Like the English scenario, the French case exhibits the reluctance of the leading group here, the Third estate, to devolve political rights to peasants and workers differently; unlike the Third estate in France, England had a proper capitalist class. Examining these reforms, Chibber argued that, similar to the British case, it was the pressures brought by the masses that made the reforms possible, forcing leaders of the Third estate to accommodate farmer's interests rather than any genuine interests of the Third estate to create a common political ground through accommodating interests of peasant and workers and expand the political base (Chibber 2013:63-75).

In conclusion, Chibber's analysis of these two revolutions contrasts with Guha's narrative. Chibber concluded that Guha mistakenly interpreted the English scenario of the 1640s and the French revolution of 1789. Guha valued the Bourgeoisie role within the events of the 1640s and 1789 as that of a hegemonic catalyst successfully knitting an anti-feudal coalition by rising above sectional interests to incorporate popular demands to create a common agenda. Guha viewed Bourgeoisie as a radical element in its anti-feudal and progressive political intention (Chibber 2013:76-79). This was the standard against which Guha measured the Indian case. Guha compared the performance of the Indian Bourgeoisie, both British and Indian, in the wake of colonialism and nationalism, against the British and French issues and concluded that the Indian case amounted to dominance without hegemony as in the Indian case Bourgeoisie compromised with feudal elements and abandoned anti-feudal rhetoric.

Subsequently, its compromise and accommodative towards feudal elements prevented it from creating an anti-feudal coalition under its hegemony (based on consensus from different subaltern groups) by rising above its sectional interests and broadening its political agenda of accommodating peasant and worker's interests. Indian Bourgeoisie failed to integrate laboring classes under a common agenda creating a common political culture via consent. Thus the Indian Bourgeoisie was unable to measure up to the radical achievements of their European counterparts and instead ended up producing mediocre liberalism (Chibber 2013:46-49, 89-91). Thus Indian case for Guha is summarized as one of dominance without hegemony.

Chibber's refutation of Guha's dominance without hegemony argument draws upon this mistaken interpretation of the English revolution of the 1640s and the French revolution of 1789. Both these events were undoubtedly momentous, releasing forces of change. They contributed to unleashing capitalist economic forces, creating strong states, expansion of European influence beyond the mainland by colonizing new territories affecting colonization. However, the effects were not as dramatic and progressive as Guha and subalternists had conceived it.

Essentially (leaving aside the high points of radicalism involving mass involvement), these revolutions bequeathed strong oligarchic states with a new class of ruling members without any substantive devolution of political powers to the masses (Chibber 2013:76-79). Thus it's improper to assert that the Indian Bourgeoisie abandoned its historical mandate and underperformed to produce mediocre liberalism. From Chibber's perspective, they were following the path to power similar to their counterparts in England and France (Chibber 2013:89-91).

Guha's limited understanding of hegemony, which rested on the exaggeration of consent and deletion of subaltern agency, contributed to the notion of Dominance without Hegemony. However, this point must be read alongside another scholar who was a precursor to such a reduced notion of Hegemony which inspired Guha and later scholars, namely James C Scott. (Nilsen and Roy 2015:18-19). Dwelling into Scott's formulation of hegemony and its limits would, in many ways, reveal weaknesses of Dominance without the hegemony argument of Guha. Before this, it's vital to grasp the historical context within which these scholars emerged.

Scholars such as James C Scott responded to specific intellectual trends that emerged against the politico-economic conditions that rose since the 1930s and continued in the post-war phase. There were a series of issues such as the Great depression of 1929 and the rise of Fascist regimes against its backdrop, the degeneration of Russian and later Chinese revolutions into repressive totalitarian bureaucracies; Trade unions reduced to business unionism, the radical student and other marginalized groups upheaval in the 1960s, return of the most conservative economist regimes in 1980's even after the worst market crashes in 1980s which all together forced scholars to raise the question why there was no major rebellion despite the worst socio-economic and political catastrophes (Fletcher 2001:44-45).

Despite economic hardships, the lack of mass upheavals and support for conservative regimes was pinned down on the concept of hegemony. Hegemony is a state of all-embracing domination shaping the affective and cognitive structures whereby men perceive and evaluate complex social reality

via an ensemble of civil society institutions directly or indirectly (Femia 1975:30-31). The influence and reach of hegemony were so profound and pervasive that it neutralized any will among the subordinate to resist the systemic domination and even generated legitimacy in favor of the systems. Thus, in many ways, hegemony was interpreted as an all-embracing power formation so complete that it nullified not the only practical possibility of resistance but even the will to resist and even influenced people to view systemic domination as just.

However, this omnipresence of Hegemony was increasingly challenged by a new conception of resistance that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. A slew of approaches across different axes challenged the validity of hegemony. In Agrarian studies, James C Scott's work emphasized the virtues of everyday forms of resistance and its myriad forms, such as foot-dragging, desertion, slandering, dissimulation produced in the South East Asian context; in the South Asian context, Subaltern Studies scholarship invoked the idea of dominance without hegemony, i.e., the various ways in which colonial subjects avoided colonial state undermining its authority and forming a distinct domain of politics; French philosophers like Michael Certeau searched for new forms of resistance as part of everyday life (Fletcher 2001:45).

All these endeavors aimed to undercut legitimacy accorded to the argument that subordinate groups actively engaged in consenting to reproduce dominant ideas and hence were compatriots in perpetuating the dominance of elite groups. Among these various scholars, James C Scott offered a formulation of everyday resistance as a boundary between the dominion of the powerful and the dominion of subordinates characterized by autonomous consciousness free from the control of hegemonic consciousness- a theme reproduced by SS scholars under the formula Dominance without hegemony.

2.2.1. Interrogating James Scott's idea of Hegemony

James C Scott brought everyday life into prominence and emphasized how peasant lives survived between revolutions. Scott argued that everyday resistance limited the scope of dominant classes to

extract resources from the subordinate (Fletcher 2001:46). Scott furthered his position by claiming that everyday resistance attests to the presence of agency of subalterns, a proof of their capacity to demystify the hegemony of dominant ideology and locating the influence of the dominant class in the realm of material reproduction while unable to control a mental or cultural domain (Scott 1985:345-350). Scott's argument was based on a mental-material dichotomy similar to Guha in terms of the existence of an elite-subaltern dichotomy, with the latter representing an autonomous insurgent consciousness independent of dominant control (Ho Chung 2011:45). Scott argued that the dominant class's control over subordinate groups such as peasants were dominated by coercive practices operative within the material domain without any proof to influence beyond the material domain.

Like Guha and other subalternists, Scott attempted to posit a power structure controlled by elites existing solely in the form of domination. There was no evidence for any moment of complicity or compromise between the elite and the subaltern that could amount to the legitimization of the ruling classes, thus undermining the existence of hegemony (Scott 1985:325). Even in the context of non – confrontation in public, a vast domain of hidden transcripts from the elite gaze undermined dominant interests (Scott 1985:322-334). The presence of these hidden transcripts exhibited in the form of everyday resistance is proof of the absence of hegemony or otherwise consent for dominant power relations. There existed a public approval to dominant power relations and legitimacy accorded publically as part of a calculative act to demarcate a separate domain of subaltern struggles hidden from elites inhabited by a rebellious consciousness (Haynes and Prakash 1991:9-11).

Though researching in different locations (Scott's works are primarily based on South East Asia while SS scholar's studies are based on South Asia), some parallels can be drawn between Scott, Guha, and other SS scholars. One, both scholars attempted to endow the dispossessed subaltern groups with agency displayed in spontaneous forms of insurgency or as everyday acts of resistance aimed at limiting the influence of dominant classes. Two, subalternity is characterized by Guha and

Scott as an autonomous condition. Subaltern epitomized a self-determined subject aware of one's subjection and characterized by active contestation of that subjection.

Thus, negation marks subalternity. Three, subalternity represents one end of a spectrum with the elites on the other, separated with no middle space for interaction or negotiation. Four, there is no scope for any influence of elites over subalterns. Even in moments of cooperation, it's temporary and limited to external material controls with no effect extended to domains of culture and ideology strong enough to elicit the consent of the subalterns. Hence the only possible connection between the two exists in the form of domination without hegemony. However, the above assumptions on hegemony by Scott (applicable also to Guha) were based on a reductive reading of Hegemony as consent accrued through manipulation. Hegemony refers to the ideological domination of ruling classes as they dominate and control means of symbolic production, governing ideological sectors of society, culture, religion, education, and media- in a manner that it can disseminate dominant values to reinforce their position. Thus for Scott, Gramsci provided an institutional explanation for false consciousness (Scott 1985:315). Scott comprehends Hegemony as a reductive condition of passive compliance and consent by the subordinate class. Despite bailing Gramsci on charges of material determinism, Scott argued that earlier economic determinism was replaced with ideological determinism (Scott 1985:316-317). Thus Scott's equation of Hegemony to the presence of consensus (when ruling ideas determine all subaltern moves) is a relatively quickly dismissible position.

Scott argued that activities beyond the surveillance and public transcript referred to as hidden transcripts, consist of what subordinate parties say and do beyond the realm of the public transcript or the observation of the dominant (Scott 1990:183-201). In the context of surveillance structures set up by the dominant classes or the state, hidden transcripts record infra-political activities that surreptitiously challenge practices of economic, status, and ideological domination; these hidden transcripts were repositories of infrapolitics that challenged ideological and economic dominance that coexists with public display of acquiescence towards dominant classes (Chin and Mittleman 1997: 31-32). Thus subordinate classes always were aware of the hegemonic exertions from above and

were able to penetrate through them (Scott 1985:317). Scott outlined some features of hegemony to highlight its weakness and substantiate the argument of the absence of hegemony.

1. Concept of Hegemony presumes consent of the subordinate classes but ignores the extent to which subalterns can penetrate and demystify.

2. Scholars tend to assess hegemonic prevalence based on surface action, particularly public obeisance; Scott contends that public obeisance is a strategic overture that aims to prevent the dominant gaze from identifying hidden transcripts. Scholars tend to confound what is inevitable with what is just.

3. Scott assessed Hegemonic ideology as idealization, which produces contradictions that need to be criticized from within and outside. The ideological opposition to hegemony emerges from within a prevailing ideology.

4. A historical examination of the rank and file of any revolutionary mass movements shows the objectives sought are usually limited and even reformist, though the means to achieve them are revolutionary. Thus, backward-looking trade union struggles are not obstacles to revolution but a reasonable basis for it.

5. Historically, breaking the norms and values of a dominant ideology is typically the work of the bearers of a new mode of production, for example, capitalists, and not of subordinate classes such as peasants and workers. Thus subordinate classes are often seen as backward-looking. They defend their interpretation of an earlier dominant ideology against new and painful arrangements imposed by elites and the state (Scott 1985:317-318). Through the above-outlined features of hegemony, Scott offered a narrow version of hegemony based on ideological domination and consent- a condition shorn of any contention. However, for a more precise understanding, there is a need to elaborate on each of the above-outlined features.

The first feature discussed by Scott means that the bare minimum condition of being hegemonic would be that the rural elite penetrates and dominates peasants world to persuade them to elicit consent. However, farmers in Sedaka (Scott's research field) can pierce elite farmers, landlords, and outside officials' interests. Scott contends that any hegemonic tendency emanating from above is penetrated, blended with pre-existing beliefs, and transformed. It's re-interpreted as per the material and symbolic interests of receiving class (Scott 1985:318-322). Thus these acts of interpretation Scott argued that were accompanied by public approval and even submission towards dominant classes are often misread as evidence of ideological domination or hegemony. In contrast, in actuality, these acts are a pose by the powerless to evade the dominant gaze. Scott contends that Gramsci's error lies in focusing on the realm of acts rather than belief to ratify hegemony. Subaltern classes are constrained in the domain of actions owing to prudence and coercion. But in beliefs and interpretation, they are less trammeled (Scott 1985:322). Thus the rich may receive hegemony in public, whereas they may not achieve the same in private (Scott 1985:318-322).

Scott introduced a dichotomy between act and ideas that corresponds with binaries such as material-mental and public and private to assign a privileged existence of a distinct domain of thoughts, behavior, personal (the realm of mind), outside elite influence capable of penetrating and demystifying hegemonic tendencies (Scott 1985:322). The failure of existing scholarship to identify the absence of hegemony lies in the fact that they attempt to search for public encounters between rich and poor, ignoring the insinuations entirely beneath the surface, the discussion outside the context of power relations, and the anonymous, quiet acts of routine practical resistance that occur daily (Scott 1985.321). Thus every system of domination, despite its comprehensibility, is never hegemonic as the subordinate classes may imagine and act with sufficient purpose to undermine the dominant system.

Timothy Mitchell argued that the dichotomy of act-belief in Scott emerges from a dualistic conception of power as coercion and persuasion, corresponding to the body-mind dichotomy. Power may operate at the level of physical bodies as coercion, controlling human bodies as an external process.

This physical body was contrasted to unique self-constituted consciousness, a site for an autonomous existence unfettered by coercion. Mitchell argued even theorists such as Foucault conceived the modern subject as a specific autonomous subject occupying a separate realm of a culture distinct from a material domain reproducing a mental-material dichotomy (Mitchell 1990: 545-548).

Ranajit Guha presents a similar dichotomy. Guha advanced this argument by discerning elementary features of subalternity by analyzing colonial archives and arguing for the existence of a distinct domain of subaltern or rebel consciousness opposed to the elite domain (colonial and nationalist) (Guha 1982:4). Even while dominating the subaltern domain via coercive and disciplinary modes, this domain never acquired its consent and hence lacked hegemony (Guha 1997:63-67). Thus the colonial state was limited to the external material domain with no ideological domination over subalterns, where they remained autonomous, cultivating their ideologies, institutions, strategies, etc.

Similarly, in his 'Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance,' Scott explained the inefficiency of hegemonic practices as subaltern classes could penetrate, demystify, and undermine elite domination. This subversion was possible for Scott "as the subordinates were always removed from institutional circuits of power. Living outside the cities, external to regimes of hegemony, living within an oral tradition that somewhat insulates it from printed media, being an old class (unlike the proletariat) with its cultural traditions and pattern of resistance, and having its shadow institutions (like rituals, festivals, religious schools), the peasantry is simply less accessible to hegemonic practice" (Scott 1985:321). When we add that poor peasants' material and symbolic interests are likely to make them skeptical of a dominant ideology that rationalizes their material deprivation and low status, we can appreciate why they might resist "symbolic incorporation" (Scott 1985:315-322).

Thus the subalterns here peasants constitute a distinct domain, a domain of hidden transcripts reflected more in the realm of behavior against the realm of acts where they are more trammeled (Scott 1990:27). Scott argued that subalterns might contest the landlords or state as per context to avoid outright confrontation when it's futile engaging in steady acts of undergirding of state/land-

lords domination. Thus, a distinct realm of behavior/ideas/consciousness exists, a realm of subalternity with a different and unique set of practices/strategies that continuously undermine elite interests despite moments of general agreement. This outer-inner divergence or public-hidden politics is similar to Guha's elite-subaltern dichotomy.

The second feature argued by Scott was that peasants and subordinate groups' acts of submission were temporary tactical moves, pragmatic resignation intended to avoid elite domination. However, it's not essential to overlap inevitable acts with just acts. Additionally, no socio-historical patterns of domination are so complete to control the entire social life. There always exists scope for resistant and autonomous subcultures. The subordinate classes always are capable of imagining alternatives to prevailing hegemonies and thus creative enough to negate them. Scott argued that no system of domination at any given period of history had been so complete control of social life to rule out the creation of partly autonomous and resistant cultures. Even when surrounded by systems of domination, the subordinate classes can always imagine and initiate acts of negation against these systems. Thus Hegemony for Scott is never possible as subalterns always create alternatives and potential enough to imagine refutation. Thus moments of submission are pragmatic ruses intended to deceive. Subalterns always see through the hegemonic tendencies (Scott 1985:322-335).

The third feature discussed by Scott is that hegemony fundamentally involves the misrepresentation of objective interests. Hegemonic ideology requires dominant classes to persuade subordinate classes to adopt their self-serving views of existing social relations, leading to harmony and consensus. This consensus is achievable if two possible conditions are satisfied. One, hegemonic classes must claim that the system of privilege, status, and property it defends and operates is in the subordinates' interests and make promises of benefits. Second, the dominant classes must deliver on some of these promises. Thus hegemony requires some concrete sacrifices or restraint by dominant groups (Scott 1985:335-337). These promises are concretized as legitimizing practices such as feasts, festivals, and customary rights and aim to use the profit to further their benefits modestly.

Thus hegemonic attempts always involve delicate compromise equilibrium via such practices to accommodate non-elite group interests (Gramsci 1971:161). This equilibrium acts as an intrinsic measure that, whenever violated, leads to resistance. Resistance is not always inspired by subaltern interpretations and understandings but a failure of the dominant class to generalize it as common by delivering on its implicit promises (Scott 1985:338). Scott believed that hegemony was inherently contradictory, and hence it failed to survive under circumstances where elites were unable to deliver. Thus shared ideology is no guarantee of harmony and hegemony as hegemony breeds contradiction by failing to generalize its particular interests to accommodate all.

The fourth feature of Scott's description is the need for a vanguard party to raise the consciousness of the subalterns to counter elite domination as they lack coherent perspective and are marred with contradictory consciousness. Scott contended that Gramsci and other intellectuals believed that subaltern classes receive their opinions from dominant groups and hold fragmentary conceptions rather than coherent perspectives to undertake radical change (Scott 1985:340-341). Thus they needed to be educated in methods of revolutionary transformation. However, Scott contested this opinion. Scott believed that it is not necessary to have a vanguard party to instruct and raise awareness among subalterns. Moreover, Scott argues that in actual cases, subordinate classes struggle to achieve limited demands, which are reformist. These demands are compatible with revolutionary aspirations. Scott contends that neither revolutionary consciousness nor elaborate ideology is necessary to create a revolution. Scott also rejects the essential role of a revolutionary guard to lead the revolution as such a vanguard undermines the revolutionary potential of the masses. Thus subaltern struggles have the inherent potential to contest hegemony (Scott 1985:340-345).

The fifth feature for Scott is regarding the distinct history of colonies where the process of capitalist transformation is not complete or is in its nascent phase. Scott argued that the experience of South East Asia ascertain a case where capitalist changes have violated and destroyed pre-capitalist moral economy characterized by reciprocity, customary rights, obligation, etc. Scott argues peasantry in Sedaka struggles in South East Asia are characterized by a battle between capitalism and the older

hegemony where peasants attempt to defend a prevailing hegemony as it offers better prospects than capitalist change (Scott 1985:344-345). Thus unlike conventional Marxist understanding, Scott argues that empirically peasants and workers are backward-looking defending a prevailing older hegemony against new capitalist hegemony as imposed from outside by the state or elites.

Scott's thin description transforms hegemony into a sterile concept. Hegemony is a state of weak consent building so permeable that the subalterns can penetrate, manipulate and deceive the elites through engaging in everyday acts creating hidden transcripts outside the influence of the dominant class, actively promoting conscious activities undermining elite interests while simultaneously acting deferentially in public to deceive the elites (Scott 1985:317-318). Scott identified everyday acts of foot-dragging, pilfering, and flight as avoiding confrontation with no revolutionary aims even though they may significantly contribute to revolutionary aims to achieve mundane ends, a tolerable material life, and a modicum of dignity (Scott 1985:348-350). Thus through such an elaborate scheme of engaging in conscious everyday moments of resistance, tactically deceiving elites via acts of public obeisance, Scott concluded that the subalterns rendered hegemony obsolete.

Scott's work attributed too much value to agents' intention, often forgetting that resistance and agents are embedded within the social fabric. Scott's description of hegemony is so narrow that its existence is denied. Scott's thesis denies the presence of both thick and thin forms of hegemony. A Thick version of hegemony operates by convincing the governed classes of the system's legitimacy, convincing them that the system is right and just, and hence it's inevitable to contest. Within the Thin version of hegemony, subalterns identify the system's injustice even though they realize their powerlessness to fight the system. Scott contended that both versions are impossible. In the case of Thick hegemony, the everyday forms of resistance actively demonstrated awareness and potential to contest hegemony, whereas, in the case of thin hegemony, the subalterns were always imaginative to conceive alternative counter social orders against hegemonic assertion (Scott 1990:73-80).

Thus Scott reduces hegemony to formulaic ideological domination or a condition of consent, avoiding the entire complex of socio domination, the critical standpoint from which Gramsci had conceived hegemony. Scott's emphasis on the symbolic/idealist sense of hegemony covers only one meaning and fits the term to represent consciousness instead of its other, the body. The symbolic sense reduces hegemony to consensus. But Gramsci's notion of 'consenso' is different from the consensus, which means consent given to the ruling group to reduce violence, but doesn't guarantee consensus in the sense of harmony (Mitchell 1990:553-554).

Scott interpreted hegemony as an absolute, whereas in actuality, it is a contested category, a field of force characterized by a struggle to accommodate the interests of the subordinate. It is a dynamic and lived process, a way of life where identities, relations, and organizations based on the asymmetrical distribution of power are arranged to maintain the influence of a class. It is not uniform, and every period may produce a different form of hegemony depending upon the responses of the subaltern classes as hegemony presumes and requires their participation.

Hegemony is tenacious and fragile, involving a complex idea of consent- one composed simultaneously of action and a passive part. Thus consent of the masses is a complex mental state, i.e., a contradictory consciousness mixing resistance and resignation. It varies as per historical periods. Thus in some periods of history, consent will be active within masses where people engage actively in legitimizing the prevailing order. However, at times there would be disagreements between groups producing challenges to hegemony, leading to only passive consent.

Comparing and contrasting Scott's description of hegemony with Gramscian scholars such as Joseph Femia, T J Lears, William Rosenberry, etc., brings forth aspects that highlight the limitation of Scott's interpretation of Gramsci and the complex nature of hegemony within Gramsci. First, Gramsci never regarded hegemony as an ideational-symbolic activity not connected to a material base. There exists a complex interaction between economic base interests and the superstructure

composed of various institutions. It is not linear; instead, it is circular interaction to form an organic whole. The base influences what forms of consciousness are possible.

The base-superstructure interacts and reformulates historical blocs whose success depends on organic cohesion between economic and ideological realms, each promoting the other by overtly narrowing each other's influence. Thus the strict binary of base-superstructure doesn't necessarily operate similarly (Lears 1985:570-572). Femia also raises a similar argument by locating Gramscian perspectives within a category called Open Marxism. Femia argued that no automatic determination course of action exists in history, only a more or less favorable atmosphere for the diffusion of a new ethos. Thus, the economic base influenced ideological and political activities, informing various possible outcomes. However, the former was not determined by the economic base. The ideological and political movements are crucial in determining alternatives. Essentially Gramsci was attempting to avoid extreme positions of idealism and crude materialism. Scott's reading of hegemony as a symbolic or ideological determinism is incorrect (Femia 1975:35-38).

Second, hegemony is not a fixed or permanent condition. Hegemony is a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibrium between the interests of the fundamental group and those of subordinate groups (Gramsci 1971:182). Thus hegemony is not a finished condition within Gramsci. It is contingent and dynamic, marked by periods of active and passive, acknowledging hegemony's contested nature. Hence, Scott's claims of the absence of hegemony owing to the capacity of subalterns to penetrate and demystify hegemony are ill-founded as Gramscian views on hegemony already include this position. Scott views public obeisance is used as a ruse to violate the hegemonic consent to advance subaltern interests. However, this assumption acquires merit if hegemony is equated with mere consent. But as argued above, consent within Gramsci is contradictory with simultaneously including passive and active elements. Thus, while consent is active in some periods, subordinate groups legitimizing ruling values, it is weak in some phases of history, pointing to contestation to ruling classes. Consent in Gramsci is not a coherent and absolute value, but in actuality, it simultaneously includes elements of dissent and confirmation.

Analyzing other points raised by Scott, such as contradiction within hegemony, the role of trade unions, or the necessity of a vanguard and the less than revolutionary acts of resistance needs revision. Contradiction within hegemony is not a derailing feature to discard hegemony. As explained above, hegemony is considered a struggle to achieve the support by ruled classes to dominate is never a complete process as the subaltern opinion of support (consent) is always divided and ambiguous. While a section may approve of some ruling ideas, they may disagree with others. They may approve of ideas in abstraction but not in concrete. The contradiction becomes, as Scott highlights, a problem only when hegemony is a closed process. But it was never conceived as a closed and static instead was assessed as a conflictual, fragile, and contentious equilibrium where counter-hegemonies are options.

As William Adamson has argued, hegemony is a process of continuous creation that, given its massive scale, is bound to be uneven in the degree of its legitimacy it commands and to leave some room for antagonistic cultural expression to develop (Adamson 1980:174). Thus hegemony is conflict-ridden as it creates counter-hegemonies, raising prospects for new hegemonies to overcome counter-hegemonies. Hegemony is a work-in-progress, a struggle via contentious negotiation between dominant and dominated. Therefore hegemony is a vulnerable condition, subject to contestation, which leads to further renewal, recreation, defense, and modification as per its active relation to the revival and recreation of subaltern politics (Williams 1977:112). Thus Scott's contestation that hegemony is contestable owing to the presence of contradiction within itself, or that hegemony rules out any alternative is reductive as it minimizes hegemony to harmony.

Thirdly, unlike Scott, the Gramscian perspective never proposes a binary between revolution and reform. Gramsci was never definitive in the forms of counter-hegemonic politics. There are different stages or conditions that subaltern politics can assume. There exists a wide range of possible modes of resistance, from working within the dominant framework to struggling for partial autonomy with own organization and new agendas even within the dominant frame to integral autonomy,

all of which may coexist. Thus before integral autonomy, the subaltern needs to work against and work with the elite agenda, where the latter may attempt to control the subaltern activities.

Therefore Subalternity (condition of being subaltern) is contradictory as it's characterized by the co-existence of deference and defiance (Chin and Mittleman 1997:27-28). Thus there exist passive and active phases of contestation. There are periods when subalterns subscribe to dominant political structures while undermining them at other levels through influencing their manifesto, launching a new organization, and pressing autonomy claims. This points to their existence as Rosenberry states a dynamic range of actions, positions, and possibilities meaning a mediating space connecting elite and subaltern domains while simultaneously conceptualizing reform and revolution, both part of the possible dynamic options for subalterns achievable as per the degree of hegemony (Rosenberry 1994:360). Gramsci never assumed any subaltern initiative as irrelevant or ultimate, for that matter. Every form of action, however small, is significant. Gramsci viewed the spontaneous feelings by mass and their contradictory commonsense as an embryo for developing counter-hegemonic projects; they included elements of deviations, subversive beliefs, and values that could inspire counteractions. These deviant elements existed alongside elements of conformism (Femia 1975:38-43).

Gramsci believed that there was a need to avoid extreme positions of elitism and spontaneism. Instead, there should be a reciprocal relationship between subalterns and revolutionary intellectuals. The masses and intellectuals must unite organically with a pedagogical perspective where the intellectuals must learn from the masses, leading to the development of organic intellectuals from the proletariat familiar with the subaltern conditions, institutions, and way of life, thus remaining rooted on the ground. Thus unlike Scott's contention, the Gramscian perspective was neither definitive of vanguard (Gramsci favored communist parties but was open to other formations) and also encouraged intellectuals and activists to positively engage with common sense to develop counter-hegemonies. However, unlike Scott, Gramsci was critical of common sense owing to the contradictory nature, i.e., the coexistence of dominant elements alongside deviant elements, making it unstable.

Hence there was a need to renew common sense to achieve a coherent worldview or good sense. But it must not be superimposed from the outside but must emerge from the outcome of subaltern struggles. Gramsci offers a dynamic perspective of hegemony and a dynamic picture of subalternity. Unlike Scott, Gramsci views a cyclical relationship between the two. Both impact and influence each other. Subalternity is neither reduced to autonomous existence nor subordination but includes a wide range of possible positions constituted by its interaction with the hegemony. Thus it may simultaneously exhibit tendencies ranging from confirmation, association with ruling groups while influencing its agenda, claims of limited or partial autonomy in relation to the dominant framework to claims of integral autonomy. Thus such an approach located subalternity as a broad form of resistance within a field of force in connection to the action with and against ruling classes within a hegemonic process rather than a bounded condition of passivity or consensus.

In conclusion, an assessment of the notion of hegemony provided by these scholars in response to Scott's idea reveals the narrow definition of hegemony. Like Scott, Guha also followed the same trail resorting to defining hegemony as the presence of consent and hence determining its absence as evidence for domination. A collective analysis provided by Vivek Chibber, Joseph Femia, T.J.Lears, and William Rosenberry proved the narrow understanding of hegemony followed by scholars such as Guha and Scott and how it has led to incorrect statements such as Dominance without hegemony.

2.2.2. Structural dichotomy- a Precondition for Subalternity as Negation

The second point raised by Ranajit Guha was that elite historiographies overlooked the existence of two dichotomous domains, namely elite and subaltern, which together constituted the field of politics in colonial India. The domain of subaltern politics represented the politics of the people, i.e., efforts and the struggles waged by the people, independent of the elites, expressed in the form of tribal hools, agrarian unrest, and peasant insurgency, which were misrepresented entirely and needed proper assessment (Guha 1982:4). Guha argued that owing to the lack of hegemony of the elite over the subaltern domain, the subaltern domain survived as an autonomous domain inhabited

by a pure state of oppositional subaltern consciousness or subalternity, independent of any elite intervention. Through an exhaustive analysis of archival material on peasant and Adivasi insurgency, Guha formulated a relation of power under which subalternity was construed. This relation of power was an oppositional pair with the dominator on one side and the dominated on the other. An oppositional relation of power meant an autonomous domain where the dominated had their subjectivity. There will be no domination in the absence of such a condition as the dominator will completely subsume the defeated. Dominance, thus, exists within a social relation of power where the conditions for the reproduction of authority are preserved. It existed through the perpetuation of an autonomous domain, and here it was present in acts of resistance. Resistance for Guha was the dialectical other of domination, and together they constituted a whole (Chatterjee 1983: 58-60).

The resistance exists in a relational grid, and hence, its nature can be understood only with its other consciousness, that is, the consciousness of the dominator. Guha argued that the moment of resistance is when subalternity expresses itself. Guha's analysis brings forth six features of subalternity. They are negation, ambiguity, modality, solidarity, transmission, and territoriality. These six elementary features are the distinctive aspects that could be located within subaltern movements, whether a peasant insurgency, social brigandry, or Adivasi revolt. Among these six, the most critical element which expressed subalternity entirely was negation.

2.2.3. Subalternity as Negation

Guha contended that subalternity was characterized by a state of negation. Guha, in his works, explored the nature of subalternity by analyzing various instances of peasant insurgencies. Insurgencies, for Guha, represent the pure expression of negation of the prevalent power structure via inversion of existing power relations and, subsequently, an effort to mark one's identity as independent of the dominant structures (Guha 1983:1-16).Guha primarily conceived negation as a state of rejection of all properties and attributes imposed on the subaltern (here peasant) by elites of different types-class, caste, and government officials. Guha conceded negation as the main constitutive characteristic of subalternity, which would manifest in everyday forms of resistance to open peasant rebellions.

A subaltern defined his social being not through the properties and characteristics of their social beings.

Instead, the subalterns define their existence through a definition of the consciousness and the class limits of their enemies (Guha 1983:20). Subaltern existence has been interpreted in terms of the values and attributes imposed by the elites as a set of the hierarchically imposed distance between elite and subaltern aimed at reproducing this inferior position in terms of wealth, political power, and ritual status; a subaltern recognized himself not by properties and attributes of his social being but by a diminution of those of his superiors (Guha 1983:18). Thus, negation was a self-defining act whereby subalterns attempted to inverse markers of subalternity.

The most immediate strategy of negation was to destroy symbols/markers of authority and stamp their existence. This was achieved through two practices. One was discrimination, and the second was inversion. Discrimination was an act of explicit selection and separation whereby the subalterns identified and separated their friends or allies from their enemies (Guha1983:20-21). Guha argued that the process of discrimination itself was extended through a process of analogy and transference, which Guha dubbed as the 'atidesa' function.[3] It is a practice whereby the insurgents expand the focus of their activities to include more groups or individuals who may not then be directly responsible for the state of subordination of the subalterns.

In a condition of atidesa, there will be no discrimination between good and bad individuals within the elite. Besides, the subalterns may respond to all classes irrespective of whether they are the primary cause for subalternity (Guha 1983:24). The transference of violence from a specific class to all may assume the character of a general attack on all symbols of authority. Such action included military targets such as police check posts, prisons, army barracks; non-military establishments such as households of moneylenders, guest houses, or households for missionaries, planters, contractors,

3 Atidesa was a term Guha borrowed from Sanskrit grammar and linguistics. It means extended application, application by analogy, transference of one attribute to another, attraction of one case or rule to another (Guha 1983:28).

civil officials belonging to various government departments – all sites of authority, civil and military, native as well as foreign and their supporting auxiliary groups (Guha 1983:24-28).

However, this extensive generalized violence has often been erroneously labeled as acts of mindless arson or spontaneous responses to economic hardships. Guha argued that the historian, native and foreign failed to account for the factor that in all these acts, the subalterns targeted all members of their three prominent oppressing groups, that is, sarkar, sahukar, or zamindar (Guha 1983:6-11). The identification of oppression with the triumvirate of sarkar, sahukar, and zamindar presented the political understanding of the subaltern regarding how these three together constituted the power structure on which the colonial state was rooted (Guha 1983:7-8). But, the subalterns also extended their focus to include local elements that supported any of these groups.

For example, in the Indian colonial context, while the initial cause of the outbreak was British policies transforming them into primary targets, as insurgency extended the scope of rebellion included all groups which were seen as allied to the British such as traders, moneylenders, railway officers, missionaries, buildings belonging to the railway, post-office, treasuries including both civilian and non-civilian populations and offices (Guha 1983:24-27). Through targeting all symbols of power, irrespective of whether sarkar/zamindar/sahukar initiated the conflict, insurgent subalterns (peasants/Adivasis) displayed a certain level of broad understanding regarding the working of colonial state power- particularly the collusion between colonial elites and their indigenous partners and how their mutuality of interests has created an integrated power triad with the sole objective of exploiting the insurgent subalterns (Guha 1983:8).

The discriminatory act of identifying enemies and extending it to include all exploitative classes points to the existence of conscious awareness of the extensive nature of economic exploitation and the political structure sanctioning the former, even though the nature of the consciousness is characterized by a negative perception of superordinate authority conceiving it in terms of officialdom or sahibs. Thus, the discrimination, identification of enemies, their native allies, and extended applica-

tion were signs of political consciousness's presence, even though the nature of political consciousness was feeble.[4]

There is only a limited understanding of the nature of the colonial state. Colonial authority was understood in immediate forms such as a revenue or military officer or as a police station or a railway track (Guha 1983:28). The second mode of practicing negation was an inversion. Inversion as a mode of negation involved inverting the symbol of power through appropriation or desecrating the symbol of power (Guha 1983:28-31). Inversion involves a negative response whereby the symbols of power appropriated or inverted are borrowed from the elite (Guha 1983:71-75). Resistance (titled differently as insurgency, revolt, armed rebellion) is predicated on the same structure against which it was directed as in the process of negation subaltern appropriated/desecrated object of authority instituted by the elite and thereby achieve the objective of humiliating elite and achieving one's positive assertion (Guha 1983:19-20).

The reason behind inversion lies with the hierarchical social order in colonial India. Hierarchical social order in colonial India maintained a particular hierarchy of relations sanctioned by religion and caste sanctions which were reproduced through dress codes, residence architecture, language, body postures, etc. The autonomous subaltern consciousness erupted at moments of insurgency or revolts, overcoming the influence of dominant borrowed consciousness and effectively rejecting all the aforementioned markers of authority imposed by elites (Guha 1983:36). Thus, the most effective expression of resistance was destroying every mark of authority, which interestingly was the marker of subalternity. For example, riding a horse or wearing a turban/umbrella, recognizable markers of authority were subversive acts that undermined the dominant order (Guha 1983:61-72).

4 The nature of subalternity as an ‘immediate’ form of consciousness is an important insight from Gramsci. Gramsci argued that the history of subaltern classes is a collection of fragmented, immediate events. Any individual attempting to draw a coherent understanding must take into account some aspects. First, all events are assessed on basis of their immediate causes and impact. The events are not connected to each other so as to carve space for a generalization. In such a context, it’s possible to understand the immediate nature of an event, though generalization is not possible (Gramsci 1971:52-54).

Guha assumed that negation was a natural outcome of the given colonial condition of dominance where power was interpreted in terms of a series of inequalities between the rulers and the ruled as well as between classes, strata, and individuals between social groups and expressed more frequently in a coercive manner (Guha 1997:20). Due to colonialism's externality, colonial capital and later colonial state led by both colonial and national bourgeoisie failed to produce any democratic political culture of organized protest and rights similar to one created by the modern Bourgeoisie revolution in England in 1640s France in 1789. Similarly, the working class peasants were not within mature objective conditions to develop revolutionary consciousness to lead a revolution. In such context, the resistance would express itself outwardly in various modes of negation such as discrimination, appropriation, inversion, and desecration of symbols of authority or, as Guha states in a semi-feudal language of politics (Guha 1983:75-76). For Guha, negation is the first glimmer of anti-dominant consciousness.

However, subalternity (the entire Subaltern studies project) has been solely predicated on negation (involving discrimination and inversion) of borrowed symbols of the elites rather than inventing new symbols. Even while assessing negation as an active rebel consciousness, Guha represented it as a nascent, infantile mode of thinking (Guha 1983:28). This infantile mode of thinking by subalterns instead of creating a new set of symbols and vocabulary resorted to defining their existence through familiar signs or markers, which simultaneously reflected elite authority and subaltern subjugation (Guha 1983:75).

Events of insurgency embody subaltern consciousness solely in terms of resolute negativity against the dominant order, without being bound to any new principle (Chatterjee 1989:206). However, the binary relation between elite-subaltern shifting between the state of antagonism and non-antagonism overlooks the possibility of subaltern consciousness as a state of being constituted through an interaction between the dominant and the subordinate (Chatterjee 1989:206-207).Barring the hierarchical nature of the association, which is not negligible, it's important to remember that the elite are

the most familiar entity close to the subaltern. The relationship is concretized through an intimate space permeated with hierarchy and antagonism.

Despite resisting the sarkar-sahukar-zamindar triad, the consciousness encouraging insurgencies is interpreted as disjointed, inchoate, and hesitant, hence falling short of understanding the complete nature of peasant existence particularly its weakness in gauging the structure of authority and its role in structuring peasant condition (Guha 1983:19). Such disjointed and insufficient consciousness points to the complex nature of the colonial state and its affiliated groups, particularly non-military civil offices and officials, and how their work at the everyday local level negotiated colonialism through compromises and negotiation.

Even in officialdom, the colonial power structure had a more complex existence that couldn't be entirely grasped by subaltern consciousness as it remained hesitant and disjointed perception. Thus even while crediting insurgent peasant/Adivasi with consciousness to learn domination and act against it, Guha limited the depth of subaltern consciousness owing to its episodic and disjointed nature. Thus, despite being political, acts of negation were immature as it was enacted through a borrowed language.

Guha and subsequent subaltern scholars while recording independent initiatives failed to properly comprehend this contradictory nature of acts of negation i.e. how acts of negation were shaped by the interaction between the subaltern and dominant groups. This failure led to arguments such as autonomous articulation of negation (independent of elite influence) in terms of discrimination, appropriation, and inversion around elite symbols, falling short of proposing an alternate order to the prevalent one which has been negated. Excessive emphasis on the dichotomous existence of elite and subaltern domains with no mediating space between them and the autonomous existence of subaltern actions prevented Guha from understanding the actual cause behind the continued prediction of subaltern insurgency on elite symbols was owing to the contradictory nature of subalternity. The

dominant consciousness continued to influence subalterns, even while they engaged in autonomous acts of negation (Gramsci 1971:326-327).

2.2.4. Subalternity and Religion- a case of negation

Ranajit Guha argues that subaltern insurgency to undermine superior authority was not limited to targeting material symbols such as military cantonment, police station, revenue offices, etc., but was extended to cultural symbols, most notable being religious symbols. Incidents of negation involving religion were accomplished through two modes- one, appropriation, and two, desecration.

In the first mode of negation, i.e., appropriation, insurgents (Adivasis or peasants) appropriated upper-caste rituals and customs, an act regarded as threatening as it erased the difference between the upper and lower layer of the caste society (Guha 1983:71-73). Insurgency provided a unique opportunity for inversion of the caste order by displacing the upper castes from their exclusive privileged position by appropriating and performing puja. For example, the performance of a sacrifice or prescribed puja was an exclusive right of a particular caste (in this case, priestly or landlord). Reversal of this right had occurred where lower castes have embraced Sanskritisation, which has subsequently led to tension and violence (Guha 1983:71). Thus appropriation was a model of negation where the insurgent (peasant or Adivasi) defined oneself not in his terms but terms of his enemy's.

The second mode of negation was desecration. In incidents of sacrilege, subalterns attempted to destroy the enemy's prestige by attacking the symbol of their authority. In the Indian case of rural insurgencies, Guha pointed out how Temples became the site for desecration as they were symbols of power and prestige for Hindu landlords. Most Temples were patronized by local landlords and remained a perpetual bone of contention as the caste order denied the right to Temple entry to non-Hindus (Guha 1983:73-74). Entry of the Temple and defilement of the idol was characterized as a classic case of desecration. The meaning of blasphemy was not measured in religious terms but in the humiliation, it inflicted on the enemy.

Similarly, Hindu landlords destroyed Muslim mosques in the wake of peasant and Adivasi insurgency to threaten and degrade sites of worship that sanctioned attacks on Hindu landlords (Guha 1983:75). Whether on Temples or Mosques, these attacks represent a mode of disgracing the places (Temple or Mosque), which were sites of authority, prestige, and inspiration. But even in acts of desecration, the objective was to temporarily destroy symbols of authority that only destabilized ruling groups, as desecration was never succeeded by an effective programme of installing a new sign of faith that would perpetuate the spirit of insurgency and prevent the return of authority.

The relation between subalternity and religion is vividly demonstrated in acts of appropriation and desecration, reproducing the same contradictions visible in the case of subalternity as negation. Both acts of appropriation and desecration involved discrimination and inversion -two critical features of negation. A Temple or a ritual identified as a symbol of the powerful ruling authority was identified and consciously discriminated from other objects. Whether Temple or ritual, the object was systematically appropriated or desecrated by the subaltern through entering a temple, performing a ritual, or defilement of Temple premises, a condition previously unachievable owing to the power and restrictions of the ruling elite. Appropriation or desecration affects an inversion of the prevalent social order accomplishing both stages of negation.

The limitation within such acts of appropriation or desecration is that within these acts, as Guha proposed, the subalterns tend to assert their identity in terms of their enemy's culture rather than their own (Guha 1983:71). All acts of discrimination, appropriations, and desecrations aimed at realizing inversion were derived from the same structure of authority against which the insurgency was directed. Thus authority and uprising were closely associated as the language of rebellion was derived from the structures of power against which it was revolting (Guha 1983:75). Thus involving religious symbols as part of insurgency radiated features of subalternity as negation- achieving the same potential while reproducing the limitations.

Partha Chatterjee elucidates similar theme connecting subalternity and religion by referring to the case of Balahadis, a deviant religious sect in West Bengal, whose resistance to the dominant Brahminical order seems to have been unsuccessful owing to the intricacies of power relations (Chatterjee 1989:194). Chatterjee argues that subaltern religious orders such as Balahadis, a religious sect inspired by the teachings of Balaram, challenged Brahminical religion through inverting Brahminical caste order upside down, placing Balahadi and Balaram on the top and the Brahman at the bottom, which effectively subverted the dominance of Brahmins, undermining their status as pure and hence socially superior (Chatterjee 1989:203). However, such an inversion is not predicated on a new structure. The existence of caste and caste-based differences is not contested. Instead, Balaram raised Hadi to the supreme position of ritual purity, defining it as a self-determining originator of differentiation within the genus and reducing Brahman to an impure and degenerate lineage (Chatterjee 1989:202-203).

Such acts of inversion, even while subverting Brahminical order, do not include any self-conscious construction of alternative order owing to excessive emphasis on acts of negation. The deviant sects such as Balahadis involve in the act of absolute negation of the Brahminical caste order. Balahadis did not propose the absence of difference between caste groups; the Balahadis inverted the ordering of these caste groups raising the Hadi to a position of purest of the pure and placing the Brahmin at the bottom, a location for impure and degenerate (Chatterjee 1989:203). The markers of subordination imposed by the elite through various differential markers- material and symbolic are also the ones through which the subaltern realizes one's earliest identity either in the form of elite imposition subordinating peasant/Adivasi to the elite or as insurgency, which provides an opportunity to overturn and negate these markers registering one's presence as an autonomous agent.

In the case of Balahadis, they were designated as impure by the Brahmins and placed lower within the caste order. Balaram, the founder of Balahadis, proposed a jatitattva, or the origin of species and inverted this social order. By raising Hadi to the position of purest of the pure and by reducing Brahmin to a level of degenerate and impure, it subverts the very claim of the dominant dharma that

the actual social relations of caste are in perfect conformity with its universal ideality (Chatterjee 1989:203). However, the subversion is based on appropriating and inverting a given jati order, and there is no alternative universal principle proposed. The deviant sects such as Balahadis continue to be limited by the spiritual condition imposed by dominant sects. Even while inverting the social, the emphasis is on re-ordering by inverting the Brahmins position, placing Balahadis on the top and Brahmins at the bottom. There is no move to abandon the idea of the genealogical origin of different caste groups or the idea of caste itself.

This approach, in many ways, reveals the continuing grip of dominant religious imagination over deviant sects such as Balahadis, forcing them to dictate the terms of subalternity in terms of negation instead of proposing a new alternative social order. The subversive edge of inversion offered by Balahadis is not undermined. However, the inversion revealed the limits of subalternity in terms of its negativity, pointing out its contradictory nature, i.e., it's a contradictory state of being constituted by an autonomous element revealed in its deviation as well as the presence of the borrowed part, which is displayed in the continuing emulation of caste order by the Balahadis.

The above description provides evidence that the subaltern actions of discrimination and identification of elements of economic and symbolic power of ruling authority such as Temples led to a condition of inversion. In acts of inversion, the dominance of ruling authority expressed through these symbols is displaced and inverted by the subalterns by appropriating, desecrating or annihilating them. Together acts of discrimination and inversion constitute the condition of negation. Negation in close analysis involves autonomous elements where the insurgent acts independently without any influence or direction of the elite by identifying, discriminating, initiating appropriation or desecration.

However, negation remains hesitant, inchoate, and disjointed even while displaying initiative. This hesitation is because all signs of insurgencies are simultaneously signs of authority. Thus in establishing one's identity, the subaltern, instead of instituting a different symbol, borrows the same dom-

inant symbol to achieve the objective of inversion. Through the borrowed symbol of Temple or revenue office which belongs to the elite, that subaltern identifies his value. Subalternity as negation includes autonomous initiative by subalterns which is expressed in the enemy's culture rather than their own.

Thus subalternity is inherently contradictory as it's composed of independent and borrowed elements. However, despite these apprehensions, Guha continued to overlook the limits of negation, as the sole focus was to establish the value of negation as a point to comprehend the nuances of the acts of subaltern rebellion, which the previous studies have neglected. Thus negation was treated as the first glimmer of subaltern consciousness mature enough to discriminate, appropriate, desecrate and eventually invert the prevalent social order.

Like Guha's formulation of dominance without hegemony, the dichotomous nature of subalternity as opposed to and independent of any elite influence has been contested since its formulations. Interlocutors have responded to the treatment of the theme of subalternity within SS in general but Guha in particular. There have been respondents such as Javeed Alam, Ranajit Das Gupta, B. B. Chaudhuri, Ranajit Das Gupta, Frederick Cooper, Henry Schwarz, Jim Masselos, Sumit Sarkar, Vinay Bahl, etc. Most of these responses tended to offer their general disagreement with the two crucial themes advanced by subalternists: the structurally dichotomous character of Indian politics and the autonomous existence of subalternity as opposed to the elite domain. Their response to the relation between subalternity and religion is subsumed within their respective critiques of these two themes.

Javeed Alam contested the autonomous character of subaltern politics by arguing that autonomy is equated with individual acts of resistance. Autonomy is a dialectical possibility born of struggle and revolutionary advance (Alam 2002:51). It originates from the dialectics between existing received notions of consciousness and radical aspirations. However, it's not an isolated process. There is a close interaction, tension, and exchange between elite and subaltern communities. Alam argued that

SS scholars foreclose the possibilities of how education and agitation can assist in vanguard subaltern subjectivity and similar role of manipulation in confusing people. Thus external intervention in transforming/influencing subalternity is not appreciated (Alam 2002:4-47). Subalternity has a contradictory nature which can produce opposing results. This conflicting nature prevented many peasant movements from communally mobilizing, whereas it made alliances across social groups in the same cases. This dual character, alongside external involvement, could have prevented several subaltern movements from growing beyond local/its immediate territoriality and generalized into anti-imperialist campaigns (Alam 2002: 47-49). Thus for Alam, autonomy is not an inherent condition but a product of dialectics between domination and revolutionary advance. Subaltern scholars do not sufficiently explore the complex context of subalternity, particularly the intermingling of existing forms of self-awareness with new forms of ideologies to produce contradictory outcomes.

Thus, the autonomous nature of subalternity is empirically untenable as it negates the contradictory nature of subalternity to produce an oppositional consciousness without accounting for the involvement of nationalist or colonialist intervention in the Indian case, which may disrupt/demobilize peasant movement focusing solely on the potential revolutionary failing to appreciate how complicity/collaboration was also used to recruit peasants into nationalist discourse.

B. B. Chaudhuri argues that the role of non-subaltern actors in constituting subalternity is crucial; it has influenced the nature of leadership and the various forms of organization and mobilization aspects of movements. Noticeably, however, it has affected and reframed the relationship between the elite and subaltern political mentalities. B. B. Chaudhuri argued that there exists an excessive pressure to portray the existence of autonomous subaltern politics. However, this dichotomy is exceedingly pushed over. Chaudhuri argues the peasant, tribal and other similar subaltern movements interact closely, influencing each other. The influence of the nationalist movement could have influenced the subaltern movement, particularly the nature of organization, tactics, objectives, etc. The general anti-colonial discontent prevalent within the nationalist movement influenced subaltern politics, eventually overriding the elite-subaltern dichotomy (Chaudhuri 2002:121-125,132).

Subalternity is not solely characterized by negation. Drawing evidence from David Arnold's study of the colonial police constabulary, Chaudhuri argues that constables drawn from the native population as part of the colonial police force exhibited a contradictory consciousness. They occupied lower strata of Bureaucracy and performed menial police duty at poor scales. Thus materially, they occupied subaltern positions, developing an oppositional role to the officer class demanding improved wages.

However, they seldom questioned the colonial state; their struggle rarely assumed broader forms via roping similar aggrieved native groups. Contrarily, they exacted from the natives exercising their role as agents of the colonial state, serving their interests. Chaudhuri argued that constables simultaneously assumed roles of exploiter and exploited, exhibiting both defiance and deference. This contradictory state of existence is rarely acknowledged by SS in its formulation of subalternity, as this aspect undermines the image of a coherent rebel peasant (Chaudhuri 2002:120-121).

Ranajit Das Gupta argued that the dichotomy of Indian politics and the existence of autonomous subaltern domain needs further probing as Subaltern studies have concentrated more on moments of conflict and protest and have tended to downplay the wide range of complex and contradictory forms of consciousness that exist between subordination and open revolt (Gupta 2002:108-114). There were several incidents in which the subaltern domain collaborates with non-subaltern leaders or organizations. Many peasant and local struggles have transformed into an integral part of the national movement by forging alliances with elite initiatives. Thus, subalternity as a state of being negating elite politics needs to be revisited.

Subalternity is not to be reduced neither to subordination or negation alone but to represent a diverse spectrum of attitudes, positions, and dispositions that co-exist and, at times, inter-penetrating each other (Gupta 2002:112-114). C A Bayly comments on subalternity appreciate the objective of Subaltern studies to restore the theme of subalternity into the mainstream anti-colonial narrative as its importance in preventing marginalization of subaltern struggles. However, it's important to stress

the internal divisions within subaltern struggles and understand how different factions within peasants and workers reiterate the impossibility of an unchanging peasantry or unified peasant consciousness defined solely by oppositional consciousness against domestic or colonial elitism (Bayly 2000:120-126).

K Sivaramakrishnan raised similar arguments contending that Subaltern studies established a binary of elite-subaltern, leading to a romanticization of cultural difference (Sivaramakrishnan 2002:215-216). Even when the search for subalternity produced several binarisms such as colonizer-colonized, western-non-western, domination-resistance, and analysis of power relations underwriting these binaries, it further constrained the study of power as it is engaged, contested, appropriated, or deflected. Thus many radical historiographies reproduce the binaries it tends to replace via categories of indestructible community or a moral economy (Cooper 2002:257-258). But such binaries, except for the initial phase, fail to account for the complex everyday engagements, contestations, and appropriations that rework the prevalent power relations and subsequently determine the nature of subalternity.

Henry Schwarz argued that Subaltern studies attempted to bypass the bourgeoisie nationalist, ethnic claims or complicity between indigenous and colonial elites or far less a civilizational advance up the evolutionary scale and pursued to locate a heterogeneous field which either resisted official nationalism or had no access to nation formation (Schwarz 2002:306).

Reflecting on Guha and other contributors, Schwarz, alongside Massellos, argued that these scholars contended vast areas of unintegrated life outside the narratives of dominant elite historiographies. There exists an irreconcilable difference between the consciousness of the dominant and the dominated. Thus subalternity (subaltern consciousness) reflects an 'outside,' a location outside elite historiographical accounts which represents the subaltern as an integral other, a binary constituent standing in opposition to the ruling groups and a mentality characterized by opposition or resistance.

The symbolic opposition embodied within the insurgent peasant consciousness represents 'a metaphoric mode', the other of the prevalent way of historiography. The insurgent peasant, rebellious hillmen, and revolting traders represent the 'other' of the liberal cautious, and controlled legalistic parliamentary institution-oriented politics of the elite. However, subalternity fails to accommodate the vast contradictory acts and positions by subalterns that could be recorded as collaboration or subordination.

There is a tendency to provide a totalizing theorization of all the subaltern actions, including those localized as anti-colonial. Hence the assertion of insurgency as the essence of subalternity tends to overlook historical contexts and determine the structure of subaltern consciousness in its pure state of antagonism, which is, in fact, political and organized (Schwarz 2002:315-320). There are a few features of subalternity. They are

1. Perpetual mobilization, i.e., a state of conscious organized political opposition.

2. Subalternity as a provocation to remind the middle class of its complicity.

3. Thus, subalternity posits a complex state of disruption (Schwarz 2002:320-322)

However, the mutuality of the state of subalternity needs further exploration. Despite attributing a critical value to Subalternity in highlighting the limits of dominant modes of historiography, Schwarz also highlights the fictive construction of subalternity as a redemptive consciousness that emerges despite its best attempts as a diametrically opposed consciousness always mediated by historians (Schwarz 2002:325).

Extending Schwarz's argument, Massellos argued that SS and similar scholarship has attempted to unearth an invariant structure of continued resistance or social warfare (Massellos 2002:205-206) consistently. The subaltern emerges as a reified creation of historians. Subalternity merges diverse acts or dispersed violent action to constitute a mentality of opposition. Subalternity signifies con-

sciousness of and resistance (Massellos 2002:205). The critical aspect comprising subalternity is the moment of polarization inherent in the exercise of power and its resistance (Massellos 2002:206).

However, despite the above claims, it's challenging to ascertain autonomous existence via resistance as the subaltern resides in a universe that she, alone, is not the determinant. Subalternity as a state of being of the subaltern is determined by interaction with various spheres or, to argue differently, external determinants influence subalternity. The claims of subalternity are asserted on the grounds of the absence of dominance or an altered notion of power. If external material and discursive power are maintained, subaltern autonomy disappears (Massellos 2002:207-209). Subaltern studies produced a reified heroic figure, a systematic attempt to assert an objectified hero through a heroic myth-making, construing a tradition of opposition (Massellos 2002:209-210).

Vinay Bahl attempts to limit the analysis of subalternity by trying to contextualize subalternity. Bahl argued that despite claims of documenting voices of the people or inaugurating a new approach to rectify elitist bias within Indian historiography and restore the agency of subaltern, it has failed to accommodate the elements of material culture and its role in forming the subaltern conditions; it also fails to provide any sort of alternative emancipatory politics for the masses.

Constituting subalternity or subaltern consciousness was the initial thrust area of Subaltern studies scholars. They followed British Social Historians such as Eric Hobsbawm, E.P.Thompson, Rodney Hilton, etc., who delved into regional languages and colonial records. They read them against the grain to recover the voices of subalterns (Bahl 2002:360-361). This was the first phase of subalternity where the focus was on subaltern movements to restore the initiatives by subalterns independent of any elite intervention.

In the next stage, the emphasis shifted to interrogating the practices of knowledge production. Particularly focusing within the discipline of history, by rewriting history from the vantage point of the marginalized, provincializing modernity in colonies, pushing history to its limits, and writing back contradiction and ambivalence back into history. Thus from empirical mainstreaming to rewriting

history from the vantage point of 'difference' between colonizers and colonized and maintained this by focusing on structural dichotomy and stressing on difference emerging from that dichotomy (Bahl 2002:361-362). This overt emphasis on difference via focusing on themes of insurgency, revolt, and armed rebellion is emblematic of the SS approach, which characterized subalternity as conscious, political acts initiated with intention, solidarity, and organization rather than spontaneous violent responses. In the Indian case (commenting chiefly on the works of Dipesh Chakrabarty on Jute factory workers), Bahl contends that subalternity is the state of mobilization and conscious contention waged against both national and colonial elites mediated through inegalitarian and hierarchical pre-capitalist values (Bahl 2002:365-366). Chakrabarty and other SS scholars reject to analyze the role of capital or state in influencing subaltern action. Bahl analyses that the objection to the role of external elements such as Colonialism or Nationalism is based on the notion that elites (national/colonial) were dominant but not hegemonic and that subalternity thrived on the autonomous acts of subalterns conducted independently of the elites. Thus to grasp subalternity, one needs to delve into the everyday culture characterized by inegalitarian religious ethics and caste values.

Bahl contends that Chakrabarty, in line with Ranajit Guha, argued for a continuing structure of loyalty within the working-class defiance of authority throughout the history of labor mobilization (Bahl 2002:374-377). Underneath the trade union mobilization, which occurred in the colonial phase based on membership, rules, and procedures attempting to realize a modern bourgeoisie democracy politics, there survived a structure of hierarchy and loyalty where authority and order were based upon status and submission. The interaction between labour and capital and modern organizational forms and class ideologies is not featured as a primary focus for Chakrabarty as he tends to relate the politics of masses (peasants, laborers, Adivasis) within a domain of culture informed by religious, case norms and strengthened by primordial loyalties and customary ties, outside the influence of elites and capital (Bahl 2002:377).

Bahl argued that despite the above-cited autonomous claims, the influence of various factors such as caste, religion, etc., workers overcame such divisions and united on a class basis based on their

everyday struggle against industrial owners, supervisors, etc. Subalternity (here refers to worker's consciousness) is not a static condition but rather contingent upon the contexts, i.e., conditions of production and reproduction, community and religious demands, caste norms, etc. Bahl argued that all these factors structure the shape of subalternity (Bahl 2002:380-382). Like Tom Brass and later Vivek Chibber, Bahl argued that the failure of capital to transform need not be assessed as a failure of capitalism. Instead, it points to internal contradictions, ambiguities, and divisions within the colonial process. However, the colonial process's persistence despite such divisions and setbacks indeed suggests two aspects

1. Effectiveness of working class.

2. Survival of dominant class (capitalist/administrative elite) via traditional institutions of caste etc.

Subalternity as a state of opposition and appropriation needs to be viewed as a state of ambivalence constituted via interpretation and mutual influence. Citing worker mobilization, Bahl argues that capitalist social formation or subjectivities vary across national boundaries as per contextual requirements. Capital's requirements are construed as per contexts subjected to contestations from below. However, capital and its contestation exist in an interactional condition (Bahl 2002:374-381).The difference as the basis of politics, Bahl argued, undermines common ground for emancipatory projects. Subalternity as an autonomous claim is shored against the dichotomous binary of elite asserting its particularity.

However, no position or identity exists in an absolute state. Each form of subalternity is circumstantial, which assumes a concrete pattern against a particular historical context. Besides, there are 'differences within differences,' i.e., several layers of subalternity vis-à-vis several subalterns; each subalternity needs evaluation per its specific context. Bahl argued that SS scholars fail to account for external determinants of subalternity, internal differences within subalterns, ambiguities, reinventions by colonial capital and state, and the absence of any emancipatory politics etc. (Bahl

2002:372-389). However, one of the most detailed responses to the notion of subalternity as negation was provided by Sumit Sarkar.

Sumit Sarkar was one among the earlier members of the SS group, who later exited the collective and emerged as its critic. Sarkar began his analysis by assessing the influence of Edward Said, particularly his influence over Subalternists scholars in terms of their homogeneous understanding of subalternity as a context-free, romantic pre-colonial condition. Sumit Sarkar's contention against Subaltern studies was based on their adaptation of Edward Said's perspectives in interpreting Indian history. Sarkar argued that Said offered a simple and homogeneous conception of power relations viewing colonialism as a rupture whereby the colonies are constituted. The entire moment prior to colonialism is either dependent or derivative of colonialism. Thus the search for any past or self is mediated via colonial apparatus. Therefore, colonial domination is so total that it forecloses any scope for resistance or agency.

Saidian frame produces a stark binary of an innocent native, a romanticized pre-modern, pre-colonial via invoking the existence of community consciousness similar to peasant communal consciousness and conception of a communal mode of power proposed by Partha Chatterjee (Sarkar 2000:240-246). Sarkar argued that the Saidian framework and works produced within a similar vein, particularly Subaltern studies, have attempted to theorize subaltern consciousness as a romanticized pre-modern, pre-colonial consciousness where one should seek subaltern autonomous claims. As opposed to this, the realm of the elite is characterized by all features of enlightenment, such as English education, the notion of history, social mobility via reforms, nationalism, etc., all conceived and implemented through colonial apparatus. These activities, however, were never comprehensive and left vast areas of life outside without appropriating the native.

However, in conceiving the colonial subject Said and his followers reproduced the intellectual categories of colonialist apparatus. Thus they produced a homogenous native residing outside the territory of the colonial state (Chandavarkar 2000:64-66). Therefore, Subaltern studies drawing upon

Saidian frameworks reproduced homogenous subaltern figures bereft of any complexities of their actual context. However, Sarkar offered a more detailed and thematic review of the shifting meaning of subalternity within Subaltern Studies and its influence over Indian academia.

Sarkar's argument drew on the internal contradictions within the project. It focused on the project's origin in the early 1980s as a critique of elitist historiographies- nationalist, colonialist, and Marxist. The Subaltern studies were a conscious attempt to move out from the prevailing academic orthodoxies while retaining a commitment to restoring popular initiatives such as peasant insurgencies and tribal uprisings to their original significance. Recuperating the figure of a rebellious peasant or the rebellious Adivasis was part of a conscious effort to problematise the relations of domination and exploitation and recover from these relations the agency of the subalterns. Thus subalternity is emblematic of the attempts of India to produce history from below (Sarkar 2002:400-401).

Thus the early SS volumes (particularly Vol I to Vol IV) contained articles predominantly on themes such as subaltern struggles, documenting empirically peasant or tribal movements, demonstrating an empiricist approach to confirm the existence of subaltern autonomy across different spheres of life, erecting a concrete domain of subaltern politics characterized by a state of negation. Thus these volumes summed subalternity as negation. However, post-1986 witnessed a shift from such empirical struggles by subaltern groups to a critique of western colonial power-knowledge and a non-western community consciousness as its alternative based on religious identities (Ludden 2002:18-20).

Thus the meaning of subalternity shifted from a resistant consciousness to a representation of subaltern subjectivity. Instead of focusing on various struggles by diverse subaltern groups, the emphasis shifted to colonial practices representing subalternity. New turn used creative methods of reading colonial texts, archives, and oral histories to erect a domain of hidden identities based on a difference vis-à-vis colonial/nationalist domain. Subalternity was traced within fragmentary testimonies, dramatic responses, spontaneous reactions, etc. Subalternity moved into the field of cultural studies.

Many commentators signaled this as the post-colonial, post-modernist turn in interpreting subalternity. Rather than focusing on socio-economic interconnections and entanglement between power and resistance, subalternity was defined as fragments of difference rooted within the domain culture. Therefore the core of subalternity shifted from the negation of the colonial elite to the negation of all forms of universalism and Eurocentrism (Sarkar 2002:402). The internal shifts within the meaning of subalternity produced fixed essentialisms such as subalternity as negation or subalternity as an autonomous condition of contestation proved through drawing examples from numerous accounts of struggle. Separating such conceptualizations from the socio-economic contexts out of fear of economic reductionism fixed these above tendencies as permanent. Sarkar argued that separating power and resistance prevented critical appraisal of these categories. Similarly, viewing subalternity only as subordination or subalternity as negation rendered it as an absolute condition untouched by power/or as being a state with no agency in the first case.

Such a stark separation between domination and autonomy rendered both concepts ineffective. Such an approach was reinforced by the influence of the Saidian framework within Subaltern studies. Saidian critique of Orientalism emphasized the omnipotent presence of colonialism as it was judged to have wholly transformed colonies. Outside the domain of colonialism lay the domain of the native communal consciousness untouched by European rationalism. Said presented a new binary-colonial cultural domination stripped of all complexities and variations against an indigenous domain of internal divisions (Sarkar 2002:407-408).

This new binary underscored elite-subaltern by rephrasing it as nation-community. The community represented the new other within the binary whose opposite pole was the nation. Thus the initial empirical disjunction between elite and subaltern was supplemented with colonial-indigenous community or Western-Third world cultural nationalism. This shift also marks a close association with new reading techniques and practices to delineate processes constituting subalternity. Thus, the changes in the meaning of subalternity within the community domain often came close to neo-tradi-

tionalism and anti-modernism (Sarkar 2002:407-417). Sarkar summarized the arguments on subalternity as

1. Subalternity was restricted to any autonomous moment of resistance or contestation.

2. Subalternity as a pure domain of indigenous resistance outside Western colonial cultural domination or nationalist control breeds retrogressive indigenism. Such formulation also overlooks moments of struggles, particularly women, anti-caste movements that utilized the elite's resources and partnered with them. Subalternity with SS scholarship repudiated enlightenment ideals and delegitimized various civil society movements and gender and ecological struggles on liberal institutional politics.

3. Subalternity as resistance devoid of transformation is reducible to uncritical reverence of indigenism, cultural fragments preserved by a benign community (Sarkar 2002:417-422).

Most of the above respondents point out that the criteria of determining subalternity based upon negation, spontaneity, violent nature of the struggle, and horizontal and traditional organizational modes have not been productive. Such measures limit the variegated forms of subalternity between two endpoints-institutionalized legal actions and spontaneous violent actions. Despite the productive response offered by Sumit Sarkar, Javeed Alam and other respondents both subalternists and their critics commit similar mistakes in different manners.

The subalternists, in their drive to restore the subaltern as the objective agent in history, conclude, almost uncritically, that the subalternity is characterized by an invariant opposition to the elites. They fail to account for everyday forms of struggle, the traditionally sanctioned forms of resistance, reciprocity, and the moral economy which connects the subaltern with the elite. The moment of insurgency is the only moment accounted. There are extended periods of association between the elite and the subaltern where the latter supports and even fights for the former. This contradictory nature of subalternity is wholly ignored.

The respondents to the subalternist's account of subalternity attempted to present empirical historical evidence problematizing the subalternist's argument of the existence of an autonomous subaltern domain and the presence of a unique subaltern consciousness. However, their account of subalternity reduces the former as a variant of primitive peasant consciousness or false consciousness. The immediate and fragmentary nature of subalternity is counted as a sign of the inability of subaltern classes to comprehend the true nature of their structures of dominance. While the subalternists are blinded by their theoretical contention of the existence of the pure oppositional nature of subalternity, its critics and interlocutors have derided subalternity as a case of false consciousness or a condition that precludes any form of political mobilization.

This understanding of subalternity as a consciousness that needs to be eventually overcome has tended to influence their approach to the question of connecting subalternity to religion. Though scantily mentioned, religion is part of the peasant consciousness that would eventually disintegrate with the integration of subalterns into the domain of modern legal-institutional politics.

Thus, for subalternists such as Guha, religion reflects subalternity in terms of negation expressed as desecration or appropriation, whereas for respondents, subalternists treat religion as backward consciousness inspiring peasant insurgency. Both accounts overlook the complex nature of subalternity and its impact on religion.

Contrary to these accounts, there exists a parallel stream of thought inspired by the writings of Antonio Gramsci. He viewed subalternity as a state of contradictory consciousness that harbors not only deference but also defiance. Gramsci assessed subalternity as an immediate but original thought of the subalterns. It holds the conditions required to articulate a new counter-hegemonic project drawing simultaneously from the traditional and modern political wisdom. The present study proposes a rethinking of subalternity by emphasizing the contradictory nature of subaltern consciousness, its connection to religion, and how it mutates within a subaltern movement, such as the Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha.

2.3. Rethinking Subalternity- a Gramscian perspective

The subalternists and their critic's accounts of subalternity produced a strict binary understanding of subalternity. Subalternity, as per Ranajit Guha and other subaltern scholars, was marked by the presence of pure oppositional consciousness of subalterns towards elites, constituting a distinct autonomous domain. Critics such as Javeed Alam, B. B. Chaudhuri, Ranajit Das Gupta, and others have contested these claims. Both the narratives discount the role of the everyday experience of subalterns, which includes elements of popular religion, legendary stories, folklore, and the language into which the subalterns translate their experience.[5] These elements collectively constitute the 'commonsense' of the subalterns (Gramscian equivalent for subalternity), whose key feature is contradiction.

Gramsci argues that any search into the nature of subalternity should necessarily commence with an inquiry into the subaltern common sense as it represents the immediate observations of the subaltern. Gramscian comments on the contradictory nature of subaltern consciousness are scattered across various sections within *Prison notebooks*. Common sense refers to the original thinking of the subalterns. Common sense is expressed in a fragmented and disjointed manner because of being simultaneously composed of contradictory (mutually opposed) elements of thought, which mistakenly leads to its assessment as incoherent. However, contradiction is the key to understanding common sense. In actuality, the reason for 'contradictory' forms of consciousness among subalterns is because it simultaneously harbors elements of independent (autonomous) and borrowed elements of consciousness (Gramsci 1971:333).

The autonomous element indicates independent thinking and decisive action of the subalterns to transform the world, tending to act implicitly within the activities of the subaltern, occasionally ap-

5 This point needs elaboration. Gramsci attempts to demystify the two broad lines of thought. One is the enlightenment understanding that philosophy is a specialized and difficult activity which can be done only Philosophers. This argument had inspired the assumptions among Marxists that the common people needed to be educated. The second point of attack for Gramsci is the Crocean philosophy that all knowledge is present within common sense; it is the fountain of all philosophical inquiries. Instead, Gramsci searches for a golden mean which argues that there exists a philosophical tradition which is to subalterns (Gramsci uses the term everybody) which has its own limits and characteristics. It's the spontaneous philosophy. This is present in (a) common sense and good sense, (b) popular religion and an entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting collectively bundled under the category 'folklore' and (c) language which is a totality of determined notions and concepts and not just words grammatically devoid of content. Gramsci views that it is within this spontaneous philosophy and particularly its core category, that is, common sense with which any study of subalternity must begin (Gramsci 1971:323).

pearing in forms of flashes that unite him with other fellow workers in the practical transformation of the world. At the same time, the borrowed consciousness includes more verbal or explicit elements of thinking and practices inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed, a sign of submission and intellectual subordination imposed on the subalterns by the dominant reiterating their subordinate position (Gramsci 1971:327-333).

Despite the presence of the autonomous element, the influence of the verbal or explicit (borrowed consciousness), a remnant of the dominant ruling group, is significant as it continues to hold influence over the subordinate social group, its moral conduct, and the direction of its will. The borrowed consciousness varies in its efficacy but is powerful enough to produce a contradictory state of consciousness, neutralizing implicit autonomous initiatives on behalf of subalterns, preventing any decision, choice, or action leading to a condition of moral and political passivity (Gramsci 1971:333). Thus contradiction owing to the coexistence of borrowed and autonomous consciousness becomes the critical feature of Gramsci's understanding of subalternity.

Gramscian concept of the contradictory notion of common sense offers a unique approach to understanding subaltern struggles. Gramsci never rejects the significance of independent thinking and initiatives sponsored by the subalterns. However, Gramsci doesn't view subaltern initiatives in isolation. The borrowed elements tend to exert their influence over the autonomous subaltern elements. Thus, despite demonstrating an independent and organized conception of the world (a philosophy) and practical political action, the subalterns may not always succeed due to the dominant ruling class's different forms of interventions preventing any concrete decision or action. Thus the subaltern struggle for liberation was going to be a protracted conflict that always emerged with the responses of the ruling classes, and Gramsci proposed a schematic picture of the same.

Gramsci proposes a two-staged process to escape the moral and political passivity through which the subordinate groups must distinguish themselves from the dominant ruling classes theoretically and practically. This is achieved through developing a critical understanding of the self by the sub-

alterns via assuming hegemony in the ethical and political field. This involves two stages. The first stage is an elementary and primitive phase inculcating a sense of being 'different' and 'apart,' developing an instinctive feeling of independence, indicating a mental distancing from the ruling classes' coercive or moral and intellectual influence. The second stage involves a more coherent and united conception of the world, which moves beyond the instinctive imagination and transforms imagination into a concrete, tangible notion (Gramsci 1971:333).

The most crucial challenge is achieving this hegemony which is never an easy process. The dominant ruling classes continue to interfere and influence the subaltern actions to perpetuate their influence. The constant and protracted struggle between the autonomous and dominant consciousness produces mixed outcomes. For example, there are moments when the dominant group reigns over subalterns forcing them to embrace their agenda. At the same time, there are moments when subaltern groups may disagree with the dominant groups and carve their autonomous politics (Gramsci 1971:52-53).

The protracted nature of subaltern struggle needs to be explored as they could reveal how the contradictory nature of subalternity has shaped subaltern struggles. Under the title 'History of the Subaltern Classes: Methodological Criteria, Gramsci proposed a general framework listing the possible stages experienced by a subaltern struggle. These stages point to the probable courses undertaken by subaltern classes in their desire to overcome the disjointed, episodic and fragmented nature of common sense and a dominant intervention to develop a more coherent and unitary conception of the world (Gramsci 1971:321-328).

Gramsci proposes six different types of phases through which subaltern struggles to pass. Gramsci argued that subaltern classes, by definition, are not unified and are always subject to intervention by civil society and the state; hence these stages are not absolute and can be broken down into intermediate phases or can be combined for analysis as per the requirement (Gramsci 1971:52). The six stages proposed by Gramsci are

1. Objective formation of the subaltern social groups, by the developments and transformations occurring in the sphere of economic production; their quantitative diffusion and their origins in pre-existing social groups, whose mentality, ideology, and aims they conserve for a time.

2. The active and passive affiliation of subaltern social groups to the dominant political formations, their attempts to influence the programmes of these formations in order to press claims of their own, and the consequences of these attempts in determining processes of decomposition, renovation, or neo-formation.

3. The birth of new parties of the dominant groups, intended to conserve the assent of the subaltern groups and to maintain control over them

4. The formations that the subaltern groups produce to press claims of a limited and partial character.

5. Those new formations assert the autonomy of the subaltern groups but within the old framework.

6. Those formations which assert integral autonomy (Gramsci 1971:52). [6]

These stages need not follow in a logical sequence. They can appear simultaneously, or there can be jumps in some cases. However, there is one point discernible from these stages. Subaltern social groups, their political formations, and their response to dominant political formations are not independent of dominant interventions.

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6 The notion of autonomy is a widely debated theme within philosophy. There are different definitions to autonomy. There is a basic idea of autonomy, that is, it is a minimal status of being responsible, independent and able to speak for oneself. There are, however, different meanings to autonomy in different contexts. Feinberg proposed that there are at least four different meanings of "autonomy" in moral and political philosophy: the capacity to govern oneself, the actual condition of self-government, a personal ideal, and a set of rights expressive of one's sovereignty over oneself. However, the core idea central to these different versions is that it is a condition where a person can reflect, choose and act according to one's own deliberations. The main contention with these conceptions is that they are absolute and transcendental in nature. They fail to take into account the significance of 'context'- both material and non-material in determining the nature of an individual's thinking and actions.(Stanford Encyclopedia 2003:1-3). Subaltern Studies interpreted subaltern struggle as evidence for the existence of a state of autonomy. In this case it is a state of consciousness where the subaltern is aware of the composite structures of domination; s/he discriminates and attempts to inverse them, enjoying a state of control over one's affair. Guha's definition of autonomy is similar to a state of mind where subalterns are thoughtful, in control and aware of the consequences of their action so much that they are capable to act independent to the intervention of the elites.

The dominant social group constantly attempts to influence subaltern politics. The dominant political formations attempt to acquire the consent of subalterns through new political initiatives. The pre-existing mentalities and ideology also influence subaltern attitudes toward dominant politics. However, Gramsci never imparts an impression that subaltern social groups are entirely subordinate to dominant machinations. But they are certainly influenced by dominant initiatives, and the variations within subaltern initiatives indicate the continued influence of dominant groups. Subalterns attempt to affiliate at times actively but also passively. In the case of active affiliation, the subaltern social groups launch their political fronts or similar organizations with limited or partial independence.

These claims are limited and partial as they are necessarily within the dominant framework. Such claims aim to influence dominant political programmes to advance subaltern demands. The efficacy of such demands may influence dominant groups to revise their programmes to add subaltern demands. In some cases, dominant groups may create new political formations to accommodate subaltern demands, guarantee their consent and maintain their control over subalterns. The most radical subaltern political formations tend to break away from current political arrangements to propose integral autonomy, which aims to replace the prevalent socio-political order with a new one (Gramsci 1971:52-106).

Thus, subalterns struggle to develop an autonomous consciousness in a coherent worldview, and organized subaltern movements are always subject to the dominant initiative. For Gramsci, this leads to contradiction as the subaltern initiatives continue to be influenced and affiliated with dominant politics even while they attempt to assert themselves distinctly. Thus from a Gramscian standpoint, a subaltern struggle is never solely reducible to opposition or subordination. Instead it is composed of a diverse set of acts such as confrontation, withdrawal, negotiation, re-grouping, and again confrontation. There are some essential aspects of subalternity that these diverse phases of subaltern struggle reveal. One is that despite being contradictory, subalternity is the immediate and original thought of the subalterns. But even while subaltern tends to understand the relation of dominance

and exploitation imposed by the elites, they accept it as fate due to the episodic and fragmented nature of thought. Thus episodic nature of thought prevents them from establishing an interconnection between different episodes, thus producing a general picture of structures of dominance and understanding the conditions of its subordination (Gramsci 1971:272-273).

However, the most conspicuous feature of subalternity is its contradictory character. The subalterns may engage in a protest, followed by negotiation, moderation, and even accommodation. There are everyday forms of resistance from social satires to foot-dragging, squatting, and so on even when subject to their dominance; defiant attitude towards local elites even when there is a trust in national level elites in delivering development (Patnaik 1988:4). At best, it is a complex that merges contradictory tendencies of collaboration and resistance to produce a contradictory consciousness (Bhadra 1989:90-91).

The mentality of the subalterns or their subalternity is characterized by a mix of approbation and apathy and resentment and resistance, simultaneously working through containments of power and contestations of domination (Dube 2004:136). Subalternity is embedded within relational spaces of connection and articulation. The dominant power relations tend to shape and control subordinate groups, whereas subordinate groups contest, negotiate, and appropriate the dominant. Thus subalternity is mediated via a dynamic (more interestingly precarious) balance between contesting forces or emerges at the interstices of ascending powers and subordinate groups as an example of an unstable equilibrium (Nilsen 2015:46-47).

Subalternity interpreted as autonomous mentality or as being a derivative from dominant power relations, fails to capture the dialectical nature of the concept. Subalternity is a state of being constituted by conjunctural possibilities and structural constraints. While the state or dominant classes attempt to map, record, control, manage and define subaltern groups, the latter influences state or dominant classes with their objectives and tactics. Thus sites of power represent a contentious negotiation between dominant and subaltern classes producing a compromised equilibrium attempt to ac-

commodate the interests and tendencies of the group over which hegemony is to be exercised (Nilsen 2015:46-52). Thus thinking of subalternity as an embedded condition imbricated within prevailing power relations of society helps to untie the complexity surrounding subaltern struggles. Whether in resistance or accommodation, the subaltern response is determined by a dialectical relation between dominant social classes and subordinate classes.

Therefore, the nature of subalternity is determined by two broad elements, i.e., hegemonic power relations and resistance to such hegemonic exertions. Following this thread, Marcus Green formulated a similar though more elaborate schema of subalternity, drawing a connection between Gramscian reflection on subalternity, common sense, and language. Subalternity was conceived by Gramsci, not as a euphemism for the conditions of the proletariat. It referred to various social groups such as slaves, peasants, religious groups, women, and different races. It was conceived as a concept historically constituted not merely by class but rather at the intersections of caste, religion, race and culture (Green 2011:399).

The condition of subalternity was constituted through the intersection of these different modalities with varying contents as per historical contexts. It involved constructing an identity based on caste, race, and religious features, excluding particular groups from participating in dominant political organizations (Green 2011:396). Thus, the Gramscian concept of subalternity implies subaltern groups are subordinated to dominant groups will, power, and influence. However, this relation between dominant and subaltern groups not necessarily exhausts the subaltern's political power even though it exists in varying degrees depending on the level of development. Thus some groups exercise more autonomy and initiative than others. Despite indicating subordination, the Gramscian concept of subalternity is transformative. The existence of a varying level of political consciousness and organization point to the contradictory nature of subalternity owing to the coexistence of resistance and conformism. It also points to the inherent potential of subalternity to transform itself by transforming contradictory consciousness into coherent consciousness (Gramsci 1971:52-53).

Marcus Green argued that the concept of subalternity alongside Gramscian concern for language highlights the key to understanding the Gramscian notion of subalternity, i.e., the immersed condition of intellectual activity within the lives and experiences of the masses. Gramsci's concept of subalternity draws upon the concept of common sense of the masses. Common sense refers to the philosophy of the masses, common beliefs, and opinions held by the people pointing to the mentality or psychology of the masses (Gramsci 1971:323). It is contained within language, popular religion, folklore, common sense, and good sense. However, Gramsci was not mesmerized by common sense. Gramsci comprehended its contradictory nature as it involved elements of dominant philosophies and subversive possibilities (Gramsci 1971:326-328).

Gramsci contended that instead of blindly celebrating subalternity, a transformation of subalternity is necessary for the liberation of subalterns. However, such a transformation must not be imposed on the common sense of the masses from outside. It should begin by developing a new and more coherent common sense (Gramsci called good sense) (Gramsci 1971:328). Gramsci viewed the rejection of common sense as a negative approach as it tends to display a complete disregard for the counter-hegemonic potential of common sense of the masses (Gramsci 1971:423-425). Gramsci urged a systematic focus on common sense through critiquing it and transforming it into an elementary base by transforming common sense to produce a renewed critical common sense, or good sense was a necessary pre-condition for developing counter-hegemonies (Green 2009:10).

Gramscian analysis of the language in Italy provides an actual historical example of how to approach fragmentation and the contradictory nature of common sense, and the need to overcome the fragmentation. Selecting a language is not merely words based on grammatical rules but rather concrete forms of thought (Frosini 2003:99 in Green 2009:11). Thus being the expression of concrete thought of the subalterns, language embodied the fragmentary character of subaltern thought. Gramsci believed that a national language is required, but it cannot be imposed from outside.

The outside attempt to set a standard language structure over a heterogeneous dialect-dominated region would create dissonance between the imposed standard language and the dialects used in regions. Thus an external non-popular superimposition may reinforce parochialism and narrow thinking, leading to only mechanical and outward unity. Gramsci pointed to numerous regional dialects, each conceiving and expressing its provincial worldview. For a common national language to emerge, there must be multiple and stable contacts between various parts of the nation (Green 2009:15-20).

Thus, a standard (language or politics) depends on a shared life constituted through numerous everyday commerce, writing, and trade activities that could establish stable and continuous communication circuits (Green 2009:15-20). In the absence of common social life, a national language imposed outside would be mechanical and artificial as numerous dialects would exist alongside a superimposed language (Green 2009:19-20). Green argued that Gramsci used such linguistic standardization to formulate some general argument regarding subalternity, contradictory consciousness, and how to transform it. Drawing insights from linguistic standardization, Gramsci viewed fragmentation as a serious problem. Gramsci assessed the fragmented, incoherent, and spontaneous as a problem for any coherent perspective to develop a counter-hegemonic politics. However, a superimposition of a new coherent politics from outside on subaltern common sense would only lead to a mechanical transformation producing only limited unity between the new politics (despite revolutionary credentials) and subaltern worldview (Green 2009:15-28). Instead, Gramsci proposed a serious evaluation of common sense whereby common sense needs to be grappled, sifted, understood, and sorted by its users and keepers. Such a process cannot be unitary and static; rather, it would be heterogeneous and dynamic.

The contradictory elements need to be transformed into critical consciousness producing a new common sense (or good sense) (Green 2009:20-28). This transformation from contradictory to non-contradictory coherence is a prolonged unstable process not based on stagist logic whereby the process must move from one point to another. But as mentioned above, it's an unstable process be-

cause even while subalterns may attempt to transform deviant elements into coherent counter-hegemonic imaginaries, these attempts are subjected to interventions of the dominant classes. Thus the transformation of common sense to achieve good sense is a continuous struggle and always contingent owing to the activities of the dominant classes.

Marcus Green and other scholars drawing inspiration from Gramsci attempted to focus on the aspects of subalternity as a mediated condition. i.e., a condition shaped by hegemony. Green contested scholars such as Gayathri Spivak's position of subalternity as a location where all lines of social mobility are last as all mobility is outside subalternity or Spivak's revised position of subalternity as a location without an identity rejects any form of political resistance (Nilsen and Roy 2015:11).Green essentially argued that subalternity existed in various degrees at various levels. Each subaltern group is at its specific level of subalternity owing to its specific level of organization or autonomy depending upon levels of cohesiveness (Green 2002:9-15). Gramsci, as per Green, never viewed these political struggles/organizations or representations as completely nullifying hegemony. These struggles existed, shared, were influenced, or in some cases, were accommodative of dominant power relations. Thus embeddedness of subalternity, i.e., its mediation via hegemonic practices, is one crucial aspect (Nilsen and Roy 2015:15).

Subalternity embraces political action with a transformative objective. However, this does not guarantee success or transformation of conditions of subalternity since it is mediated. Subalternity is mediated. The institutional or everyday resistance conditions and promotes subalternity. It allows autonomy at various levels, allowing/persevering as a compromised equilibrium- subjected to assertions and contestations that need to be renewed and recreated as new assertions (Williams 1977:110-112). Thus, subalternity points to a condition of co-existence of Hegemony and Resistance.

In such a state, hegemony and resistance exist not as binary but as an entanglement. Resistance and power are relational in terms of an ongoing process of negotiation involving casting and recasting

of rhetoric of domination and subordination. Hence, subalternity represents a contradictory condition where an autonomous resistance consciousness is revolting against the ruling authority alongside a borrowed consciousness continuing to exert its influence. A continuous, embedded, ongoing, mutable system of domination and subordination shapes both the rulers and the ruled. Subalternity is a conceptual category representing this contradictory history of subaltern struggles (Haynes and Prakash 1991:299-302).

2.4. Subalternity and Religion: a shift from negation to contradictory consciousness

The early sections of this chapter show how Ranajit Guha criticized all prevalent historical scholarship-colonialist, nationalist, and Marxist-for being elitist by attempting to reduce subalternity embedded within diverse sets of binary relations of dominance and subordination in South Asia into either subordinate consciousness injected by elite leadership or as pre-political mentality or false consciousness and subsequently overlooking subalternity as an autonomous insurgent consciousness which was characterized by the negation of elite politics (Pouchepadass 2002:85-86). SS scholarship emphasized the directive role of subalterns exhibited across various movements independent of elite influence, an angle overlooked by previous scholars. Despite referring to subalternity as the composite culture of resistance to and acceptance of domination and hierarchy, the core meaning of subalternity was fixed as an autonomous state of being (Chakrabarty 1985: 376).

However, at later stages, works by Partha Chatterjee, Tanika Sarkar and Gautam Bhadra directly touched on the contradictory nature of subalternity.[7] Partha argued that subalternity includes auton-

7 There weren't many among the ranks of Subaltern studies or even outside its boundaries particularly its interlocutors who agreed with the Gramscian perspective. However, mounting evidence of contradictory tendencies particularly evidence of collaboration and appropriation of dominant interests by subaltern social groups appear to have had their impact on some scholars such as Partha Chatterjee, Tanika Sarkar, and Gautam Bhadra. The perspective was succinctly put up by Tanika Sarkar when she discussed the Jitu Santal movement. Sarkar argues that the Jitu Santal movement internalized dominant class and caste ideology; not only was its hierarchical order fully accepted, but through such internalization the Santals also accepted an alienation from their own identity. Thus 'the other' defining the subaltern's self-consciousness need not always be the elite groups exerting dominance as stressed by Guha, it may also be groups and classes that lie lower in the hierarchy and maintaining distance from them might be the most important move to project self-image and self-respect. This is an interesting aspect as the Santal movement attempted to internalize contradictory socio-political strands. Thus there was animosity among Santals towards Christians and Muslims indicative of influence of Hindu communal organizations, while the contemptuous reference to Chamars and Domes pointed to influence of Brahminical caste values (Sarkar 1985:149-153). These tendencies were active sometimes stronger than the resistance offered by Santals to colonial and native elites. Summing this up Tanika Sarkar argued that the problem yet to be considered carefully in studies of subaltern culture and consciousness was the existence of contradictory tendencies of acculturation and resistance to the same structures of authority. Without an understanding of this we shall not be able to explain the attitudes of acceptance and submission which remain as strong if not much stronger than subaltern resistance (Sarkar 1985:153).

omous elements which express a common understanding of a subaltern group engaged in the practical activity of transforming the world through their labour, often at the behest and certainly under the domination of ruling groups, and the other the element which is borrowed from the dominant classes and which expresses the fact of the ideological submission of the subaltern group (Chatterjee 1989:170-171). Thus, subalternity is a contradictory consciousness composed of autonomous and borrowed elements, shifting its meaning away from a binary conception characterized by antagonism towards an interactional nature of subalternity, where it's constituted via a volatile interaction between the dominant and the subordinate (Chatterjee 1989:206). This dimension of subalternity is closer to Gramsci's conceptualization of subalternity though Gramsci uses the term common sense to refer to subalternity. Partha Chatterjee contended that common sense (Gramscian equivalent for subalternity) is a contradictory unity composed of two opposing elements- implicit and explicit elements of consciousness.

While the former represents an embryonic perception of the subaltern group, which occasionally erupts in flashes when the subaltern group acts autonomously in organic totality, whereas the explicit part refers to the borrowed consciousness pointing to a condition where subaltern groups are being submissive and subordinate to another group (Chatterjee 1989:170). The relation between these two parts is not fixed but volatile, which changes according to the shifting relations between the dominant and the subordinate groups (Chatterjee 1989:171). This contradictory tendency of being autonomous and subordinate simultaneously is the key to the subaltern life-world as it influences all their decisions and movements. This contradictory tendency is often reflected in forms of submission and acceptance of dominant order while simultaneously exploring and realizing opportunities for subversions.

Thus ambivalent actions involving opposition to the prevailing order even while negotiating and legitimizing its broad structures are recurrent features within subaltern movements. The confrontation is followed by a period of negotiation and accommodation while simultaneously formulating strategies to overthrow the dominant order. Instead of treating such contradictory positions as signs of in-

consistency or fear, there is a need to understand that the subaltern groups are constantly subjected to the intervention of the dominant, ruling group. Hence, all their activities are always fragmented and episodic. Owing to the continuous interruption by ruling groups, the subaltern groups need a permanent victory to break their subordination which is not immediate. Subaltern success is always protracted and involves various stages- from being affiliated (both passively or actively) to dominant political formations aiming to influence the dominant agenda to create their political formation demanding limited or partial autonomy within the old framework eventually, political formations asserting integral autonomy. Each step is valuable as they indicate initiative from subalterns (Gramsci 1971:52-55).

Religion is the most crucial domain where this is reflected, as it's the principal element of common sense (Gramscian term for subalternity). The relationship between common sense and religion is more intimate than common sense and the philosophy of intellectuals (Gramsci 1971:420). Chatterjee argued that shifts within the domain of faith in many ways indicate the larger struggle between the dominant and the subordinate. Autonomous elements, evidence for subaltern initiative erupts precisely at the moments of heightened conflict between classes. At such moments of crisis, society tends to rupture into two faiths, two religions, and two world views opposed to each other (Chatterjee 1989:171).

Extending the insight of contradictory consciousness further into the domain of religion, Chatterjee argues that the history of religion is composed of two opposing tendencies- an attempt to articulate a universal religious code for the society as a whole and the subaltern opposition to any such imposition, producing a tenuous unity (Chatterjee 1989:173-174). Th religion, in myriad ways, reflects a contradictory unity where dominant and subversive faiths co-exist based on the only possible principle of unity being the contradictory one of simultaneous acceptance and rejection of domination (Chatterjee 1989:189). Drawing from the above logic, Chatterjee argues that there exist dominant unifying religious codes such as Hinduism assuring status and privilege, aiming to accommodate and stabilize subaltern religiosities within a hierarchically structured whole projecting a false unity

to the outside world alongside deviant religious positions articulated by subalterns with varying degrees of affiliation underlining difference and self-identity opposed to these unifying tendencies (Chatterjee 1989:186-192). The co-existence of these two opposing tendencies leads to a tenuous state of unity, wherein first, the dominant faiths attempt to impose doctrinal and practical means unsuccessfully, leaving marks of unresolved and continuing conflict which this process of unification bears (Chatterjee 1989:188).

This argument is evident in the case of subaltern faiths such as Balahadis, studied by Partha Chatterjee. Drawing upon his study on the Balahadi sect, Chatterjee argued that deviant sects often appropriated and inverted dominant religion and customs without replacing them with new practices. Chatterjee acknowledges and repeats his previous position that a deviant sect such as Balahadi, in its very act of negation, challenged the customs and rituals of the dominant faith. For example, the Balahadis invert the prevalent social order by displacing Brahmin to a pure and degenerate lineage and instituting Hadi as the purest of the pure (Chatterjee 1989:203). The inversion replicates the model of caste only difference being a new hierarchy is proposed. The dominant social imagination of caste sets the terms of inversion and subsequent negation.

Partha Chatterjee elaborating upon the trait of strong negation on which Balahadis and other similar deviant sects are solely based, argued that in acts of negation expressed as appropriation and inversion or desecration, the subaltern deviant faith attempts to define oneself by appropriating and inverting symbols of the dominant order, rather than proposing a new social order based on a new universal principle (Chatterjee 1989:202-203). This relation between subaltern and dominant for Partha Chatterjee is evidence that subalternity expressed in idioms of deviant faiths or initiatives is not solely shaped by any autonomous negation independent of elite intervention but is constituted through continuous interaction between the dominant and the subordinate (Chatterjee 1989:206-207). Thus religion among subalterns in many ways reproduces the contradictory feature of subalternity, offering evidence of an organized attempt to overcome assimilative tendencies of dominant

faiths via articulating opposing faiths/sects while simultaneously appropriating elements of the dominant religion.

Tanika Sarkar elaborates on the contradictory aspect of subalternity and its expression in the form of religion in her article titled 'Jitu Santal's Movement in Malda, 1924-1932: A Study in Tribal Protest'. Jitu Santal's movement, which occurred between 1924 and 1932, responded to the illegal rent enhancement and arbitrary use of authority against the Santals of the Malda region in West Bengal (Sarkar 1985:147-149). Sarkar contends that Jitu Santal's movement presented a contradictory notion of resistance.

The movement began objecting to the legitimacy of the colonial regime as it supported landlords and money lenders, predominantly Hindus, via providing coercive and legal assistance to exploit the Santals, leading to a revolt and projection of an alternative tribal authority (Sarkar 1985:141-147). But the contradictory aspect was that the movement also involved a rejection of the Santal identity to raise its status through integration with the same Hindu society, which had been their oppressor for an extended period (Sarkar 1985:149).

Colonial state, Hindu Landlord (Diku), and Muslim peasant rivals threatened Santal's ownership over land; thereby, Santals very identity as land is not merely an economic element but a cultural link that connects a Santal to one's ancestors (Sarkar 1985:146). The above group was resented as outsiders as they grabbed Santal land through dubious means (Sarkar 1985:145). However, despite being a threatening other, the outsider is not a distinct entity standing outside but a figure that influences Santal folklore. While in most folklore, Santals are heroes who triumph over outsiders, such as Diku using bravery and wit. Santals also acknowledge Diku as a figure who deceives the Santal and forces him to follow the former's lead leaving a deep imprint of superiority (Sarkar 1985:150).

Thus, the Santal self-image is a complex amalgam of different attributes such as weakness, helplessness, and stupidity on one side alongside cunningness to overpower the Diku (Sarkar 1985:150). Jitu's movement posited a complex of contradictory sentiments composed of resentment towards

Diku alongside awareness of Diku's power, fear of defeatism, and a profoundly negative self-image (Sarkar 1985:149-150). While the former inspires revolt, the latter lead to Sanskritisation and conversion to Christianity, leading to an abdication of Santal Tribal identity.

The contradiction appears in two ways. Jitu Santal's movement, on one end, encouraged a revision of Tribal customs in favor of sanskritising tendencies integrating itself into caste-based Hindu structure while simultaneously revolting against Hindu landlords and money lenders. Another contradiction noticed by Sarkar is a selective acculturation process whereby some Santali practices, mainly eating non-vegetarian food, were abandoned. Several practices relating to childbirth, marriage, and various festivals were retained (Sarkar 1985:152).

The desire to integrate into Hinduism encouraged Santals to leave dietary practices considered unclean, despite the former's very long period of oppression against Santals. This contradictory attitude of embracing Hindu practices even while resisting via retaining key cultural symbols and attacking Hindu landlords is vital as many subaltern movements are marred with similar contradictory tendencies, particularly concerning their religious choices. Thus, the acculturation was never absolute but selective and uncertain, indicating non-compliance (Sarkar 1985:150-154).

Thus Jitu Santal's movement reveals the contradictory nature of the Tribal mentality, particularly concerning the question of religion. While Hindu religion and customs were accepted, on another level, there existed a continuous struggle against Hindu overlords and local oppressors. Additionally, even while abandoning dietary practices dubbed unclean, the Santals continue to follow Santali customs related to social occasions such as marriage. Thus the reverence and influence of Hinduism persisted alongside the disregard and discontent, which was expressed primarily through following tribal traditions and attacking Hindu landlords.

Gautam Bhadra produces a similar account in the work 'Conceptualizing Subalternity in Kantanama or Rajadharma,' which attempts to map out the contradictory nature of subaltern consciousness even though the theme is not overtly religious by exploring the insights from a 19th-century literary

work, Kantanama or Rajadharma. Authored by Dewan Manulla Mandal, the text was composed to record the deeds of his zamindar to please him (Bhadra 1989:54-58). However, the text was not simply a work of appeasement. On the contrary, the text presents a moral order that the superior (here zamindar) is obliged to follow, which is the base for the domination and is followed by the subalterns (Bhadra 1989:59).

Rajadharma is a metaphor to indicate a moral order and a living space that provides a space for self-recognition for the peasants and other subaltern classes. The peasant owes his existence to a relation to the king /lord based on a universal law (Bhadra 1989:83). Even the submission of authority is based on the presence of a moral order recognized by both the zamindar and the peasant (Bhadra 1989:84). This moral order may have many characteristic marks that every dominant class zamindar/lord/king must follow to make him an eligible or proper authority of veneration (Bhadra 1989:72-78). The mode of expression for veneration to the authority may include various acts, from annual offerings to ritualistic positions accorded to the zamindar at events such as festivals or custodianship of religious center (Bhadra 1989:66-71). The tone of veneration may internalize and express itself in religious overtures.

Contrary to submission, the violation of the moral right to rule may lead to insurrection, which represents the moment of challenge to Kingship that may invoke an alternate theory of Kingship (Bhadra 1989:91). Submission of top authority and resistance to the same are both simultaneously constituents of the subaltern consciousness and is sanctioned by the same moral order. The simultaneous presence of elements of submission and resistance reflects the contradictory nature of subaltern consciousness.

Bhadra argues that the text of Kantanama provides ground for the subaltern to embrace and contest the dominant classes. While the subalterns subscribe to and interpret the text to justify their control and subordination to them, the text also imposes certain inviolable boundaries on the dominant

classes, which, when violated, undermines their authority, leading to legitimate challenges as insurrection (Bhadra 1989:90-91).

Kantanama, for Bhadra, provides a context within which the belief structure can rationalize both defiance and subordination (Bhadra 1989:90). Bhadra's proposition points out how insurgency (following Guha's formulation) represents an extraordinary moment of inversion where the prevalent sarkar-sahukar-zamindar power triad is overturned. However, there are vast moments of obedience and collaboration beyond insurgency which inform the peasant life world. As argued by Bhadra, collaboration and resistance are two elements in the mentality of subalternity, which coalesce and merge to make up complex and contradictory consciousness (Bhadra 1989:91).

Thus instead of viewing resistance and power or resistance and collaboration as binaries, Bhadra's Kantanama urges to recast their relation as being constituted simultaneously by the influence of dominant and subaltern interests. This contradictory feature of peasant attitude points to a more profound condition of subalternity, which moves beyond a single condition of negation to embrace more aspects such as negotiation, wherein the subaltern classes incorporate and adjust with dominant elements so long as the latter respect certain boundaries and accommodate some interests.

The history of religion, in many ways, mirrors this tussle, particularly the struggle between dominant groups imposing their faith to control subalterns and the latter attempt to overcome the former's influence via simultaneous acceptance and rejection of dominant religion repeatedly proving the contradictory nature of subalternity. Therefore, redefining subalternity as an outcome of the interaction between the dominant and the subordinate opens a new standpoint to comprehend the contradictory nature of subalternity.

Subalternity is understood as a state of being which is relational in a sense it is constituted at the interstices of a set of socio-historical power relations, whose specific nature depends on the particular equilibrium between the interest of the dominant group and the subaltern (Nilsen and Roy 2015:12).

[8] This is a state of compromise equilibrium whereby the dominant group (caste or class) attempts to maintain its dominance via incorporating some demands of the subalterns whereas violently suppressing other demands. In contrast, subalterns continually engage in moderate or militant forms undermining the former's assertions (Nilsen and Roy 2015:19).

However, some particulars of subalternity are notable. Subalternity is relational, intersectional, and dynamic. It's relational because it's constituted through a changing interaction process between the dominant and the subordinate. By intersectional, it means subalternity is constituted along several axes of power, whose specific empirical form must be deciphered in concrete empirical settings, and by being dynamic, it means subalternity does not preclude agency, but agency arises and develops within and in relation to dominant discourse and political form (Nilsen and Roy 2015:12).

Thus, subalternity is neither a state of submission into dominant discourse as argued by Gayathri Spivak nor entirely voluntarist as presented by Ranajit Guha (Nilsen and Roy 2015:12). Instead, subalternity is broadened enough to be constituted as a contradictory condition derived from an intersection of power and contestation, whose specific form was determined by concrete historical contexts. The religion, in many ways, mirrors this contradictory condition of subalternity explicitly concretized in the form of a tussle between different forms of dominant faiths attempting to dominate and deviant sects trying to contest.

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8 This perspective of treating subalternity as a contradictory consciousness rather than an alienated oppositional consciousness is appropriate to understand the relation between subalternity and religion in the context of organizations such as KPMS. Particularly on various issues related to religion such as continuing fidelity towards Hinduism despite long history of discrimination and conversion as a path to social mobility. KPMS represents a contradictory position, combining both deviant and compromising tendencies, a position similar to many other subaltern organization or deviant sects, owing to their historical context.

CHAPTER 3

Contextualizing Subalternity and Religion in Kerala: a case of Ayyankali and the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham

"There is commonsensical knowledge, and then there is historical knowledge. Received knowledge includes observations and conclusions constructed in a particular period in history and passed across generations. They are based on hearsays, stories, legends, myths, gossip, and propaganda. Historical knowledge, on the contrary, is based on verifiable evidence, literary, archaeological, etc. Referential correspondence for any statement made by a historian enhances historical knowledge's status as more authoritative than a myth or a story. However, Pulayas and all other similar subordinated castes exist at the edge of history or outside history as the elites write the history.

Pulayas who are present within history reflect an instrumental attitude of elites. The original history of Pulayas needs to be written. It will be difficult as there is no evidence. Second, the individuals writing history are not sincere, even those within the community. However, even if such odds exist, there existed a past where Pulayas were inheritors of this land and occupied a better status. Since there is no evidence, we must use religiously inspired myths, stories, and legends to write such a history".[9]

"Religion for Dalits includes worshipping ancestors or deities such as Madan, Marutha, and Arukola. They have their priests, often the eldest male member of the caste. Gods are worshipped at important events such as marriage, birth, or death. There are no elaborate rituals or complex scriptures involved. Deities are more accessible as if one can sit, drink and make fun of them without getting annoyed. Gods are everywhere, but they are not to be feared or subordinated. The realm of God is continuously subjected to negotiation."[10] These responses represent a cross-section of the numerous responses offered by subaltern groups when enquired regarding the role of religion in the

9 Interview with Suresh on 27-12-2017.

10 Interview with Ajayan on 27-12-2017.

life of Pulayas. The respondents offered some interesting insights into the actual working relationship between subalternity and religion- in some cases enforcing subalternity or in some acting as a mirror of reflection.

There have been instances where the assumptions and validity of categories such as subaltern or subalternity have been questioned.[11] The critical problem of research was to explore subalternity, ascertain whether it is a state of subordinate consciousness, a rebellious consciousness, or a combination of both and whether it is possible to discern some general relation between subalternity and religion?.

There are two possible standpoints from which the linkage between subalternity and religion is articulated. First, religion is a source of subalternity, where subalternity is understood as a state of subordination, and religion is a medium to legitimize/impose it. For example, in Kerala, caste practices are sanctioned by Brahminical Hinduism and protected by the princely State of Travancore. The State assumed the role of guardian of a social order, which perpetuated discriminatory social evils such as untouchability because the same social order provided legitimacy to the princely State of Travancore. In the second case, subalternity is an insurgent consciousness rebelling against the dominant Brahminical Hinduism. Religion was its main component, which reproduces this rejection of dominant power relation by offering tools of negation through appropriation, conversion, or inversion of the existing dominant religious idioms for subalterns to succeed.

Despite the subversive potential of the second standpoint, both versions work with an incomplete understanding of subalternity impacting the nature of religion. In the first case, subalternity is equivalent to subordination and is enforced through religious sanctions. Here religion is instrumental in enforcing subordination. In the second case, subalternity is a liberated consciousness achieved

11 Some respondents were skeptical about using the category of subaltern or subalternity. The reservation was based on the ground that the category subaltern (in Malayalam keezhyalan) was insufficient to capture the complex realities of Pulaya's everyday life. In general, the category such as subalternity overlooked the complex web of socio-economic conditions that constitute their existence. The current categories do not entirely satisfy the historical concerns of subaltern classes and tend to limit their struggle within the boundaries of mainstream politics. Some responses are based on the growing consciousness that 'subaltern' as a category reinforces a sense of humiliation on the Pulayas, which they have been rejecting. Instead of being denoted under a category equitable to subordination/broken, there is an increasing tendency to project themselves as the original inheritors of the land. Pride and inheritance are increasingly replacing subordination/humiliation as the base for a new kind of politics.

through an inversion of dominant religious symbols via appropriation, desecration, or conversion. Here, religion is an access point to rebellious consciousness challenging the dominant order. However, in both cases, subalternity is limited to either subordination or rebellion, overlooking its contradictory nature, which is reflected in the religious choices made by groups such as Pulayas.

In analyzing the relation between subalternity and religion, one can witness an overlap between religion and subalternity whereby the same religion has simultaneously been an object of emulation and inversion. For example, even while caste atrocities encouraged conversion to Christianity, social-religious reforms within Brahminical Hinduism and the intervention of the princely State of Travancore at a later phase prevented large-scale conversion to Christianity. The internal reformatory tendencies aiming to integrate lower castes into a reformed Hinduism via Sanskritisation and Temple entry showed the continuing tendency of traditional Brahminical order to evolve and maintain its influence over the subaltern life world. Despite being a source of oppression, Temple-based Brahminical Hinduisms reformatory tendencies were subscribed by lower castes as these changes offered social mobility and guaranteed patronage of the princely State of Travancore.

Similarly, the liberation story via conversion is not uncomplicated but rather a contradictory transition. Conversion transformed Pulayas into Christian Pulayas without erasing caste markers despite guaranteeing liberation. Opposition from non-slave castes (Syrian Christians, Shannar Christians) forced Christian missions to create separate worship spaces for Pulayas and Parayas. Conversion never absolved Pulayas or other lower caste converts of caste markers. Thus there has been a long struggle between dominant and subordinate groups to influence each other, which has extended itself to the domain of religion, resulting in a tense equilibrium between the dominant faiths (Brahminical Hinduism and Christianity) and lower castes.

In the above-discussed examples involving Pulayas, there exist contradictory outcomes- negating Brahminical Hinduism, even while subscribing to the same on accounts of religious reform and benefits of Sanskritisation. Similarly, conversion offered a new social space but created a separation

manifested in the form of specific Christian denominations proving the continuation of caste-based discrimination. Thus, to understand the relation between religion and subalternity, in the case of Pulayas, one must focus on the contradictory religious choices among Pulayas.

The chapter has been divided into two phases for the convenience of presentation. The first phase includes the Pre-Ayyankali period covering periods between the 7th -and 11th century A.D., emphasizing the origin of the caste system in then Chera dominions (contemporary Kerala), focusing on the historical processes through which *the jati* system was instituted in Kerala, and Namboothiri Brahmins rose to prominence. The second phase focuses on Ayyankali and his various struggles, the formation of Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham, and his engagement with the question of religion. This section will attempt to contextualize the above contradictory condition of religion, locating both dominant and resistant tendencies among Pulayas focusing mainly on the period of Ayyankali and Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (hereafter SJPS). This period is significant as many problems faced by current KPMS owe their origin to the course set within the pre-1956 princely State of Travancore. The confrontation, competition, negotiation, and accommodation between Ayyankali and the princely State of Travancore, set the tone for the future possibilities of Dalit politics in Kerala.

3.1. Historical Preliminaries: Feudalism and the emergence of the caste system in Kerala

This section covers a period between the 7th and 11th century A D. Despite differences among scholars, there is agreement that these five centuries set the pathways for the future centuries up to the second half of the 19th century. This period was the background period that prepared the ground for establishing a feudal order-socially, politically, and economically. This period witnessed the decline of the Chera-Chola-Pandya Kingdoms resulting in political fragmentation and the emergence of numerous *Nadus (*principalities) (Gopalakrishnan 1974:234-241).It created a feudal polity characterized by the absence of any central power, unlike the earlier periods (which were dominated by the Chola or Pandya dynasty) and the subsequent division of Kerala into several small Nadus, each ruled by a *Naduvalikal* (Narayanan 1999:56).

Socio-culturally, it was a period that witnessed the ascendance of Namboothiri Brahminical hegemony. The ascendance of Namboothiri Brahminism also prepared ground towards the establishment of a rigid caste social order, sanctioned through Sanskritic scriptures, with the Namboothiri as the pure caste occupying the top and the native aboriginal groups such as Pulayas, Parayas being incorporated into this order as 'impure' untouchables (Gurukkal 2010:310-316). The fragmentation of the centralized Chera-Chola political system into competing small principalities and the simultaneous rise of a structured hierarchical caste structure dominated by Namboothiri Brahmins consolidating temporal and spiritual powers through land grants and controlling knowledge via temple structures presented two contrasting processes (Veluthat 1999:66).

While one political process indicated fragmentation, the other led to consolidation. Though the contrary, these two conditions converged to constitute a 'system of theocratic feudalism,' which led to the subaltern position of Pulayas and other aboriginal communities within Kerala (Gopalakrishnan 1974:274). A detailed analysis of the emergence of the feudal polity and social transformations under the Brahminical hegemony would help understand the root cause of the subaltern position of communities such as Pulayas, Parayas, etc., in the later 19th and 20th centuries.

3.1.1. The decline of centralized kingdoms and rise of political principalities: a case of Feudal Polity

Prior to the 7th century A.D., present Kerala (referred then as *Cheralam* owing to its proximity to the sea and *Charmae* by Megasthenes) was divided and controlled by Pandya, Pallavas, Chola, and Chera kingdoms at different periods (Gopalakrishnan 1974:1,221). The most important reason which triggered the rise of the caste system and subsequent subordination of Pulayas was the weakening of the Chera dynasty in the 8th century A.D. and the political rise of *Nadu* (Gopalakrishnan 1974:234-241). The political volatility owing to the absence of any centralized form of authority weakened the scope to develop any elaborate political, institutional formations nearing a state or a stable economy. The State in the period was characterized by a loose network of a federation of *Naduvalikal* (local chieftains) who owed their allegiance to the Chera King titled *Perumal* (Naray-

anan 2013:154-156). This open political system of feudal chieftains, with a nominal authority of *Perumal*, symbolized a disintegrated polity, a logical outcome of erosion of political authority owing to misrule by unfit, weak rulers and incessant warfare (Narayanan 1999:41-43). This gave scope to local chieftains to carve out spheres of influence for themselves. Thus the *Naduvalikal* competed to expand their frontiers.

This expansionism by local Naduvalikal had essential motivations. One was to consolidate and accrue benefits of the expansion of wetland cultivation. There was an expansion of wetland agriculture production, dissolving the traditional kinship-based production system and managed through the ideological tutelage of Namboothiri Brahmins. They introduced plough-based production, a more advanced agrarian system, across the land they acquired as grants offered to the Temple. They incorporated the agrarian classes such as Pulayas and Parayas into the hierarchical social order to achieve cohesiveness. Each was constituted as a caste with a specific status based on its duty (Gurukkal 2010:290-297). This social order was a system composed of cultivating and non-cultivating groups to consolidate society towards a consistent social formation with a stable agrarian base.

This new social formation based on caste invariably offered a source of revenue and established political unity for the *Naduvalikal* within a fragmented polity (Veluthat 1999:73-76). Additionally, *Naduvalikal* cemented their alliance with the Namboothiri's by attempting to appoint themselves as patrons of the local Temple; through such liaisons, they acquired *Kshatriya* status, enhancing and legitimizing their status as chieftains (Veluthat 1999:66). Besides, they also drew scores of attendants, peasants, and other working classes into the temple-based production system. Thus this production system evolved into a complex social formation composed of *Namboothiri Brahmins* and ruling *Naduvalikal* (Chieftains). Power was constituted through an alliance between the Brahmins and local chieftains (Veluthat 1999:66). This system parallels the fragmenting process inaugurated by the weakening of the Chera dynasty, consolidating into a new political-social order with temples as their epicenter had emerged.

This new order, characterized by sociologist A Ayyappan as a *theocratic feudal order*, would characteristically establish a hierarchical social order with several aboriginal, agrarian classes such as Pulayas categorized as untouchables while anointing *Namboothiri's* like the upper elite (Gopalakrishnan 1974:274). However, this consolidation of power by Namboothiri's was a long process involving migration, alliance with local chieftains, acquisition of land settlements, and establishment of a political economy based on temples, etc. (Veluthat 2002:102-107). These developments are to be analyzed separately to understand the subordination of Pulayas and their incorporation into the Hindu fold.

3.1.2. The ascendance of *Namboothiri Brahmins*: a case of Theocratic Feudalism

The most significant factor which determined the nature of social, political, and cultural life of the period between the 7th to 11th centuries was the migration of *Namboothiri* Brahmins, the establishment of Brahmin villages, cementing an alliance with the ruling classes of Naduvalikal, the creation of a temple economy and more importantly the establishment of a hierarchical *jati* (caste) order based along with principles of pollution and purity (Gurukkal and Varier 1991:121-131).

The rise of Namboothiri's within Kerala history, expansion of their sphere of influence through acquiring lands as *Brahmaswam* and *Devaswam* increased their hold over land, whereas bestowing cultural status to the ruling classes ensured the political status cemented their ties with Naduvalikal. All these developments created the background for establishing a new set of power relations that would influence the socio-political life of the post-12th century (Veluthat 1978:71-74).

3.1.3. The origin of the Namboothiri Brahmin

Various myths and legends have marred the origin of Namboothiri Brahmins. The most famous legend is the story of Parasurama and his initiative to settle Brahmins in Kerala. Mythically, Kerala was land reclaimed by Parasurama, the seventh incarnation of Vishnu from Varuna, the God of the sea.[12] He donated the land to the Brahmins, whom he had invited to settle on this land. This mythi-

12 The legend is that Parasurama needed land to donate to Brahmins as part of his penance. Hence he threw an axe into the southern ocean and reclaimed the land. He later invited and donated the land to the Brahmins. For their well-being, Parasurama instituted a system of offering services whereby aboriginal was incorporated as Sudras, expected to offer all kinds of services to the Brahmins (Saradamoni 1980:49-51).

cal origin, donated by a Brahmin-Kshatriya personality, has been widely circulated across the Namboothiri community as a legitimizing principle to sanction their claim to a higher status and land. The myth also accords an elaborate mechanism for a social arrangement whereby every group of people is assigned a specific role in society. They are to perform that role as a teacher, warrior, or servant if they wish to acquire a meaningful life.

This origin myth and the principle of *Jati* coincide with the period of migration of Brahmins from northern Deccan regions to the Cheralam, which occurred in the 4th and 5th century A D. The period of migration points to a period of *transition*. This transition was characterized by a shift from a plunder-based predatory model of appropriation to a more systematic wetland plough agriculture. Plunder raids to capture crops or cattle, or similar valuables, were the most prevalent model of accruing resources for sustaining dominance (Gurukkal 1999: 34-36). This system produced its internal contradictions. The logic of such a system was based on the redistribution of plundered booty among the vassals or subjects. However, it depended on the agrarian success of others, i.e., a failed crop could lead to a real crisis. Low labour productivity and low reproduction formation created contradictions that replaced this predatory economic, social formation with an advanced plough agrarian system (Gurukkal 2010:262-263). This alongside witnessed a breaking up of kinship-based production with a jati-based specialization. There was a permanent attachment of individual groups with special skills such as metalworking or pottery to the Brahmin household.

These individual groups were hierarchically arranged in a socio-economic model, which was reproduced. A hierarchy was inherent to this production system in which the relations between two antagonistic classes were fundamental. More than the functional division of laborers, it was the dominant position of the Brahmins which sanctioned the existence of the jati system. The ritual purity, resource potential, political influence, knowledge regarding weather cycles, astrological interpretations, calendrical measurements, etc., equipped Brahmins with the capacity to consolidate the ideological conditions for creating structures to legitimize the jati system, particularly the principle of hierarchy (Gurukkal 2010:265).

The use of hierarchy as an organizing ideological principle was the critical contribution of Brahminism. The permanent division of individuals into tight compartments broke the traditional clan kinship-based socio-economic arrangement with a hierarchically arranged hereditary-based jati system. It created a production system whereby the traditional kinship-based production where the entire system was based on reciprocity and redistribution, which involved the superimposition of a clan member or even an outsider as the head man to collect the total produce. The new arrangement of plough-based production with Brahmins and Temples as their nerve center established a permanent system of production and collection, relating a non-producing Brahmin caste as the owners of means of production appropriating clan members labour through extra-economic coercion (Gurukkal 2010: 262).

This increasingly hierarchical arrangement to restructure the existing production mode for more labor-intensive, wetland production placed the various castes, such as Pulayas being forcefully placed in a subordinate position, framed as impure and untouchables, expected to perform agricultural labour activities as a hereditary occupation (Gurukkal 2010:247). This transition, however, was not smooth. It was a long process involving massive human labor endeavors supported by coercive, ideological, and institutional transformation whereby separate clans were transformed into specialized function-based groups specializing in specific activities such as agricultural laboring or metalworking, etc. (Gurukkal 2010:244-246).

This division of labor was supplemented with better irrigation and water management technologies, the know-how of seasons and practices of paddy cultivation, etc. These developments perfected the jati system as a socio-economic-ideological system suitable for the new material conditions (Gurukkal 2010: 247). This social-economic arrangement of Jati was centered on land, particularly under the temples. Most of the Brahmin village settlements had evolved around a temple nucleus. Hence, it is necessary to understand the role of the Temple to completely comprehend the constitution of the jati system and the subaltern conditions of Pulayas.

3.1.4. Temple as sites of social stratification and cohesion

Temples in South India, Kerala, emerged as centers of a new structural principle that would re-organize the social relations synchronizing it with the increasing economic specialization and hierarchical jati system emerging with the expansion of a wetland rice production (Veluthat 2002:102-103). Temple emerged as a landed magnate, re-distributing the land endowed to it among the various cultivating groups. Temple acted as a nucleus for an integrated organization of economic activities, which included a system of distribution and redistribution of land rights. It received much revenue as rakshabhoga, the dues received for the protection it gave to local people, and fines imposed on defaulters (Veluthat 2002:104).

The resources available to the Temple were enough to organize local society into a stable system of production through a set of institutions and practices. Temple resources such as land, gold, and cattle transformed it into a site for social interaction. Temple loaned out cattle stocks and land offered to various artisans, artisans, and other caste groups in return for their services. Temples extended loans and used interest from such activities to procure more land. The Temple's role as a landholder and distributor of land occupation rights led to land being transferred from ruling aristocratic families to Brahmins and the subordination of many intermediaries, artisans, and tillers to the temple system (Gurukkal 2010:296). This functional interdependence established order with the *uralar* at the top and *kudiyanmar* at the bottom.

The temple system established an economic and social order based on its role as a landholder and its re-distributor. Its institutional mechanisms controlled and supervised the primary resources such as land, irrigation, cattle stocks, etc., required to expand agricultural activities. The Temple, through land control, drew the services of numerous intermediaries, artisans, leaseholders, and tillers into an integrated whole. Temples became sites to draw social and economic power. The Brahmins who controlled the temple administration enjoyed a very high status and controlled the material resources at the Temple's disposal. The Temple was also associated with all other institutions. The two crucial related institutions worth mentioning were monarchy and caste institutions.

The institution of monarchy sought the intervention of temples to legitimize their claim to political power. As the seat of divine power, Temples were seen as the most critical mediating agency to neutralize all competing claims and coalesce them to strengthen the political authority. It acted as a divine mediator with a reign over all subjects, which had been invested with discriminatory powers to resolve social tensions. Besides this, the Temple offered an alternative legitimization mechanism to replace the tribal clannish mechanism. The equation of King to God or divinization of kingship was the most popular mode of legitimization. For example, the deity was compared to the monarch. The daily rituals in the Temple and palace were homologically linked, and it was argued that they were the same. The divinization of the King to the deity sanctified the monarchy. At the same time, it also set controls on the monarch to ensure the welfare of the deity and the subjects associated with the Temple (Veluthat 2009:64-72).

Thus, monarchs made donations and sought counsel, blessings, and support from the Temple; they competed to capture the custodianship of temples as it gave access and opportunity to associate themselves with the Brahmins, whose hegemony was crucial in legitimizing the monarch's position (Veluthat 1999:76). Thus, through its intervention, the Temple not only resolved political contestations but also perpetuated its temporal and spiritual hegemony. However, compared to the institution of monarchy, the Temple and Brahmins institutionalized their leadership through the institution of caste. It incorporated, instituted, and crystallized the institution of caste through its intervention.

The Temple created a bondage system through a reciprocal relationship whereby the various social groups exchanged services in return for land. Various artisans engaged in crafts or arts were made to settle on the land. They were awarded occupancy rights in return for their services to the Temple. These hereditary groups became castes, who engaged in hereditary specialization with the name of their .professions soon translating into caste names (Gurukkal 2010:312-316).

The social transaction between the Temple and numerous hereditary functionaries led to the proliferation of the caste system. As more specialized social groups entered the temple system procuring

land in return for their services, each became a separate caste. These castes were not only integrated into a hierarchical structure based on contractual obligation but also subjected to the subaltern positions, often pushed to bonded labour. Each caste was accommodated as per its birth and occupation into separate Jati. The laboring castes, such as Pulayas, occupied the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy and imposed all kinds of socio-economic handicaps, restricting their mobility (Ganesh 1990:153-170).

Thus, a temple acted as a socio-economic complex that ensured the interaction between different castes, all interdependent through a service and reward system. Temples attempted to neutralize the exploitative nature of hierarchical caste relations and subsequent social conflicts through a discourse of contentment, through theories of karma and duty, persuading every caste to perform its role so that the caste cohesion could be maintained. The above discussion offers a historical account of the transformations that conditioned the rise of Namboothiri Brahmins to prominence, establishing the Temple as a site to supervise and organize social life through the institutionalization of a hereditary service tenurial later emerged as the jati system.

It provides an account of incorporating clan-based social groups as particular castes in a hierarchical order based on their specific profession. The resultant hierarchical caste system subjugated tillers, peasants, artisans, etc., as subordinate castes, especially tillers such as Pulayas, Parayas were treated as untouchable castes, often treated as bonded laborers (Veluthat 2009:256-258). The system of contractual obligation sanctioned through scriptures, consecrated as the jati system, with Namboothiri Brahmins as its custodians and lower castes such as Pulayas being dominated by the former, would determine the social-political life for the next seven centuries. This system, however, would not be absolute, as subordinate caste groups would challenge the control of Namboothiri Brahmins at regular intervals, even though the resistance acquired a new radical manner in the colonial phase with the intervention of colonial missionaries, princely state rulers, and most importantly Pulaya leaders such as Ayyankali.

3.2. The History of Pulayas

The previous sections have provided a detailed historical account of the role of Brahminical Religion and its institutional arrangement of the Temple's role in dividing and crystallizing various hereditary tribal clans into water-tight systems of *jati shrenis* (caste system). Namboothiri Brahmins intervened in the prevailing horizontal clan system through their persuasive and material skills. They transformed it into a hierarchical caste system where the status of a person was determined by one's birth (Gurukkal 2010:306-316). Religion was the chief instrument in influencing and controlling the social milieu of the period. Through instituting ritualistic sacrifices, Namboothiri's new deities attempted to create a new metaphysical consciousness.

Brahminical Hinduism imposed a conception of destiny whereby the future was built into the past and present. Their previous actions determined the social position of individuals and their actions. *Karma* (action), good or bad, determines one's condition. There could not be any improvement in one's position unless everyone performed their respective duty, particular caste responsibilities (Veluthat 2009:61-78). This life governing principle of everyone performing one's duty for salvation would be more rigidly imposed in the case of the subordinate castes in Kerala like Pulayas, ensuring the subaltern position of Pulayas and other lower castes. Prior to understanding the struggles of Ayyankali and later KPMS against this exploitative system, it is vital to understand the historical origin of Pulayas and the transformation within the princely State of Travancore, which set the background for the rise of Ayyankali.

3.2.1. The Origin of Pulayas

There are different narratives regarding the origin of Pulayas. Many of these narratives, including both mythical and historical, have concurred that the Pulayas were one of the earliest inhabitants of Kerala.[13] They owned land and held high social and political status. There is evidence for chieftains

13 There are different stories regarding the origin of Pulayas. It is usually linked to the story of Parasurama. When he donated land to Namboothiri's, they asked for assistance cultivating the land. Parasurama gathered inhabitants from the forest and asked them to serve the Brahmins by cultivating their land. Another story links Pulayas to Shiva, who gave them a boon with a spade and axe and rights to clear and cultivate the land. When other people occupied these lands, they were asked to serve them. Saradamoni also draws the account of Samuel Mateer, an English missionary who had worked among the Pulayas. Mateer recorded that Pulayas believed God created them to serve the higher ones. Another mythical account relates Pulayas as off springs born to upper caste widows whom Parasurama killed. However, historians such as Padmanabha Menon, Elamkulam Kujnan Pillai, etc., have traced the origin of Pulayas to the people who work in the field. The Pulayas thus were the sons of the soil as their social world revolved around the

who belonged to the Pulayas.[14] All this evidence proved the existence of a golden period for the Pulayas when they occupied a respectable position in socio-economic life. More than the factuality of many of these stories, their subjective valuation is crucial for any subaltern resistance. There are some exciting aspects of their myths that require attention. The mythical stories regarding Pulaya origin trace their origin back to the story related to the reclamation of land by Parasurama, its donation to Namboothiri's, and his arrangement of attaching Pulayas to these lands as former's servants. The story presents the ground for the presence of Pulayas prior to the arrival of Namboothiri Brahmins (Chentharassery 1979:54-60). Pulayas tracing their origin back to Shiva or Parasurama also point to a stage in the earlier history of Kerala when they were removed through force and persuasion from the land and transformed into Agrestic slaves (Saradamoni 1980:49). This transformation was a violent and continuing process. Even after subjugating the Pulayas, Namboothiri's ensured that they remained within their control. The jati system was instituted to regulate and supervise the Pulayas and other subaltern castes.

The objective was to physically incorporate Pulayas within the fold of the jati system, even while restricting them to the lower stratum by castigating them as impure and untouchable. Namboothiri's instituted an elaborate lifeworld based on caste rules, restricting the interaction between different castes by categorizing some castes as impure and some as pure. They created an illusion of karma to propagate the idea that people were forced to be born in lower castes owing to their sinful deeds. Their occupation reflected their status in the world scheme. Hence the role of every individual was to perform one's duty and ensure that everyone performed theirs. Any transgression was interpreted as a violation and needed to be repaired with the immediate intervention of Brahmins through punishments and fines based on dharmashastras (Nisar 2007:15-34).

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paddy field, who owned them but were pushed into slavery at a later phase (Saradamoni 1980:49-52).

14 Scholars such as Saradamoni have provided detailed evidence for the existence of a kingdom named Kokkotamangalam, believed to have been ruled by a Pulaya princess. There are also pieces of evidence derived mainly from the local names related to Pulayas. For example, there is a place called Pulayanar Kotta, which is cited as evidence of the existence of a Pulaya chieftain. Besides this, a person called Aikkara Yajamanan, whose ancestors were Pulaya kings. They held influence over the Pulayas of North Travancore, while the name Aikkaranad reckons the evidence for the existence of such a Pulaya kingdom. Another familiar story regularly cited is that Pulaya woman located at Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. However, by the 19th and 20th centuries, the status of Pulayas was that of enslaved people. They formed the backbone of agriculture as most of them were agriculture laborers (Saradamoni 1980:44-49).

Pulayas viewed these dharmashastras as a superimposition, a conspiracy of Namboothiri's to maintain their hegemony. Pulayas believed that they were the original inhabitants of Kerala, who were displaced by Namboothiri's who had invaded from Deccan using force and intrigue. The story of Parasurama's reclamation of land and its donation has been interpreted as an act of violence perpetrated by a Brahmin-Kshatriya to eliminate non-Brahmin resistance in the South (Balakrishnan 2008:289-302). Interestingly many Pulayas view these as critical sources to re-construct their contemporary life.

However, the social transformation witnessed by Kerala in the 19th and 20th – the intervention by the colonial authorities, the activities of Christian missionaries, and the modernization urge of the princely State of Travancore would unfold a period of social transformation leading to a period of social upheaval led by lower castes such as Pulayas. Among the various social reformatory movements, the most decisive move which would have a lasting impact on Kerala's future of Pulaya politics would be led by Ayyankali (Nisar 2007:35-65).

The most potent immediate historical context that led to Ayyankali's agitation was the socio-economic transformations within the princely State of Travancore. The ruling classes within Travancore, the role of Christian missionaries, and the influence of colonialism, especially its impact on the economy and state capacity and colonial political leverage over Travancore, all led to a period of transformation. The various phases of Ayyankali's politics, numerous struggles, internal fragmentation, and transformation point cannot be read in isolation. The Ayyankali movement evolved with its engagement with the intervention of Travancore State, the Christian missionaries, emerging structures of opportunity, and subsequent competition among communities for social emancipation and resources. Hence, a grasp of these changes is relevant to understanding the background against which Ayyankali's struggles emerged.

3.3. Colonialism and Modernization within Travancore

Colonialism (British authorities, Christian missionaries, and caste and community associations) forced the princely State of Travancore to adopt modernization in the economic and social sphere

inaugurating a period of social churning.[15]The process of change initiated by the princely State emerged as a set of moves and counter-moves between British colonizers and the State of Travancore (Devika 2011:109). In order to grasp the nature of social churning, there is a need to understand how British authorities constituted the politics of the princely State.

The princely states were brought under British paramountcy via treaties and subsidiary alliances, perpetuating a constant fear of annexation. The State of Travancore was brought under British control through the Subsidiary alliance system in 1795 (Kawashima 1998:4). Under the arrangement, the Travancore rulers had to give up control over their military and foreign policy. They maintained a semi-independent status surviving on the edge of the British Indian Empire. The rulers had the freedom to pass laws related to law and order, revenue, trade, and other administrative matters.

In order to ensure that the administrative practices within princely states do not contradict the British interests, a British resident/agent was appointed who acted as an executive representative of the British Indian Empire (Kooiman 2002:14). However, this arrangement was no security against annexation, and many princely states that entered into subsidiary alliances were later annexed into British India (Kooiman 2002:36). Thus Subsidiary system (or less formal arrangements such as Sanads) created a ruling class interested in perpetuating British rule in India, but a class that was constantly under the watch of the British Empire via an arrangement of British Resident. The subsidiary system opened a power struggle between the British and the Travancore state. The former attempted to politically and economically control and integrate Travancore into the British Indian free trade system. In contrast, the princely State attempted to avoid annexation and maintain its au-

15 The period under discussion is the late 19th century and early 20th century. It was a period engulfed by socio-religious upheavals demanding abolition of caste-based discrimination and clamor for political representation leading to significant movements such as Vaikkom Satyagraha, Guruvayur Satyagraha, Abstention movement, etc. The period witnessed transformation across different areas such as the judiciary, public service, law, employment, organizational politics, and political participation, dispersed via diverse agencies such as Christian missionaries, caste-religious organizations, nationalist movements, peasant and workers unions, and the princely states of Travancore. British colonialism and the work of missionaries provided former slave caste and untouchables opportunities for social mobility through education and conversion, encouraging them to question caste-based hierarchies. Abolition of slavery, expansion of Public works, plantation economy, and integration of Travancore into a more free-trade economic structure eroded reliance on slave labour. Thus spread of education and a new sense of self based on equality, hygiene, and discipline generated confidence among untouchables and slave castes, leading to the emergence of charismatic leaders such as Ayyankali and Poyikayil Appachan, Pambady John Joseph. They mobilized and organized Pulayas, Parayas, Converted Christians, etc., and articulated demands for land, employment, financial assistance, fairer representation in Princely state assembly, abolition of social inequities such as untouchability (Alex 2020:1-2).

tonomy by reformulating itself as a modernized version of its Hindu self-description as a Dharmarajyam or the land of Charity (Devika 2011:110).

This reformulation initiated an active intervention by Travancore to restructure the existing socio-economic order. The active administrative intervention led to the increased pace of modernization involving the abolition of several state monopolies, such as the monopoly over Pepper in 1860 and Tobacco in 1863, the abolition of slavery in 1855 led to releasing a large labour force into the market, which was absorbed by an emergent commercial agriculture sector as well as plantation (which was further secured by security over land tenure provided by Royal declaration in 1865), extending abolition of inland transit duties to more commodities and adoption of British Indian free trade system ensured smoothing of trade relations smoothening the transition to a more modernized economy (Kooiman 1989:119-120).[16] The above tendencies of modernization by the State of Travancore ensured mobility to lower caste by abolishing slave labour, leading to their integration into the plantation economy, public works department, and provision for education, land, and employment. Alongside these changes, there were other changes such as colonial administrative practices creating salient caste identities and a growing awareness of an ethnic self among Pulayas and other lower castes owing to various missionary activities such as rejection of the institution of agrestic slavery and demand for the abolition of slavery, the spread of Christianity emphasizing on cleanliness, discipline, self-respect, dignity, and organization alongside missionary discourse and colonial ethnology which encouraged Dalits to organizationally challenge caste discriminations with mis-

16 The princely State of Travancore presented a curious case. The princely State of Travancore was a self-declared Hindu state whose legitimacy was rooted within its role as a guardian of the mammool (customary usage)- of the traditional Brahminical caste order of which the Travancore state was the self-appointed rakshapurushan (Guardian) (Devika 2011:109). However, the Travancore ruling dynasty was also called a model state ruled by enlightened monarchs who introduced several modernizing measures such as the abolition of slavery, establishing educational institutions, financial assistance for weaker sections to pursue education, establishing health centers including funding research on epidemics, modern transportation facilities and encouraging public works which in great ways broke the static condition of former slave castes. Thus, the princely State of Travancore served Brahminical interests under pressure from the upper caste even while pursuing modernizing policies due to British paramountcy. Thus Travancore represents a contradictory case where the ruling dynasty intertwined contradictory policies (which sometimes appear complementary) to achieve a condition of insurance against any form of annexation (Kawashima 1998:16). In many ways, the model of modernization pursued by the princely State of Travancore, combining reverence for Brahminical caste order with modernizing tendencies such as English education, modern health, modern organizational politics, and competitive political arenas such as the Princely legislative assembly, stood as a model on how to pursue social transformation without eroding foundations of legitimacy. The Travancore experiment, i.e., balancing Brahminical predisposition and the inevitability to change, influenced its response to emerging salient communal and caste formations, setting the tone for post-1957 Kerala politics.

sionary support and demand redistribution of resources such as land and proportionate representation in Government services, political bodies, etc. (Madhavan 2008:766-767).

The enumerative practices such as the census introduced by the colonial State erased specific jatis among the Dalits, unifying particular jatis into homogenous individual castes (Madhavan 2008:764). Classificatory mechanisms such as census, administrative procedures, formation of caste association all overlapped, erasing internal differences among lower castes such as the case of Pulayas- where divisions such as Eastern and Western Pulayas were erased- paving the way for the emergence of a single unified caste with definite boundaries (Mohan 1999:2).

These aggregate caste identities were supplemented with similar categories such as Adi-Dravida, which not only expunged differences to create new homogeneous categories but also invoked the existence of a glorious past belonging to the lower castes prior to the present period of slavery and suffering, which they had lost owing to the oppressive and dubious nature of Brahminical Hinduism (Madhavan 2008:765). Thus aggregate Dalit caste categorization such as Pulayas involves a double process of erasing caste differences to constitute a unified caste identity based on a shared lost cultural legacy on one side while simultaneously dislodging differences among the lower castes to develop alternative Dalit-Bahujan narratives of past (Madhavan 2008:765).

Besides the administrative classificatory practices introduced by colonial officials, the intervention by Christian missionaries was also instrumental in infusing a sense of confidence and self-respect among slave castes such as Pulayas, Parayas, etc., encouraging them to challenge caste hierarchies (Madhavan 2008:765). Christian missionaries inverted the Brahminical imposition of pollution and purity by insisting on a code of discipline, cleanliness, and submission. The missionary intervention led to the formal abolition of slavery, the spread of English education, a culture of hygiene, and awareness of public health in Travancore, particularly among the lower castes. The missionary modernity led conception of a reformed liberated self from the slave castes such as Pulayas.

However, the missionaries' impact failed to move beyond the realm of theology to address the material deprivation Pulayas and other slave castes faced in terms of lack of land or employment, etc. (Mohan 1999:4-11). Thus, the British Paramountcy, the active intervention of Christian missionaries and subsequent growing anti-caste consciousness among the untouchables and slave castes, and eventually the Travancore state's response in terms of a modernization drive to meet the colonial requirements set the background for the social reformation trends within the context of Travancore which eventually challenged the caste hierarchies with demands for social justice.[17]

3.3.1. Engaging Religion- The Travancorean experience

Before understanding Ayyankali's approach to connecting subalternity and religion, there is a need to comprehend that Ayyankali's case is unique as there is very little overt use of religion. It is noteworthy as the social transformation of the 19th and 20th centuries within Travancore was marked by various reformation models, many mediated via the language of religion.

There is a need to understand various strands of transformation such as Temple based reform model (involving consecrating of the Temple, demand for Temple entry, Sanskritisation tendencies, etc.), conversion to a new faith such as Christianity or transgressive faiths such as Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha where religion figured prominently (Mohan 2005:46). For example, Narayana Guru's challenge to Brahminical orthodoxy is executed by consecrating a Deity and numerous Temples, which were open to all castes.[18]

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17 There were numerous strands of social reformation categorized as representing an 'age of Renaissance' within Kerala History. There were reform movements that ultimately espoused anti-caste principles and negated the structure together, while there were movements that reworked the prevalent hierarchies establishing its heterogeneous character (Mannathukkaren 2013:496). It is also inappropriate to romanticize these movements, as per Nissim Mannathukkaren, for each movement had a different impact. While movement among lower castes such as Ezhyavas ensured their social mobility, the movements among the lowest caste remained active in the early phase. However, they failed to consolidate into a larger political constituency that could influence post-1957 Kerala politics (Mannathukkaren 2013:496). Thus assessed in posteriori, the emergent new public realm was not characterized by certain equivalence between differently endowed communities but was clearly in favor of a few powerful communities such as Ezhyavas, Nairs, and Syrian Christians (Devika 2011:111).

18 Similarly, Guru's earlier life was dedicated to composing Sanskrit hymns in dedication to Sanskritised deities such as Vishnu,

Despite his ascetic background, Guru viewed Temple as central to the social world of all castes. It structured and sanctioned the creation of an integrated hierarchical social order installing Brahmins at the top and castes such as Pulayas at the bottom. Thus, Temple was simultaneously the source of legitimacy and a source of oppression. Inversion of the Temple via appropriation and installation of an idol under the aegis of lower castes would dismantle the upper caste dominance. However, Narayana Guru's activities also dislodged traditional deities of Ezhyavas, such as Madan, Marutha, etc. (Mohan 2005:38). Thus even though Narayana Guru's actions in the short term inverted Brahminical Hinduism, in the long term, it opened tendencies of Sanskritisation within lower castes, particularly Ezhyavas (Alex 2020:2).

Similar problems are present within the conversion, even though it was judged as a radical turn. Christian missionaries vehemently opposed the inhuman treatment of lower castes, particularly the institution of agrestic slavery that treated Pulayas as animals (Mateer 2010:93-95). The consistent effort by missionaries led to the formal abolition of slavery in Travancore and Cochin and the spread of education. It raised awareness among Pulayas and other lower castes being mistreated and the need to fight this discrimination via embracing a liberated self.

Missionary modernity brought in the message of Christ as the path to achieving this new self wherein they should abandon unclean practices and embrace a new code of cleanliness, discipline, hard work, and unwavering faith. Thus, it redefined the slave castes self in the realm of theology as a new imagined self that rejected the impurity projected on it by embracing a new faith (Mohan 2015:82-102).

However, the missionaries attempted to address problems of slavery and caste in terms of cleanliness and upliftment without understanding that the roots of the miserable conditions of Dalit existence that lay within objective material conditions of existence. Thus the inversion of caste discrimination in an imaginary Biblical world was proposed as a medium to rupture the caste hierarchies of

the actual worldly realm without undertaking any advocating the question of redistribution of material resources, particularly land (Madhavan 2008:766-767).

Besides the limitation of missionaries in addressing the material conditions of Pulayas and other lower castes, such as lack of land and other resources, the theological resolution in terms of conversion to a new faith itself never guaranteed a complete absolution from caste. Caste-based discrimination continued against lower caste converts. They were being treated differently, avoided by other converted Christians from the Shanar or Ezhyava caste leading to the formation of new congregations (Kooiman 1989:172-178). For example, in 1909, Poiykayil Johannan started a movement later known as Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (hereafter PRDS), a movement aimed at erasing jati identity and creating a new identity (Mohan 1999:13).

The movement by Johannan emphasized erasing separate aggregate identities such as Pulayas, Parayas, and Cheramars as these were potentially divisive and emphasized the unity of lower castes. Johannan's teachings aimed at unifying all untouchables and discrimination urging them to retrieve the golden age of Adi Dravida (a term used by Johannan to indicate all slave castes) where everyone lived freely without any discrimination (Mohan 1999:13-15).

Johannan projected a prophetic aura and divinity of a redeemer transgressing the formal Church structure, formulating a distinct reading of the Bible, replacing Biblical themes with slave memories of separation and pain, and eventually promising redemption for all slave castes (Mohan 2005:44-46). Hence, every strand of socio-religious reform- Temple-based reform, conversion, or a deviant sect such as PRDS- produced its contradiction.

An additional factor that needs to be considered is the role of the State of Travancore in these above-discussed tendencies. The relationship between missionaries, a princely state, and British officials was not fixed but dynamic and complex (Kawashima 1998:219). It could be argued till the 1920s, the relationship between Travancore and Christian missionaries remained amenable and co-operative (Kawashima 1998:219-222). Conversion or formation of sects was not seen as a threat so

long as the converted remained loyal and obedient to the Travancore's dominant Hindu socio-economic order. The Travancore state even approved the colonial superiority in health, education, and technology and understood the need to modernize. However, in post-1930, the increasing assertion of Syrian Christians and lower castes demanding proportionate representation in employment, legislature, etc., threatened the upper caste status quo within Travancore's political offices (Manmathan 2013:64-66). In response, Travancore adopted divisive policies encouraging the activities of Hindu Maha Sabha, promotion of Hinduism, the blatant favoritism towards Nairs, a series of measures to consolidate and revitalize a Hindu constituency via Temple entry measures preventing large scale conversion by Ezhyavas, encouraging Hindu Maha Sabha to reconvert the converts and impart training in Sanskrit and scriptural training (Devika 2011:113-115).

Besides the above measures, the Travancore authorities targeted Hindu Pulayas through various measures such as redistribution of land, fees concessions for Pulaya students, hostel facilities and scholarship programmes, recruitment into government jobs, financial assistance via cooperative societies to conciliate the lower castes, placate their leaders and ensure their loyalty and support (Basu 2016:49-57). Though not wholly successful, these measures prevented Pulaya leaders from engaging in an all-out criticism of the Travancore state, adopting a conciliatory approach of appreciating the State's effort even while pointing out its limitation (Basu 2016:53-55).

Each of the above-discussed reform moves- Temple-based reforms, including measures by the princely State of Travancore state to allow Temple entry for lower castes, conversion to Christianity, or formation of a deviant religious sect such as PRDS created a wave of social transformation but alongside contradictions. The liberatory potential was laced with new forms of segregation, pointing to the contradictory nature of social transformation. Temple-centered reforms, either in Temple entry or appropriation of the Temple by lower castes, even while allowing social changes, led to the consolidation of Hindu identity, neutralizing lower caste protests, and alienation of minorities (Manmathan 2013:64-65). Similarly conversion imparted a new self, created a form of internal segregation leading to the formation of deviant sects such as PRDS; former caste divisions

were weakened but not erased and were being replaced by mutual rivalry and division in the form of different congregations Salvation Army, American Lutherans (Kooiman 1989:178).

Thus, each strand of social transformation generated a new set of standards that dictated liberation terms. For example, Temple entry neutralized the revolutionary potential of the lower caste movements and opened a potential path to Sanskritisation. Conversion liberated scores of lower castes, but intra-church discrimination led to deviant sects questioning the liberatory promises of Christianity.

3.4. Contextualizing Ayyankali's position on religion

Ayyankali faced the reformatory and liberatory positions offered by Temple entry and Christianity. Ayyankali witnessed how these acts set limits on change that subordinate groups could achieve- for example, Christianity offered spiritual solutions without addressing material conditions, or Temple entry integrated lower castes into the Hindu fold, neutralizing the threat of loss of the Hindu majority to Christian conversion. Thus, while an independent stream of consciousness within lower castes such as Pulayas challenged caste discrimination within Brahminical Hinduism and Christianity, they were also influenced by their potential mobility.

Therefore, religion simultaneously turned into an object of attachment and defiance. The contradictory nature of subalternity extended itself to the domain of religion and influenced the course of lower caste struggles as they were being divided along religious lines. Ayyankali was positioned at the intersection of a profoundly complex situation constituted not only by the promise of salvation but a condition of liberation contingent on positions and counter-positions involving a host of actors- the princely State of Travancore, missionaries, British officials, and social reformers each driven by their vested interests. These actors had intermeshed interests and were reflected in their decisions such as Temple entry, reformed Hinduism, or conversion. Ayyankali's responses about religion were essentially part of his broader response to these vested interests that constituted these decisions.

Ayyankali had never been overtly religious except for a very brief period in the earlier part of his life while being associated with a Hindu reformist activist named Sadananda Swamy. No accounts on Ayyankali have presented evidence suggesting Ayyankali's inclination towards any particular religion. Hence, religion does not appear as a strong axis within Ayyankali to anchor social reform as many of his contemporaries, such as Narayana Guru, Poiykayil Johannan, Christian missionaries, or the princely State of Travancore (Kappikkadu 2017:79-80). Despite this, Ayyankali was not dismissive of the influence of religion over Pulayas and other caste groups and adopted a middle position to formulate an understanding regarding religion.

Ayyankali never advocated embracement of any particular faith, nor did he deride any faith except for the social disabilities it produced. Ayyankali was open to any faith so long as it addressed the social discriminations faced by Sadhu Janam (the term used by Ayyankali to refer to all subordinate castes) without producing new hierarchies. Ayyankali's approach to understanding and connecting the theme of subalternity to religion was guided solely by the contradictory nature of Hindu reformism and conversion, i.e., mobility with new controls (Chentharassery 1979:20-34).

Ayyankali understood the mobility and limits set by reformed Hinduism and never encouraged the model actively embraced by Travancore princely state and various community organizations. However, there was another aspect of the princely State which was crucial in moderating Ayyankali's position towards the Hindu state of Travancore, i.e., the role of the princely State of Travancore in initiating various reforms such as distribution of land, financial assistance for education and jobs via cooperative societies, preferential treatment in government jobs, etc. Ayyankali needed state patronage to advance the interests of Pulayas and other castes without compromising on the anti-caste agenda. In contrast, the Travancore state needed Ayyankali's support to neutralize any possible Christian challenge. This complex nature of princely state politics composed of opposing tendencies shaped Ayyankali's position.

Similarly, in the case of conversion, Ayyankali never opposed conversion and understood why Pulayas and other lower caste converted. Thus even while realizing the debilitating impact reformed Hinduism and conversion would have on the long-term consolidation and development of subaltern politics, Ayyankali tended to side with the potential mileage offered by these choices to Pulayas and other communities. Ayyankali developed a contradictory position whereby Ayyankali toned down towards the Hindu state of Travancore owing to its patronage, even while not being much enthusiastic towards reformed Hinduism. Similarly, mobility by conversion was significant for Ayyankali to support the process even though that would lead to fragmentation within subaltern politics in the future.

Therefore, Ayyankali's position reflects a contradictory consciousness- one divided between influences of dominant religious tendencies such as reformed Hinduism and conversion while simultaneously attempting to advance an autonomous politics by negotiating and leveraging the above tendencies without being neutralized by them. Nevertheless, it was a complex game of moves and counter-moves that always yielded a precarious equilibrium, and hence each of these cases- reformed Hinduism and conversion demanded different treatment. The following section attempts the same.

3.4.1. Religion as subordination and liberation-an assessment of Hindu reforms and conversion in Travancore

Regular confrontations marked Ayyankali's early stages of his career. Ayyankali launched numerous struggles such as Villu Vandi Yatra (1893), Kallumala agitation in 1915-1916, the agrarian strike of 1904, etc. Numerous similar struggles were targeted against the exploitative and discriminatory attitude of upper-caste Hindus who had prevented the access of Pulayas and other lower castes into public institutions such as schools, courts, hospitals, etc. (Basu 2016:49-51). They were denied all types of civil rights and denied any political representation. They survived on subsistence wages, attached to the land, and were sold, leased, and bought like cattle. Their socioeconomic status was apt to categorize them as agrestic enslaved people.

Ayyankali believed that this inhuman condition and the numerous hardships they had to undergo were sanctioned and perpetrated by a fictitious superiority of upper castes. The legitimacy for this imagined superiority was acquired through an elaborate set of myths, rituals, and institutions. The upper castes have controlled the intellectual and economic resources such as education, land, government jobs, etc. Caste superiority and its oppressive manifestation, such as untouchability and unseeability, were grounded within the institutional sanctions of Brahminical Hinduism (Mateer 2017:41-47).

Ayyankali was associated with Sadananda Swami, a Hindu social reformer working in the Trivandrum regions of Travancore state among the Pulayas intending to ameliorate the caste-based oppression.[19]This association was brief as Ayyankali soon abandoned the idea to realize social change via spiritual intervention. Ayyankali believed that there was a need for a reform that would aim to address the oppressive nature of the Hindu religion as religion itself was acting as a hindrance preventing access to education, land, employment, civil rights, etc. Thus, religion emerged as a source of subalternity (subalternity meaning subordination) for Pulayas, a legitimizing source for caste practices and hence something that needed to be radically altered.

Ayyankali believed that the plight of Pulayas, especially their conversion to Christianity, was more because of the mobility offered by Christianity in terms of education, right to worship, and fair treatment, restricted within the Hindu fold. Ayyankali viewed that upper castes must reform themselves if they wanted to avoid the flow of the lower castes to Christianity. However, it is very scarce that one comes across any reference which points to Ayyankali's direct exhortation to accept conversion or any other religion. The activities of Ayyankali point toward a different model of engagement with the question of religion.

Ayyankali's insistence on the question of land, education, employment, right to access a public road, offices, hospitals, etc., aimed at organizing Pulayas and other lower castes and putting pres-

19 During this phase, Ayyankali and his peers had opened a Bhajana Madom (prayer hall) to involve Pulayas and other lower caste groups in some spiritual reform (Mani and Aniruddhan 2013:51-54).

sure on princely state authorities. Ayyankali was increasingly aware of the changing nature of the social scenario and political power and understood the need to create spheres of influence within secular power centers like legislative assemblies and political parties if they intended any meaningful transformation in the condition of Pulayas. Ayyankali increasingly believed that caste prejudices could be engaged and undermined through organized community power and pressure politics.

With this aim, the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (hereafter SJPS) was established in 1907 under the leadership of Ayyankali. SJPS spread its influence among Pulayas, Parayas, and other disadvantageous caste groups and initiated numerous struggles ranging from the Kallumala agitation in 1915-to 1916 to the agrarian strike of 1904 (later taken up by SJPS). Numerous similar struggles were targeted against the exploitative and discriminatory attitude of upper-caste Hindus preventing the access of Pulayas and other lower castes into public institutions such as schools, courts, hospitals, etc. (Basu 2016:49-51), that attracted the attention of Travancore state authorities.

The heat of lower castes protests, the fear of mass conversion by Pulayas, damage in terms of loss of majority status, and the need to ensure friendly relations with lower castes to protect the status of caste Hindus forced the princely State of Travancore to initiate several reforms. Reforms such as the abolition of slavery, recruitment of Pulayas and other lower castes into government jobs, financial assistance in the form of grants, mid-day meal schemes, hostel facilities, fees concessions, earmarking and distributing excess land to Pulayas and other lower castes, cooperative societies to provided financial assistance for self-employment, etc. all aimed to ensure support and loyalty of SJPS and similar organizations.

The princely State of Travancore also nominated members from different lower castes such as Ayyankali as a member of Pulayas, Kandan Kumaran representing Parayas, Paradi Abraham Issac representing Converted Christian, Kurumban Daivathan representing Pulaya into Sree Moolam Praja Sabha to represent and raise the problems directly before the State and in most cases the deci-

sions regarding redistribution of land or employment were implemented through select leaders such as Ayyankali (Nisar 2007:82-90).

Thus Ayyankali and other leaders mentioned above from various castes became benefactors of state patronage, which raised their status among the lower castes while also allowing the princely State of Travancore a tentative hold over these communities. The transactional value of this politics cannot be overvalued. However, Travancore's engagement with Ayyankali and SJPS proves their influence, how significantly State intervened in terms of the demand for resources by Ayyankali and developed a zone of cooperation.[20]

Additionally, there were other factors. There were movements such as Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP), which emerged from within the ranks of Ezhyavas, a backward caste that pursued to achieve social mobility via embracing reformed Hinduism advocating fidelity to Temple religion as well as Sanskritisation (Alex 2020:2). Reformed Hinduism was, allowing Temple entry and other privileges, regarded by many as an acceptable model of transformation. The pressure from fear of mass conversion of Ezhyavas and other lower castes and several struggles such as Vaikkom Satyagraha in 1924, Guruvayur Satyagraha in 1931, all demanding Temple centered reform led to the Temple entry proclamation in 1936. These moves aimed to ensure the neutralization of lower caste radicalism and the integration of different castes to forge a Hindu identity (Manmathan 2013:64-65).

The Temple entry addressed denial of the right to worship, which stole the limelight over conversion as a means for social mobility, particularly for Ezhyavas and other lower castes into Christianity, even though hierarchies prevailed without any substantive change (Manmathan 2013:64-67).

20 There should not be any misunderstanding regarding the nature of the princely State of Travancore. It was still dominated by Brahmins and other upper castes whose interests it zealously guarded. Upper castes, particularly Nairs, occupied the majority of offices. Even after adopting a favorable policy towards Pulayas in distributing land, preferable employment, financial assistance for education, and self-employment, Pulayas had to overcome several hurdles. Despite land allotments, Pulayas and other lower castes were not allowed to take possession of these lands and often were subjected to illegal evictions. The high amount of land registration fees made it a further impossible task to accomplish. Similarly, hurdles prevailed in the case of education, employment, etc. (Basu 2016:51-57). However, they continued to collaborate with the Travancore state towards improving their condition, and the Travancore state intervened in their matters favorably, pointing towards the existence of a Transactional space where both Pulayas and lower castes and the Hindu state of Travancore negotiated, mediated to avoid extreme confrontation and reach a reasonable solution.

The favorable interventions by the princely State of Travancore, the model of reformed Hinduism proposed by Ezhyavas, the Temple entry declaration, etc., offered more accommodation for lower castes. Despite its upper-caste interests and limited structural change, the emergent Hindu identity, particularly in the post-1920s, offered a route to mobility. Moreover, to retain Hindu identity was to also remain favorable before the State of Travancore, which was increasingly becoming intolerant towards Christian denominations.

All these measures influenced the position of Ayyankali and SJPS. Despite intense reservations, Ayyankali and SJPS movement remained mainly within the Hindu ambit.[21] It could be argued that Ayyankali viewed religion from a material perspective, i.e., assessing religious reform from a non-religious standpoint.[22] Ayyankali attempted to draw benefits from being within the Hindu fold without being completely absorbed into the Sanskritisation tendencies, even though the latter were increasingly visible in later stages of Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham.

However, assessing from the above discussion, it can be argued that Ayyankali simultaneously appropriated the progressive interventions from the Hindu state of Travancore, even while contesting the caste moorings. Thus Ayyankali presented a contradictory position concerning the emergent Hindu identity is not entirely rejected even when not all its tendencies, such as Sanskritisation or Temple entry, are acceptable.

A similar contradictory position is present while addressing the question of conversion. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Ayyankali adopted an open perspective toward religion. Ayyankali never advocated against conversion, even when there were no references concerning any

21 This position is similar to the position embraced by reformers from the Dheevara (Fisherfolk) community, who adopted a middle path in reformulating their identity- remained within mainstream Hinduism, but challenged its framework. They challenged the Temple structure, Brahmin domination, formal priesthood, Sanskrit language, etc. Instead, they reiterated the significance of their profession, retracing its roots to various Puranic references to Fishing and Fisherfolk, discrediting narratives that categorized Fishing as an impure act. Instead, through Puranic references, the Dheevara reformers interpreted Hinduism as a religion of Fisherfolk. Thus, they inverted the dominant upper caste understanding based on retrieving a glorious community past while rejecting conversion to Christianity and outright Sanskritisation (Alex 2020:15-16). Thus Dheevara movement proposes to think against reducing lower caste reforms in the late 19th and early 20th century in dichotomies either as models of emulation or models of rejection.

22 Most accounts on Ayyankali have very few direct instances where religion is engaged. Ayyankali was largely bothered regarding the material transformation of Pulayas and other lower castes, which made him undermine the stress on religion, unlike many of his contemporaries, such as Narayana Guru or Poiykayil Johannan, who resorted to the consecration of idols and establishment of Temple, Prophetic image, theological teachings to achieve social transformation.

active support (Kappikkadu 2017:79-80). Ayyankali adopted an open approach to Pulayas without discriminating between Hindus and Christian denominations.

This standpoint was proved when Ayyankali established SJPS as an organization for Sadhu Janam, or Poor people. The objective was to unite all the disadvantaged sections within the caste system irrespective of religious or sub-caste denomination and work towards their general welfare (Saradamoni 1980:150). However, such a common standpoint was not supported by all. Some leaders believed that some segments were more disadvantageous than others.

This belief led to the formation of different organizations within Pulayas, such as Ayanavar Maha Sabha in 1916 under Thomas Vadhyar, Cheramar Mahajana Sabha in 1921 by Pambadi John Joseph for representing Cheramar which later split as Hindu Cheramar Maha Sabha and its Christian denomination, Cheraman Sabha by Charathan Solomon for Christian Pulayas and the Hindu Pulaya Samajam by Kurumban Daivathan for Hindu Pulayas (Babukkuttan 2019:111-113). Though operating under different names, all these organizations had members from the Pulaya caste, subscribing to different religious denominations. Most of these leaders, such as Kurumban Daivathan, Pambadi John Joseph, and Thomas Vadhyar, were very close to Ayyankali and SJPS.

A specific organization for social upliftment of a specific segment of Christian or Hindu Pulayas or Cheramar was a sound strategy for organization and cohesion among specific sub-caste (Jati) or religious denominations. It created divisions among Pulayas on religious denominations. Additionally, by the early 20th century, there were indications of distress among lower castes who had converted to Christianity. Despite being profoundly transforming for the lower castes, the act of conversion never wholly resolved the caste problem.

The continuing caste discrimination forced the Church authorities to intervene and form a separate organization called the Christiya Sadhu Jana Sangham (Poor Christian's Society) in 1912 to represent Dalit Christians' socio-economic and political interests (Mohan 2005:44). The Christiya Sadhu Jana Sangham was a meant as a means to contain and control the swelling unrest among the vast

number of converted lower castes by teaching and training them to channel their ire into achieving spiritual uplifting under the watch of the Church rather than raising their discontent to a level which would lead to divisions, splits leading to an open challenge to the Church.

However, the Christiya Sadhu Jana Sangham's formation foreclosed the possibility of united Dalit opposition as the converted Pulayas were being mediated through Church and thus began to operate separately (Mohan 1999:9-11). Thus conversion in the earlier phase led to social mobility while in the later phase it led to fissiparous tendencies weakening autonomous Dalit politics as competition emerged between the Hindu and the Christian Pulaya. Thus, conversion presented a contradictory outcome that offered resistance to caste disabilities, liberating Pulayas and other lower castes.

However, continuing caste discrimination led to the formation of new organizations and even movements such as PRDS, pointing out how the caste dominance continued. Dominance co-existed alongside liberation within conversion. Ayyankali was never against the Christian missionaries as he was open to the liberatory potential of conversion. Ayyankali, similar to the contradictory position adopted in the case of reformed Hinduism, accepted the social upliftment guaranteed by conversion even while struggling against fragmentation encouraged by the same.

3.4.2. Ayyankali's approach to the question of Religion and Subalternity: a case of *middle approach*

The above discussions have brought out two opposing trends to a tenuous compromise. The discussion brings out the historical context within which Ayyankali attempted to connect the question of subalternity to religion. Ayyankali comprehended subalternity as a contradictory condition composed of both moments of subordination and resistance, and religion is the most evident expression of this contradiction. Ayyankali's position concerning reforming tendencies within Hinduism and conversion to Christianity proves how the religious experiments within lower caste brought out the influence of the contradictory nature of subalternity within the domain of religion.

Ayyankali witnessed a period of tremendous social change where religion emerged as the main object of change. There were several strands of social change, but predominantly all strands involved

a change based on religion. For example, the SNDP movement among the Ezhyavas, the PRDS movement among Pulayas and Parayas, etc., had aimed toward some religious reform or a new theological interpretation as the base for envisioning a new socio-political life. SNDP movement, one of the most significant movements among backward castes, focused on developing an elaborate philosophical and institutional base alongside its anti-caste struggles. Narayana Guru evolved a detailed philosophy where he drew heavily from the anti-Brahmin Shaivaite-Siddhar and Advaitic tradition, arguing that *jati* denoted a species. In this context, it meant everyone had a species. Animals, plants, and human beings all belong to different species. However, the *jati* system instituted by Brahminical Hinduism segregated people from people. This segregation had no logic as all human beings were part of the same human species (Omana 2014:362-363).

Guru proposed a new *matham* or religion that did not discriminate against people based on their birth or profession. He instituted and disseminated this new *matham* through temples where he deified idols symbolizing Hindu gods or sometimes placed mirrors as an idol, undermining the illegitimate hold of Brahminism hold over Hinduism. Guru's *matham* constituted an idea of Hinduism where everyone could worship an idol and recite prayers without facing any discrimination. He wrote numerous works both in Sanskrit and Malayalam to propagate this message. Besides these intellectual efforts, Guru exhorted that the educated Ezhyavas to establish organizations to mobilize community members and pressure the State to establish schools, increase their representation within political assemblies, government jobs, etc. (Omana 2014:348-368).

Guru urged Ezhyavas to establish industries to improve the material conditions of Ezhyavas, as he felt that material welfare was the precursor to spiritual upliftment. These religious-social interventions and mobilization would transform Ezhyavas into a formidable political force in post-independent Kerala, constituting the backbone of left politics and subsequently influencing Kerala politics. This model of religio-political reform founded by Narayana Guru through SNDP and resultant upheaval among the Ezhyavas stands as a model indicating the general direction of social transformation in the early decades within Kerala.

Despite such transformations, the SNDP movement was structured by the adherence to Temple religion and desire for Sanskritisation (Jeffrey 1974:45-59). These tendencies were further strengthened by the princely State of Travancore's intervention of allowing Temple entry proclamation, which led to the consolidation of Hindu identity, neutralized the militant tendencies within lower castes, and reduced the significance of conversion as a model for social mobility (Manmathan 2013:66).

Like the SNDP experience, reformed Hinduism and a princely state actively supporting Hinduising tendencies exerted intense pressures upon Ayyankali and the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham. Co-option via redistribution of resources such as land, financial assistance, government jobs, political representation etc. created a contradictory condition where despite being critical of the Travancore state, Ayyankali and Pulaya movement adopted a conciliatory tone.

Similarly, Christian conversion also produced its share of contradictions. The prevalence of caste practices had led to mass conversion from slave castes such as Pulayas, Pariahs, etc., to Christianity. It never resolved the caste question ultimately. Continuing caste discrimination led to various tendencies, such as forming an organization like the Christiya Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (Mani and Aniruddhan 2013:114-116). These organizations aimed to contain the dissent within the converted lower castes from turning into a full-fledged rebellion, leading to splits within the Church.

Compared to the above-discussed models- reformed Hinduism and conversion, Ayyankali's engagement with religion could be characterized as an unorthodox approach. Ayyankali had a contradictory understanding of religion, and there are reasons for it. Ayyankali's opening of a Bhajana Madom and association with Sadananda Swamy, a Hindu social reformer active in Venganoor and Neyyattinkara regions of Travancore, initiating various religious activities among Pulayas are the closest moments of Ayyankali's preoccupation with religion.

Ayyankali appears to be aware of the relevance of religion as a natural imaginary required for people to lend meaning to their life. This preoccupation with religion was more nuanced as it carried elements of anti-caste rhetoric alongside using religion as a source for evolving a reformed egalitar-

ian, caste-free society. However, this standpoint was short-lived as Ayyankali was unsure of the precise nature of religion. Ayyankali increasingly doubted the relevance of religion as a frame for lower caste salvation, even though he never dismissed its potential altogether.

Ayyankali's this perspective is repeatedly encountered at various instances in his life. Ayyankali was probably moving towards a deeply non-religious standpoint where religion could still be a ground for inversion of existing power relations, but one that created its own constraints. [23] Ayyankali realized that each religion generated its own unique set of contradictions. For example, while guaranteeing social mobility led by shifting faith, the conversion failed to shift the weight of caste, leading to other struggles. Similarly, Temple entry or redistribution of resources by the Hindu state of Travancore, such as land, employment, and financial assistance, was encouraged to retain a symbolic Hindu majority and neutralize lower caste radicalism rather than any substantive socio-economic shift. Thus reformed Hinduism or conversion was a contradictory model providing a new form of dominance alongside liberation. Ayyankali, being solely committed to social upliftment, embraced this contradiction by following a position of drawing benefits offered by religion while resisting continuing discrimination within these models.

It is arguable that Ayyankali's approach to religion reveals a broadening of resistance in a sense where influences from dominant positions- particularly interests of the Travancore state and missionaries intersected with the politics of Ayyankali and the SJPS. However, this context was a tenuous balance where the success of Ayyankali lay in preventing any influence from neutralizing the subaltern intentions. Thus, resistance was broadened enough to include ambiguous and contradictory actions, many of which may be power-laden (driven by dominant interests), but not entirely so that they turned made resistance redundant (Chandra 2015:565). Ayyankali and his politics through

23 Satheesh, an amateur historian, recalls that Ayyankali had developed an agnostic attitude, if not atheistic, by the time he entered Sree Moolam Praja Sabha in 1912. He believed that religion, whether reforms like Narayana Guru or Christianity like LMS or PRDS, did not have much to offer to Pulayas. They were essentially seeking material influence through spreading their word. Pulayas needed a philosophy of well-being that could be achieved through acquiring land, education, and employment. A new moral and material order was required, and the modern State was the only agency capable of assisting Pulayas in this endeavor. One can closely see how close to Gramscian thought Ayyankali was in his observations. He drew observations from the immediate caste experiences around him and provided a material response to them. Simultaneously he advocated alliance among different subaltern castes so that they could evolve a sustained struggle for achieving hegemony over the new State and ensure its support for their cause. With this interest, he encouraged state officials to appoint individuals from different lower castes, as he believed together they could tilt the political balance in their favor. Interview on 27-10-2018

SJPS primarily reflected this contradictory position that, simultaneously being close to the dominant power, never abandoned their subversive potential.

Thus, Ayyankali adopted a more accommodative position concerning the religion's progressive potential offered by reformism within Hinduism and Christianity while simultaneously resisting with varying success sanskritising tendencies such as Temple entry. The significance of Ayyankali's politics lies in the fact that many of the traits of the period continued in the post-1956 period, particularly after the formation of the Kerala state. In many manners, Ayyankali has inspired and set the template for the future course of politics of post-1956 Kerala, particularly for Pulaya organizations such as the Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha.

CHAPTER 4

The Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha and the question of Conversion: a case of contradictory politics

The chapter follows the discussion within previous chapters on the contradictory nature which defines the relation between subalternity and religion. The third chapter highlighted how Ayyankali's politics was expressed through various protests organized independently and under SJPS. Ayyankali's approach anticipated how the contradictory nature of subalternity would be detrimental to the future of Dalit groups, particularly the failure to forge unity between different lower castes and a joint manifesto for social upliftment owing to differences over religious and political affiliations. These differences tend to produce opposing tendencies, putting lower castes in a contradictory position. They are simultaneously subjected to the overtures of dominant pull and the desire to develop autonomous politics.

Ayyankali's politics were shaped by contradictory pulls and pressures within the context of Travancore politics. The reformist tendencies within the Hindu fold led to the consolidation and mobilization of lower castes, such as Ezhyavas and Pulayas, demanding proper representation in political bodies, state employment, etc. Despite these developments, caste-based discrimination continued in terms of lack of access to Temples, roads, inadequate political representation in representative bodies such as Sree Moolam Praja Sabha, and lack of access to resources such as land, financial resources, state employment, etc., which forced the lower castes to consider conversion as a model for mobility (Jeffrey 1976:21-22). However, the princely state of Travancore attempted to neutralize lower caste radicalism by appealing to lower castes via accommodating lower caste leaders within popular assemblies such as Sree Moolam Praja Sabha, redistribution of resources such as land, employment, financial assistance for education, self-employment, etc. and various religious reforms such as allowing Temple entry. Such preferential treatment for Pulayas and other lower castes by the Travancore state made Ayyankali and other lower caste leaders moderate their criticism of the

Travancore state in the post-1920s. After that, the politics of Ayyankali and other lower caste leaders shifted towards pressuring the Travancore state to rectify irregularities within various reforms in areas of education, employment, redistribution of land, etc., and ensure proper treatment of lower caste demands (Basu 2016:54-55). However, the shift towards a moderate position never neutralized Ayyankali's skepticism towards reform measures such as Temple entry.

Ayyankali's position reflects a contradictory position constituted by the intersection of two trends. One trend was an appealing dominant Hindu Travancore state offering preferential treatment based on Hindu denomination to overcome the threat of conversion even while retaining upper-caste dominance and second trend was the pressure exerted by emergent reformist tendencies within the Hindu fold mainly achieved by lower caste movements such as Ezhyavas pointing to a different approach towards achieving social mobility via mobilization and agitation (Jeffrey 1976:24).

Thus a tenuous state of co-existence dominated the context of Ayyankali- supporting a Hindu state even while contesting the upper caste dominance within Travancore. These factors influenced the leaders such as Ayyankali and others within SJPS to adopt a more conciliatory approach towards reformed Hinduism even while not accepting all its positions. Similarly, conversion never ensured a caste-free existence even while guaranteeing social mobility as caste hierarchies continued within the Christian fold. These hierarchies led to discontent and competition, leading to formation of organizations such as the Christiya Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham, which aimed to contain and convert the discontent among the lower caste into a more spiritually oriented practice averting any split (Mohan 1999:9-11). The patronage offered by the princely state of Travancore and the mobility of reformed Hinduism were necessary for Ayyankali to advance the more significant interests of the Sadhu Janam. These interests made Ayyankali support a Hinduised princely state, even though the Travancore state continued to be dominated by upper-caste Hindus.

Similarly, the liberatory potential of Christianity attracted Ayyankali as it addressed caste-based disabilities even when caste-based segregations were being reported even within missionary denom-

inations such as CMS and LMS. Thus while the reformatory tendencies of both Hinduism and Christianity attracted Ayyankali, the continuing caste practices remained an object of concern.

Religion offered contradictory outcomes-reform without any resolution to caste markers which made Ayyankali adopt an open but contradictory position on religion (in tune with the condition of subalternity). Ayyankali neither advocated support for any reformed mode of faith nor exhorted conversion. Instead, Ayyankali embraced mobility offered by both even while continuing contestation against the discriminatory tendencies produced by each of these strands. Thus, Ayyankali's contradictory position was characterized by embracing the mobility offered by both reformed Hinduism and Christianity without compromising the egalitarian agenda.

In assessment, such an approach represents the actual state of subalternity- a position prone to the machinations of dominant interventions of both reformed Hinduism and actively encouraging Travancore state while simultaneously being besieged by continuing economic and social hardships. Thus instead of treating Ayyankali's politics either as only radical or submissive, it is more meaningful to approach it from a position of contradictory unity- a position where radical tendencies coalesce with moderation and both are valuable. Embracement of such a standpoint would go a long way in understanding the inner workings of Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha, one of the largest organizations of Pulayas in Kerala, and how they have engaged with the question of subalternity and religion.

The Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha (hereafter KPMS) was established in 1970 under the influence of P K Chatthan Master, M K Raghavan, etc., all being prominent CPI leaders. The aim was to mobilize and pressure political parties to plan and implement policies for the socio-economic development of scheduled castes in Kerala (Mathew 1986:112-114). The study is not based on the presumption that KPMS is the sole representative of the Pulayas. However, being the largest organization in terms of its organizational presence across Kerala with a strong organizational presence in Southern Kerala districts such as Trivandrum, Ernakulam, Kottayam, Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, etc., it could be a

fair conclusion that KPMS would be a close cross-section of Pulayas public opinion on the question of subalternity and religion.

The history of KPMS cannot be written in isolation from the efforts of social reformers like Ayyankali, T T Keshavan Shastri, and Vellikkara Chothi. The antecedents to the formation of KPMS are traceable to the various struggles organized by these social reformers within the south and central Travancore regions of colonial Kerala. Hence it is crucial to understand the historical background of the 19th and 20th centuries, which led to the formation of the Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section is the historical background focusing briefly on the 19th and 20th-century struggles, which served as background for the formation of KPMS. The second section includes the post -1970 political developments among Pulayas, the formation of KPMS, and its activities tracing it up to the contemporary period with a particular focus on the recent political developments within Pulayas surrounding the issue of conversion, continuing engagement with Temple religion, and fragmentation of lower caste solidarities.

4.1. Historical Background to the formation of the Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha

The social condition of Pulayas in the colonial period has been documented and vividly described across various accounts. Pulayas were the largest agrestic slave castes and formed the backbone of agricultural production. They were attached to the land and were sold and bought like any other good. They were at the mercy of the landlords and were subjected to the most heinous and exploitative working conditions. Saradamoni argues that Pulayas in the 19th century never had a life of their own. They never earned a living. They were the lowest within the caste stratum. They were untouchables, and their presence could pollute the upper castes. They were not allowed to own land or any other form of property (Saradamoni 1980:44-70).

The Pulayas were divided into sub-castes, each with its customs and rules. They were not supposed to inter-dine or inter-marry, and they even practiced pollution among Pulayas themselves. For example, Kizhyakke Pulayas believed themselves superior to Padinjare Pulayas as they were followers of Duryodhana. Similarly, Pulayas were superior to Nayadee or Parayas. The Pulayas were to

take a bath if they came in touch with Parayas as the latter were polluted. The practices, customs, and beliefs perpetuated through myths and customs were so strong that each caste viewed itself as distinct entity (Mateer 2010:54-65). The above descriptions offer a glimpse of the wretched conditions the Pulayas subsisted. There were different reasons for the condition of Pulayas. The decline of a centralized political system and its replacement with a theocratic feudal arrangement with all power concentrated in the hand of Namboothiri's was responsible for transforming the status of Pulayas from being the owners of the soil to being agrestic slaves (Gopalakrishnan 1974:265-274). The new social formation, which emerged around 12th century A D, concentrated all lands in Namboothiri's hands, strengthening their economic position (Veluthat 2009:277-289).

Namboothiri's used temples as sites to accumulate and concentrate wealth. They were also a microcosm of the social life based on *the jati* system. Every professional social group was transformed into a water-tight caste compartment and was supposed to be dependent on the temple complex for existence (Veluthat 1978:86-126). Their alliance with the ruling chieftains enhanced their political status, and in return, the ruling classes used temples as sites for legitimization and resolution of conflicts (Veluthat 1999:66-78). Thus, Namboothiri's temple system controlled the socio-political life of all castes, particularly subalterns such as Pulayas, as they were dependent on Pulayas for their material welfare (Gurukkal 2010:310-316).

Thus Namboothiri's rise to dominance and its perpetuation necessitated a system that could control, supervise and neutralize dissent from the subaltern ranks. The *jati* system was supposed to perform this role. As argued, it separated and compartmentalized each caste as distinct, giving scope for each caste to achieve relative autonomy, providing space for caste pride leading to an absence of any solidarity among subalterns. However, this arrangement of separation and dependence has never been usual. It has been challenged at regular intervals within history. There were saintly figures such as Ayya Vaikunta Swamy, Thaikkattu Ayyavu, etc., critical of caste-based untouchability and similar oppressive practices within the Travancore princely state. Ayyankali continued this long tradition of anti-caste movements by organizing a series of protests such as the Villu Vandi protest

(Bullock cart protest), Perinadu revolt, Pullad protest, and Aaralamoodu protest, the first agrarian strike organized in taluks of Neyyattinkara, Kayamkulam, etc. (Neravathu 2017:19-37).

Ayyankali's protests aimed to mobilize and consolidate Pulayas and other agrestic slave castes while also strengthening the socio-economic conditions of Pulayas and other subaltern castes by putting pressure on concerned authorities. Ayyankali could be rightfully categorized as an organic intellectual who mobilized Pulayas, Parayas, etc., and stormed into the reserved caste spaces monopolized by the upper castes. For example, the Villu Vandi protest aimed at the lower caste allowing access to public spaces like markets, roads, government offices, courts, etc. Ayyankali forcefully intervened on behalf of Pulayas to ensure that they were no longer denied fundamental civil rights (Mani and Aniruddhan 2013:36-46).

However, Ayyankali realized the need for a more concerted and organized effort to realize the course's fundamental civil rights for Pulayas and other untouchables. With this objective in 1907, Ayyankali established the organization named the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham. Though Pulayas were numerically higher in number, the organization was open to all lower castes. It was the precursor to the formation of the Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha. The Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (hereafter SJPS) aimed toward a socio-economic rejuvenation of all lower caste groups, including Pulayas, Parayas, etc. It aimed to organize a new *community* under the common condition of their discrimination and hence designated Sadhu Janam meaning poor people (Babukkuttan 2019:45-53).

Ayyankali believed that a disciplined, educated, and organized SJPS could benefit more from the modern state and hence encouraged SJPS members to regularly attend the organization's meetings, which were conducted every week (Basu 2016:47-49). The objective of such regularization was to encourage solidarity among the Pulayas and other lower castes to forge alliances to emerge as a pressure group within Travancore state politics. This context led to the initiation of internal as well as external reform. Internal reform was aimed at reforming the various practices prevalent among the Pulayas, such as untouchability between Pulayas and Parayas or settling disputes among the

community members through establishing a community court with all features of a regular civil court, appointing officials to perform judicial activities, and officials with punitive powers to punish convicted members (Mani and Aniruddhan 2013:55-62). [24]

Externally, the reform aimed towards using the SJPS platform and the clout of Ayyankali as the member of Sree Moolam Praja Sabha, the Travancore princely state assembly to bargain with state authorities to implement various measures such as the abolition of slavery, financial assistance for the education of poor Pulaya students, establishing schools and hostels for Pulaya students, appointing more Pulayas in government service, re-distributing surplus land for Pulayas, etc. (Basu 2016:46-54).

Besides pressurizing the princely state, Ayyankali also understood the nuances of sub-caste politics, which emerged in representative politics where each caste attempted to identify itself independently to engage with the state to accrue various benefits that undermined lower caste solidarities. To avoid this and prevent domination by anyone caste Ayyankali mediated the nomination of several individuals from various untouchable castes as members of Praja Sabha. However, these divisive tendencies grew more assertive with the Travancore state encouraging representation of specific caste via specific representatives encouraging sub-caste sensitivities weakening Dalit solidarity, eventually leading to the decline of SJPS and the weakening of Ayyankali's political vision (Mohan 1999:18-22). This transition from being a representative of all lower castes to an explicit organization of a caste, i.e., Pulaya, indicated the fissures emerging within Dalit politics. This process impacted Pulayas within Travancore, encouraging a young generation to organize those Pulayas who were not members of any organization (Mani and Aniruddhan 2013:151-155).

This thought bear fruit in 1937 when the All Travancore Pulayar Maha Sabha was formed 1937 under the leadership of T T Keshavan Shastri, Aranmula P K Krishna Das, T V Thevan, Keshavan

24 As mentioned earlier, SJPS was conceived as an organization open to all lower castes. However, it was dominated by the numerically most significant Pulayas, which in the later phase led to several internal divisions leading to desertions from the SJPS and the formation of parallel organizations. Thus SJPS remained primarily dominated by Hindu Pulayas. Additionally, Ayyankali's nomination into Sree Moolam Praja Sabha as a Pulaya member reinforced this image (Nisar and Kandasamy 2007:90-92).

Writer, Kunjukrishnan Manager, and V I Velukutty (Mani and Anirudhan 2013:155). The differences and factions among KPMS would subsequently multiply around conversion, reservation, and access to state power. Thus, the features of the Travancore state politics- the contradictory nature of lower caste politics would continue to dominate and dictate the decisions by Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha in post-Kerala state formation.

4.2. Formation of KPMS and contemporary political developments

The historical background detailed above demonstrates the circumstances for the rise and decline of the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham and the All Travancore Pulayar Maha Sabha. The two organizations were formed to initiate reform, strengthen the community bonds and transform Pulayas into an influential political force. Though successful initially, many Pulaya organizations degenerated into caste organizations with limited regional presence and influence in later periods. Pulayas and other subaltern castes were increasingly mobilized under the Left movements. However, in the late 1960s, growing demand for a separate organization emerged. This organization was to ensure the overall development of Pulayas because many thought that they were left out. Despite being the largest scheduled caste group, they could not transform their numbers into a politically pressurizing position. Thus, the Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha (hereafter KPMS) was formed in 1970 under the leadership of P K Chatthan Master, a veteran leader of the Communist Party of India. M K Madhavan and several other prominent leaders of the Communist party became leaders of KPMS at a later phase (Mathew 1986:112-114). By the late 1970s, KPMS had spread its activities across the districts of Aleppey, Trivandrum. Ernakulam, Trichur, Quilon etc.

From the very beginning, the influence of the Communist party was visible in the new organization. Most of its leaders had a strong background in the Communist Party of India (hereafter CPI). The early decades of KPMS were essentially devoted to developing KPMS as a frontal organization of CPI to improve the socio-economic conditions of the Pulayas. The efforts in the early decades, particularly up to 2000, could be identified as efforts to use left leadership within KPMS as a political pressure point to get mileage to accrue various benefits for the Pulayas (Remani 2019:161-162).

KPMS presented a charter of demands in 1976, which highlighted the organization's objective. The main demands were the extension of reservation for scheduled caste for another 10 years, distribution of 50% surplus land to Harijans, minimum wage, allocation of small scale industries, provision for loan facilities, removal of unemployment, housing for a minimum of ten families a year, establish of a city improvement trust, facilities for education and hostel accommodation for scheduled caste children (Mathew 1986:112). The leadership successfully achieved significant success also owing to the presence of left leaders within the top brass of KPMS.

Despite having a sympathetic attitude towards the left movement, there has been growing discontent within KPMS towards the Left. The Parliamentary success of the Left (mainly CPI and CPM) was guaranteed by an alliance between different segments such as tenants, agricultural and industrial labor, Dalits, and Adivasi, paving the way for the integration of principles of social equality and freedom with demands for redistribution of concentrated resources, particularly land (Raman 2017:95-97). The various measures such as land reforms, spreading public education, developing accessible health facilities, providing social security via public distribution system, pension schemes, etc., have contributed to the transformation of Kerala into a model state within India. These have been the themes around which the Left had secure support and were being questioned. The essential criticism has been that the benefits of land reforms, public health, education, etc., have not been uniformly distributed because much of the promised radicalism was lost in implementation.

For example, the Agrarian Relations Bill, 1959 abolished landlordism and transferred land to Tillers by placing land ceilings on land distribution. It was insufficient as it failed to incorporate the Plantations within ceiling provisions. The government failed to prevent fake transfers by individual owners limiting the amount of land available for distribution. Most notably, Adivasi, Dalits who were predominantly laborers, were excluded as beneficiaries as the land was given to tenants. Additionally, the state-led developmentalism in terms of industrialization and monoculture plantation replicated the colonial model, which led to the displacement of Adivasi, a reason for several future struggles (Raman 2017:97-98). Thus while Kerala's social welfare model received worldwide atten-

tion, it failed to erase the disparity between Dalits and non-Dalits (Sivanandan 1976:6-26). There is an emergent view that the lack of numbers, other forms of resources (money, independent community organizations like SNDP for Ezhyavas) have prevented the rise of Pulayas as a strong pressure group which could have possibly led to Left parties treating them as their natural constituency (Devika 2013:3).

This disillusionment has recently become acute, leading to new Dalit organizations such as the Dalit Human Rights Movement (DHRM), Cheramar Sambava Development Society (CSDS), similar initiatives, etc. Despite its sympathetic attitude towards the Left-wing politics, this disillusionment is gradually gaining traction within KPMS, revealing other fault lines running deep within the community concerning backwardness and the issue of religion. The issue of religion itself has not been discussed in isolation. Religion has been discussed in terms of conversion and continuing fidelity to Temple-based Hindu religion (also referred to momentarily as reformed Hinduism). There has been a divided opinion concerning these issues, sometimes even leading to rifts pointing towards the prevalence of the contradictory nature of subaltern understanding around the issue of religion. The present chapter attempts to locate the nuances around the theme of conversion, while the next chapter focuses on reformed Hinduism.

4.3. Conversion: a case for contradictory politics of KPMS

Conversion presents a case of contradictory politics. As a religious option, conversion offered new forms of control and mobility. Pulaya's response was shaped by both these prospects leading to a contradictory condition producing moments of subordination and resistance simultaneously. The current chapter deals with the issue, i.e., the relevance of conversion as a model of social mobility and how it has impacted the formation of larger Dalit solidarities.

4.3.1. The Historical context of Conversion- a contentious legacy

The social context within which Conversion occurred needs mentioning. The extremities of the caste system led to conversions within the princely state of Travancore. The pre-colonial social period was marked by the prevalence of caste slavery within the Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar re-

gions. The majority of caste enslaved people belonged to Pulaya and Paraya castes. They were mainly utilized for agricultural purposes and served as agrestic enslaved people. The enslavers had absolute control over the enslaved people.

The slave masters-chiefly upper castes and Temples owned the whole land to which all the enslaved people were attached. The slave castes had no right to own, purchase or sell any property. In cases where they earned land, it would be returned to their master after the enslaved person's death. The enslavers had the absolute right to sell and purchase enslaved people as per their wishes. The control was so much complete that the enslavers, at times, even inflicted capital punishment on their slaves (Mohan 2005:40).

Besides the absence of rights, the slave castes were not allowed to own any good house, food, or clothes. The families were never permanent as the enslavers could always separate family members from each other and sell them as per their wish. Thus, caste oppressions left deep emotional scars over the slave castes in the form of natal alienation wherein families were broken and family members were sold to different owners (Mohan 2016:42). The emotional distress created by slavery was central to determining the choices made by the Pulayas and Parayas concerning their faith. The Pulayas and Parayas were eagerly waiting for a way out, and missionaries provided the much-desired relief for these castes (Mohan 2005:40).

Missionary records provide a vivid picture of how the missionaries worked against such widespread social discrimination to achieve the social upliftment of the Pulayas and the Parayas. The objective of missionary work was to raise consciousness among the slave castes through a continued interaction between missionaries and the slave caste population to liberate them from the control of the landlords (Mohan 2005:41). The missionaries used their personal and collective influence to step up pressure on the Travancore rulers and the colonial officials to address the issue of caste slavery by focusing on the theme of the abolition of caste slavery. The missionary effort bear fruits as the institution of slavery were formally abolished in Travancore in 1855, even though it came much later

than the Malabar province, which was under direct British rule, where it was abolished as early as 1843 (Mohan 2016:42).

This experience of upliftment and transformation was not an isolated incident but part of a much broader process of modernity witnessed by colonial Kerala in the 19th century, broadly referred to as the missionary modernity of which conversion was an important part (Madhavan 2008:766). The lower castes adopted conversion as a path for social transformation, not merely owing to the material benefits but the inner transformation experienced through conversion.

Embracing a faith such as Christianity offered material mobility to lower castes in terms of access to education, employment, etc. However, the missionary intervention and the colonial transformation of the economy and society provided literacy. They led to a formal abolition of slavery, paving the way for a potential Dalit liberation based on an understanding of self grounded within a new faith (Madhavan 2008:766).

This transformation was not merely external or limited to acquiring material goods by embracing a new faith. Instead, there was a profound inner transformation, developing a new mentality towards life by re-ordering their everyday life according to the Christian influenced daily prayer routines and night classes by missionaries. Such a re-ordering naturally threatened the traditional caste hierarchical order. It violated the restrictions imposed on Pulayas and Parayas using public spaces and overriding the routine field-based work time as the control category to determine their everyday world. Instead, the growing involvement of Pulayas and Parayas in prayers and evening sermon congregations created an opportunity for new subaltern public spaces in the forms of schools and chapels, which through encouraging interaction between members of slave castes, missionary teaching, composition, and collective singing of prayers oversaw the development of a new worldview which potentially proposed themes of liberation from caste oppression (Mohan 2016:46-50).

Thus the missionary effort to open up new congregations and institutional spaces such as schools, chapels for the Pulayas, and Parayas had a positive impact which was validated by an increase in

the membership of Dalits embracing Christianity. However, missionary work needs contextualization. The missionary's held a very pessimistic view of the slave caste social world. They assessed their condition as evil, low, and one from which they must be saved. Even though the missionaries worked earnestly towards this objective, they held a paternalistic approach towards the upliftment of the slave castes. They viewed the social context of the Pulayas and Parayas as being a hindrance to their work.

One good example of this would be the missionary demand to abolish slavery. One reason cited for the anti-slavery campaign of missionaries was to loosen the hold of the landlords over the Pulayas and Parayas, as this limited the influence of missionaries over Pulayas and Parayas. The missionaries viewed Pulayas and Parayas as inhabiting impure and evil habitats which were unclean, backward, and marred with superstition. Instead, through schools and chapels, the missionaries aimed to impart a new faith and mentality that would inculcate habits of cleanliness, purity, discipline, and devotion, which would eventually uplift the slave caste from their distressful social condition (Mohan 1999:6). Thus the missionaries viewed themselves as social interventionists tasked with the civilizational responsibility to uplift the slave castes from their painful social conditions.

With this objective of uplifting and reconstituting the slave caste world view which was believed as a continuous process, the missionaries focused on establishing churches and schools to create spaces for active interaction between missionaries and lower caste converts. Missionaries exhorted the converts to adopt various changes in clothing, hygiene, food habits, etc., according to the precepts of Christianity. Schools and churches became epicenters for promoting social transformations. They offered a space for congregations outside the influence of dominant caste spaces. Besides, these spaces were more accommodative and learning centers where the converts from slave castes learned new practices (Mohan 2016:47).

The Pulayas and Parayas were encouraged to learn the Malayalam language so that they could read Bible and other religious literature. This act significantly impacted these groups as they progressed

considerably in literacy. The command over vernacular Malayalam helped the Pulaya and Paraya convert to read and interpret Bible to satisfy their spiritual aspirations. The literates among the slave castes were chosen by the missionaries to act as instructors to deliver the word of God (Mohan 2005:41).

The native instructors often drew a parallel between the slave experiences and Biblical themes such as bondage and subsequent conditions where these bondages will be broken, and heaven will be delivered to the believer. Such imageries of liberation from the bondage of caste slavery couched and delivered in Biblical form, attracted the audience. Even though the stories referred to different historical Biblical contexts, they resonated with the slave castes. They saw Biblical imageries of suffering as synonymous with their bondage and suffering (Mohan 2016:46-51). Hence the sermons on liberation from bondage and suffering attracted attention because the Pulayas and Parayas considered such sermons as instruments to negotiate and overcome the caste-based oppression, even though only psychologically. Thus, among Pulayas and Parayas, prayer, sermons, and congregations emerge as a core weapon to contest and overcome the discrimination and pain inflicted by caste-based landlordism. There are instances where continuous repetition of prayer was used as a strategy to escape caste-based atrocities.

The value of prayer and the transformation brought in by prayer in everyday life of Pulayas and Parayas was revealed in the controversy surrounding the performance of Uzhiyam. Uzhiyam was a compulsory form of customary labor service that slave castes had to perform on Sundays without payment (Mohan 2016:49). The Travancore state and the Hindu and upper-caste Christian landlords who enslaved people belonging to the Pulaya and Paraya castes forced them to perform everyday work, including Sundays (Mohan 2016:49).

However, the influence of Christianity re-ordered their imagination of days and times. Thus Sunday was designated as the day to congregate and worship. The forceful and unpaid Uzhiyam became a point of contention as the upper caste landlords and the Travancore state government opposed the

demand for exemption from Sunday Uzhiyam. The conflict over the demand brought out the underlying power struggle which was already existent between the state and the missionaries. Attending church congregation and reciting prayers was no longer a spiritual matter alone but was increasingly a political issue leading to a confrontation between lower-caste converts and the state (Mohan 2016:50).

The controversy brought out the irreplaceable value placed on prayer, congregation, and Church in redefining their understanding of life. Schools, churches, congregations, and collective praying allowed lower caste converts access to a new space other than their huts and fields. Attending schools, listening to scriptures, participating in prayer congregation, composing and repeating prayers, and narrating the experience of change brought by the Gospel all indicated the novel experience through which the Pulayas and Parayas went.

The influence of Christianity was also visible in terms of external changes such as clothing, hygiene, food habits, work-life, etc. They began to order their work-life as per the norms of Christianity, demanding exemption from work so that they could attend church and prayer meetings, a direct challenge to the prevalent upper-caste social order. Besides, while attending these sermons and prayers, the Pulayas and Parayas, who barely wore any clothes, appeared in schools and churches wearing clean, white clothes (Mohan 2016:51). The converts also changed their food habits by avoiding 'un-clean food,' including the meat of dead animals, and adopted sanitized food habits (Mohan 2005:43). Inspired by missionary teachings, the converts constructed clean and stable structures, for the congregation, leading to constructing permanent huts using durable materials.

At a spiritual level, the missionary teachings over a while acquired a more independent status wherein these became increasingly interpreted, particularly by the native intermediaries or catechists, to reflect the world view of the Pulayas and Parayas. The essential theme featured in the teachings of most of these catechists was a world free of bondage and exploitation, a theme rooted within their exploitative oppressive existence (Mohan 1999:9). The teachings of catechists couched

this theme within the Biblical phrases and sermons. Thus the missionary endeavor transformed the life-world of the Pulayas and Parayas both externally and internally. A new sanitized body culture based on cleanliness, hygiene, clean clothing, sanitized food, etc., indicated the transformation brought in on the physical body. On the other side, the emotional desire to attend prayers, resorting to prayer to escape social disabilities, using the Bible as a medium to overcome one's caste disabilities, projecting a world free of exploitation despite the violent response it evoked from the landlords and state, points to the changing attitude of the people. Thus, missionary activities such as prayers and sermons offered new social imaginaries that provided them access to physical and mental resources previously denied (Mohan 2016:56).

4.3.2. Conversion and the problem of solidarity

However, as mentioned earlier, the activities of missionaries and the impact of conversion need to be analyzed more critically. The legacy of the missionary religion could, at best, be valued as contentious and contradictory (Madhavan 2008:766). The missionary discourse attempted to address caste disabilities by raising consciousness among the Pulayas and Parayas. The missionaries inverted the Brahminical question of pollution and purity, presented it as a question of cleanliness, and strived to spread awareness regarding the need for hygiene to achieve a higher consciousness (Madhavan 2008:766). However, the missionaries never understood the material conditions, particularly the lack of land and other resources, the adverse conditions of agricultural production, which was responsible for the abject social habitat of the Pulayas and Parayas (Madhavan 2008:766).

The missionaries never addressed the connection between caste-sanctioned material and social disabilities and the subjugated life world of Pulayas and other lower castes. The missionaries bypassed the objective material reality, such as the lack of land responsible for the socio-economic backwardness of the Pulayas and Parayas. Instead, they attempted to engage in a mission of upliftment which couched the caste problem within a narrative of the struggle to capture and rescue the body and souls of the Pulayas and Parayas from the continuing influence of superstition, lack of education,

and the need to reconstitute Pulayas as disciplined, clean, obedient individuals (Mohan 2005:42-44).

Thus the missionary discourse was limited by a paternalistic patronizing attitude wherein they chose to intervene within the spiritual needs of Pulayas and other lower castes, attempting to salvage them from the grip of sin, avoiding the material conditions which were responsible for the socio-economic backwardness of the Pulayas and other lower castes limiting the scope of their mission if not its significance.

Regarding the question of spreading the Christian faith, despite the best intentions of the missionaries, they were always under the spell of constant fear. They believed that despite their best efforts in establishing churches and schools and the success demonstrated by the converts, they could always fall prey to the influence of sin and idleness unless they were watchfully supervised by the missionaries (Mohan 1999:9).

The missionaries feared that the native converts continued to be influenced by local customs and old caste rules despite their best efforts. The search for pure converts, people inspired solely by the call of the soul, was a complicated case. The missionaries were disturbed by the continuous influence of caste preferences among lower caste converts and complained regarding the lack of complete change of faith among the converts (Kooiman 1989:169).

The continuing co-existence of old customs alongside newly adopted Christian beliefs points to the contradictory nature of conversion. Conversion remained a continuous process because the old customs and new faith remained intact and continued to flow into each other. The religious identity of the Pulayas and other similar converts was a continuous process of negotiation between the old customs and the Christian faith (Kooiman 1989:171). Thus, the conversion to Christianity was a complex and contentious process that could never be limited to spreading the Gospel. Instead, the practical socio-economic concerns, age-old caste rules, religious practices, etc., were equally important and continued to influence the converts. Hence the religious identity of the converts had to encom-

pass several contradictions, such as the economic aspirations and the spiritual desires of the lower caste converts, alongside another set of contradictions indicated by the co-existence of the old faith and the new Christian faith.

These inherent limits within the missionary activities in terms of not effectively addressing the caste question and their continuing influence over native converts were revealed when cases of continuing caste discrimination against Pulayas and other slave caste converts within the Christian churches surfaced. Though initial conversions provided socio-economic mobility to Pulayas, they did not immediately elevate their status. They continued to face caste discrimination within the Church, leading to widespread discontent. The conversion to Christianity never actually erased the existing caste prejudices. For example, the Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (hereafter PRDS) was founded by Poiykayil Yohannan to respond to the continuing caste discrimination prevalent within the CMS church (Mohan 1999:13).

Yohannan provided his creative interpretation of Biblical themes, often going beyond Bible (Mohan 2005:44-47).Yohannan invoked the slave past, recalling the sufferings, pain, and anguish endured by the ancestors of Pulayas and Parayas, the agony of the broken families, etc., within his sermons. His followers regarded Yohannan as a prophet who had been tasked to save the deprived Pulayas and Parayas. Yohannan provided a new social imaginary through a re-interpretation of Biblical themes stressing the need to erase caste prejudices prevalent within the Church. Yohannan and the PRDS movement is an example of organized movements which attempted to contest these caste prejudices by mounting a consistent movement to reformulate the lower caste self by rejecting all kinds of caste identities and advocating the unity of all deprived sections (Mohan 1999:13-15).

Similar discontent was reported within the LMS mission. The Shanars, owing to their economic hardships and social deprivation, accepted Christianity and continued to discriminate against the Pulayas and Pariahs (Kooiman 1989:172-173). LMS records provided evidence for continuing caste discrimination against the Pariahs. The predominance of Shanars led to the caste discrimination so

much that the Pulayas and particularly Pariahs converts were forced to form separate congregations to survive (Kooiman 1989:177-178). This discontent, particularly among the Pariahs, was made more evident as they complained about the European bias against the Pariahs. All the top positions were reserved for the Shanars, and converts from slave castes such as Pulayas and Pariahs were forced to live under the shadow of a new kind of caste dominance.

The continuing discrimination was further evidenced by the construction of churches and convening of separate congregations composed exclusively of anyone caste, avoiding contact with other castes even if they enjoyed the same social status. However, the caste feeling was not limited to Shanars. Despite enjoying the same social status and being discriminated as slave castes, Pulayas and Pariahs refused to join ranks together (Kooiman 1989P:173). Thus caste loyalties and prejudices continued and created caste-based congregations.

The caste discrimination resulted in the migration of many Pariahs and Pulayas from the LMS mission to other congregations such as the Salvation Army, American Lutherans, and other missionary societies. Caste unity, even though weak, was replaced by a new kind of competition and rivalries among these new congregations (Kooiman 1989:178). The missionaries undertook several measures to prevent the caste prejudices from turning into schisms and factionalism. They encouraged love feasts, encouraging different caste members to join together under the aegis of the Church to partake in food; the LMS mission also engaged in instructing members of the Church regarding the unchristian nature of the caste system (Kooiman 1989:174). Another strategy was to insist on a complete renunciation of caste identity as a criterion for being a member of the Church (Kooiman 1989:175). The growing discontent forced the missionaries to take steps to form a separate organization, such as the Sadhu Jana Christian Sangham, which would help the Church to mediate the discontent prevalent among the Pulayas and other lower caste converts aiming to discipline the Pulayas and other converts to direct this discontent towards achieving spiritual objectives rather than leading to any form of distinct politics outside the fold of the Church (Mohan 1999:9-11).

However, these measures failed to effectively break the caste ties and contain prejudices against the Pulayas and Pariahs. Thus, social equality within missionary modernity was overridden by caste (Madhavan 2008:766-767). Hence, coproduced its forms of control and discriminatory conditions even while providing social mobility. Conversion had other implications regarding growing differences between converted Pulayas and non-converted Pulayas. Converted Pulayas argued that they are different in terms of faith, embracing a new self based on elements of discipline, cleanliness, equality, and increasingly distinguishing themselves from their non-convert Pulaya brethren. For example, there are references from missionaries who report incidents where converts condemned themselves and others for practicing rites and customs followed by their non-Christian friends (Kooiman 1989:172).

Besides, these differences were increasingly being solidified due to the Travancore state's intervention. Administrative practices such as census created unified caste identities such as Pulayas which were recognized by the state as the legitimately representative for negotiation with the state. Identity formation involves reworking internal differences to forge a uniform image concerning the state's requirements (Mohan 1999:21). Missionary activities led to similar identity forging among the converted. They managed to create more general categories, such as converted Christians or Christian peasants, which reeled under the pressure of caste discrimination. Despite caste-based discrimination and discontent, conversion created concrete, disciplined, and organized Pulaya converts under new organizational initiatives such as the Sadhu Jana Christian Sangham under the Church, preventing the formation of any form of distinct politics and program of action (Mohan 1999:10).

Even while providing spaces of mobility, Missionary intervention deepened the division between Hindu and Christian Pulaya (converted Pulaya), erasing possibilities of forging common ground for the struggle.[25] Thus converted Pulayas, while simultaneously embracing a new faith, were subjected

25 This fact became most explicit in the case of Ayyankali and the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (SJPS). While SJPS was formed in 1907 to represent all the lower castes irrespective of religious denominations, fissures appeared based on religious lines within a few years. By 1912 Christian Pulaya converts formed a separate organization named Christiya Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham. Pambady John Joseph organized Cheramar Mahajana Sabha in 1921, later rechristened as Cheraman Christian Sabha and Kurumban Daivathan's organization, the Hindu Pulaya Maha Sabha. These divisions highlighted the contradictory nature of religious Conversion. While the intervention of Christianity produced positive outcomes, it perpetrated caste practices. In order to contain discontent, the missionaries created organizations such as Christiya Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham to limit the potential for outbursts among

to new forms of mediations and control, which set limits on the possibility of developing a distinct politics, a phenomenon visible even prior to the formation of Kerala in 1956. These divisive tendencies were, in actuality, reflections of a much deeper contentious and contradictory condition. Conversion produced a contradictory condition. It infused a defiant spirit and reconstituted the agrestic groups such as Pulayas to assert themselves against traditional landlordism.

However, it also contained this defiant attitude by mediating and channelizing the Pulayas via organizational initiatives such as the Sadhu Jana Christian Sangham, under the control of the Church, preventing the development of any form of autonomous politics outside the control of the Church. Thus, forming a separate organization for converted Christians foreclosed any possibility of unity among Pulayas. The spirit of defiance infused by missionaries was moderated via new forms of disciplining and control. The co-existence of such contradictory tendencies, i.e., defiance and submission, was a constant factor responsible for weakening joint Pulaya initiatives such as the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham (hereafter SJPS) formed by Ayyankali.

Contradictory tendencies prevented any united front against the Travancore state or the formation of a common political party in the future course. The conversion gave Pulayas a reformed self-identity and an organized voice. It also created internal schisms and new forms of restraints by encouraging the formation of separate organizations such as the Sadhu Jana Christian Samajam, and Cheramar Sangham, which eventually led to the weakening of the SJPS as a political force within Travancore in the early part of the 20th century.

This contradictory and contentious legacy of conversion, i.e., empowering the Pulayas and Parayas while simultaneously containing their discontent from threatening the missionary authority as described above, was not a historical experience limited to the case of SJPS and is traceable in the case of KPMS. The responses of KPMS members on the issue of conversion received from the field reiterate the contradictory nature of subalternity and how it gets reflected in the case of religion.

converted Pulayas. The control of the Church via various organizations led to limiting the potential of Pulaya converts discontent into developing into forging alliances and developing united Dalit movements (Mohan 1999:9-11).

The respondents repeatedly highlighted two issues around which this contradiction is highlighted the most. First, conversion as a model of social mobility, and second the boundaries produced by conversion for larger Dalit solidarities. Among these, the first issue was conversion as a model of social mobility. The historical context within which the missionaries operated, their challenges, the socio-economic transformation, and the limitations of conversion over the newly converted have been detailed in the above section. The background to the spread of missionary activities and the contributions made by missionaries for the upliftment of the Pulayas cannot be neglected. However, in the long run, conversion produced contradictions limiting its attraction as a model of social mobility.

Most importantly, conversion never freed Pulayas of their caste disabilities as incidents of caste-based discrimination within the Church were reported by missionaries which reiterated the limits inherent to conversion (Kooiman 1989:172-178). Additionally, the trends of a reformed Hinduism of the late 19th and early 20th century led to basic moves such as Temple entry which neutralized the questions of religious disability and right to worship, eventually fading out the relevance of conversion as an option for social emancipation (Manmathan 2013:66).

Post to the formation of the state of Kerala, the modernization and implementation of land reforms also impacted the Temple-centered ownership of land owing to the redistribution of surplus land, diminishing the reliance on religious conversion as a form of social mobility (Mannathukkaren 2011:403). The above developments demonstrate the limitation of conversion as a model for mobility- both social and economic. However, material and spiritual mobility provided by missionary modernity in terms of Christianity cannot be altogether discredited, although its legacy is no longer non-questionable.

This contradictory legacy of conversion has increasingly become common sense and was reflected in the responses from the Pulayas. Most respondents in the interview highlighted the discriminatory practices that notably led to conversion among the Pulayas. Most of the responses focused on the

shift in the social status achieved by the Pulayas owing to the embracement of new faith and how such a shift has impacted their relationship with the non-converted Hindu Pulayas. One respondent, Suresh, summed up the general attitude of KPMS about conversion, "Conversion provided a perfect way out for the poor Pulayas. They had access to clean clothes, education, employment, etc. The influence of missionaries also helped them to emerge as a more organized group. Despite these, they tend to have lost their roots. They no longer want to be identified as Pulaya but prefer new names such as Cheramar or Converted Christians even when they do not mind demanding reservations allotted to Pulayas.

Conversion had a double effect. Pulayas who converted became Christians but were not completely acceptable to the fold and occupied a lower position. Pulayas also deserted their tradition and past and increasingly attempted to transform. Nevertheless, the transformation was incomplete due to the caste markers that left them somewhere between. Their position is better than Hindu Pulayas, but they are not equivalent to other Syrian Christian denominations."[26]

Thus the Pulayas who converted have abandoned their past and attempted to recast themselves completely within a new mould to enter a new flock of faithful with no connection to their brethren, even though the process was never complete. Responses reveal the advantage of conversion regarding access to education, material benefits, and political mileage derived from organizational advantages. However, this conversion had a considerable cost as they had to abandon their past- particularly the Pulaya's original claim of being landowners to accept a more subordinate status from which they were to be salvaged.

Mobility via literacy, a new culture of hygiene, a more organized mode of mobilization under the Church, etc., were benefits of conversion. However, along with these benefits of conversion, new challenges emerged, such as continuing caste-based discrimination within the Church fold and a Church-sponsored organization to resolve these contentions, which prevented the mutation of the Pulaya and other similar lower caste discontent from threatening the Church's authority. Thus the

26 Interview with Suresh on 28-10-2018.

abandonment of their previous faith to embrace a promising new faith even while offering mobility never wholly resolved the question of caste discrimination eventually, putting the converted Pulayas in a state of in-betweenness or incomplete transition.

An additional factor related to the conversion issue is the nature of the relation between Hindu Pulayas who form the base of KPMS and their relation with converted Pulayas. This issue is of particular significance because it is directly related to the issue of larger Dalit solidarities. Janaki, another respondent, stated, "the Pulayas were the original inhabitants of the land who were later displaced by Brahmins and other upper castes and subjected to a subordinate position.

Over time through the intervention of social reformers such as Narayana Guru and Ayyankali, they became more aware of their condition and organized themselves against the caste hierarchies. However, some sections found conversion as an option to liberate themselves. Though it was a short-term solution, the converted sections never liberated themselves from caste within the Church and formed new congregations such as PRDS or Dalit churches. Many want to return to the Pulaya fold to receive reservation benefits. However, it is not appreciable as it only shows opportunism. KPMS is not against benefits for converted Pulayas. However, they must be treated separately rather than similar to the Hindu Pulayas".[27]

Thus, similar to Suresh, Janaki attempted to highlight how conversion led a section of Pulayas to abandon their original flock for better conditions and how they failed to achieve their desired ends. The abandonment of the Pulaya community by a section of Pulayas via conversion is never understood as an act of achieving spiritual salvation through embracing a new faith. However, abandonment was followed by an increased emphasis on the difference between the convert and non-convert Pulaya. The converted viewed themselves as the saved and prayed for their brethren to be saved (Mohan 1999:8). This attitude of being a saved group who have achieved salvation and that now the message of salvation needs to be transferred to their Pulaya brethren for they need to be saved is not

27 Interview with Janaki on 28-10-2018.

very much appreciated by the members of KPMS or even Hindu Pulayas who are not members of KPMS.

For most respondents, including Janaki, Pulayas had a very long history where they owned the land before they fell out of grace. The reforms initiated by Ayyankali, SJPS, and later taken up by KPMS are viewed as correcting that lost course and ensuring justice to the Pulayas. Conversion also must be seen from this perspective. However, even though conversion granted mobility to a section of Pulayas, it led to abandoning their old traditions, particularly-Pulaya customary Gods, rituals, etc. Most of the respondents were appreciative of the social emancipation offered by conversion. Nevertheless, they were also critical of how the religious choices drove differences among the Pulayas preventing them from forging common grounds for struggle.

The Christian converts were subject to the control and direction of their respective congregations. Even though these congregations were not absolute, they have led to separate organizations among Pulaya converts. Thus about conversion, Pulayas exhibit a contradictory attitude. Pulayas have achieved emancipation. But they are subject to machinations of respective churches leading to separate mobilizations and organizations instead of common Dalit solidarity by aligning with KPMS. There are signs of contradictory pulls whereby Pulayas are divided in their allegiances-fidelity towards Christianity prevents them from developing any organizational initiative outside the Church's influence. In contrast, there is increasing awareness regarding the need for a more autonomous Dalit movement.

Thus the co-existence of two theoretical consciousness- one implicit consciousness aligning converted Pulayas with non-converts and the other the explicit consciousness aligning the converted with the interests of the mainstream churches. This double consciousness is present within KPMS as even while being sympathetic to the cause of converted Christians, the respondents are critical of their demand for reservation by converted Pulayas as they see such demands as instrumental and opportunistic. Thus KPMS's attitude towards conversion reveals the contradictory nature of conver-

sion, its impact on converted Pulayas, and how this contradictory nature of conversion has, in turn, impacted the politics of KPMS.

CHAPTER 5

The Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha and Reformed Hinduism: crossing a contradictory terrain

The previous chapter focuses on the theme of conversion and the kind of contradictory legacy it produced. Despite the possible spiritual and material benefits imparted by conversion, it created new challenges dividing Pulayas into Christian and Hindu religious denominations, foreclosing possibilities of any larger Pulaya political alliances. However, the contradictory legacy was not limited to conversion.

Another religious theme around which the contradictory condition of Pulaya politics has been articulated is the growing interest in the Temple-centered religious activities, the limitation of a Temple-centered reformed Hinduism, and the political clout of BJP among the Pulayas and how these trends are encouraging contradictory orientations within the KPMS. Alongside conversion, one of the most pertinent issues the respondents raised concern was regarding the relation between KPMS and their continuing relationship with a form of reformed Hinduism.

5.1. KPMS and the Temple centered Hinduism: a case of mainstreaming

Two inter-related sub-themes appear recurrently concerning this issue. One is how Pulayas relate themselves to a Temple-based Hindu religion, and the second is how Hindu Pulayas association with Temple-based Hindu religion has influenced KPMS's agenda and activities. In the case of the first sub-theme, i.e., the growing interest in the Temple religion and increasing participation in Temple-related activities, some background information needs to be presented. As per information provided by Suresh, the KPMS membership is limited to Hindu Pulayas.[28] Religious affiliation is not a complex topic of discussion as most KPMS members interviewed responded that they are Hindus, even though the notion of being a Hindu is loosely conceived. Another respondent Janaki described how the Pulayas locate themselves within the Hindu fold. As per Janaki's description,

28 Interview with Suresh on 28-10-2018.

“the Pulayas were the actual masters of the land, which is evident if one traces the etymological source of the word Pulaya. Pulaya originated from 'Pulam,' meaning 'fields,' indicating their relation to land and agriculture. Pulayas had temples, deities, and rituals, which were non-sanskritised since they included local deities and customary practices.

Later due to the ascendance of Brahmins and Temple-based Hinduism, all land was transferred either as Temple land (Devaswam) or as Brahmin land (Brahmaswam), and the Pulayas were attached as agrestic enslaved people to these lands to cultivate them. According to Janaki, the social transformation of the 19th century, particularly the initiatives of Sree Narayana Guru and later the SNDP movement, were an inspiration for eradicating caste-based religious discrimination. They also allowed lower castes to claim a respectable position for their deities and rituals, claiming access to Temples and establishing their own temples."[29]

Thus this particular phase, i.e., the 19th-century reform, is remembered as a watershed moment. It witnessed several socio-religious reformers, such as Narayana Guru, advocating the abolition of bloody rituals, superstitious practices, discriminatory customs, etc. However, the significance of the 19th-century social transformation, referred to by Janaki as *Navodhanam* (renaissance), is that the period effectively forged different castes to form a Hindu identity. Even though the caste hierarchy was challenged by these social reforms of the 19th century, it also produced a reformed Hinduism broad enough to accommodate lower castes such as Pulayas on their terms. For example, the traditional sites of worship by Pulayas, where ancestral worship, snake worship, etc. was performed, were incorporated into the Temple space. Despite remaining as sites of difference, these spaces were largely neutralized, diminishing their potential owing to incorporating these deities within a hierarchy with the Sanskritised deities such as Vishnu and Shiva as the center of focus.

The Templeisation process, which involves establishing Temple structures, renovation of Temples, or consecrating new idols, involved a sanitization process through which non-Sanskritic deities and rituals were subjected to a mutation and placed within the broad landscape of an emergent reformed

29 Interview with Janaki on 28-10-2018.

Hinduism. Thus, reformed Hinduism was characterized by the purging out of violent and bloody rituals and sacrifices, effectively neutralizing ancient deities such as Madan, Marutha, etc., who were either replaced or Sanskritised and integrated to enlarge the boundaries of the Hindu fold.[30]

While this process of reformed Hinduism accelerated the process of Sanskritisation and neutralization of traditional deities and customs of Pulayas, it failed to neutralize their position as sites of resistance completely. Thus these various sites existed alongside Temple structures creating ground for a contradictory existence.[31] However, the process itself was not unique and has been previously experienced. A similar process was witnessed in Gupta and Post-Gupta phases when Brahminical Hinduism broadened its textual, ritualistic, and theological base to evolve into a more multiplex belief system. The period witnessed the transformation of Brahmanism to Puranic Hinduism as it acquired a more popular image. This form of Hinduism, referred to as Puranic Hinduism, distinguished itself from its Vedic Smarta roots and evolved slowly and gradually by continuously expanding, absorbing, and synthesizing diverse belief systems (Nath 2001:20).

This transformation was never an abrupt event but the outcome of a long process necessitated by several factors such as the growing challenge from Buddhism and Jainism, decline of foreign trade, growing trend of land grants, particularly in the peripheral region, and an increasing need to expand agricultural activities in these regions, the need for the enormous collective labor force to cultivate these new tracts of land. The practice of land grants (most of which fell outside the Indo-Gangetic plains) necessitated the demand for a vast labor force to meet the need for the cultivation of such land. There emerged the need for a class of loyal subordinates who would bring these vast swaths of

30 This process is recollected by many as an act where reformed monotheism replaced traditional inferior Gods (Mohan 2005:38).

31 This issue, however, is not unique to Hindu Pulayas. Many converted Pulayas continued to offer prayers or perform customary rituals to non-Christian deities as part of their age-old practice. Thus converted or non-converted Pulaya's age-old Gods, customs continue to hold influence within their life even though the degree of the influence is debatable. The continuing hold of these practices, such as offerings to ancestors, animal sacrifice, etc., points to the limitation of missionary preaching and reformed Hinduism to nullify the significance of the Pulaya religious sites and beliefs. However, it points to a contradictory process of transition where the embracement of a new faith leads to a condition where a continuous interaction between two different religious systems, each drawing up space for oneself and simultaneously imposing one's influence.

new land under cultivation. Mobilizing the locally available labor force from the tribals was the most viable option.

However, the Tribal population was hostile towards the Brahmin settlers as they viewed them as intruders. Besides, the Brahmins lacked economic and military means to enforce their will. Additionally, forcing the tribals to work for the new landowners meant shifting from a traditional method of growing food and adopting a system based on intensive field cultivation, rooted within a diverse and vibrant religious system (Nath 2001:28). Thus these new socio-economic circumstances, particularly the incorporation of Tribal and pre-literate sections within the Hindu fold and the necessity to hold them, necessitated the need to develop a belief system that, while catering to the elite sections of the society, still appealed to the Tribal sections (Nath 2001:28). Towards this end, Puranic Hinduism encouraged the incorporation of Tribal and folk myths, deities, rituals, etc., as part of its effort to transform itself into a more open and acceptable system of belief. The emergent Puranic Hinduism simultaneously absorbed or deconstructed the prevalent tribal and folk elements and recast itself in a more popular accessible form. It became more acceptable to tribal or lower sections of society and became their main point of reference in matters of belief (Nath 2001:28-30). Thus, a temple-tribe axis emerged, pointing to the expanding and synthesizing nature of Puranic Hinduism.

This expansive and acquiescent nature of Puranic Hinduism with characteristic elements such as temple, incorporation of tribal elements of religion such as physical traits, iconic features, ritual, and mythical beliefs associated with the Tribal religious world also point to a certain degree of Tribalisation of Brahminical pantheon (Nath 2001:34). However, in broad terms, the expansion of Puranic Hinduism reveals attempts by Brahmanism to overcome the challenges thrown up by Buddhism and the emergent socio-economic changes such as the land grants and the need to cultivate them to maintain economic dominance, etc. by evolving a liberal and open-ended belief system providing Brahmanism a popular orientation by incorporating non-Brahmin elements (Nath 2001:29-34).

Even though belonging to a different period and is driven by different reasoning, the expansion and incorporation of tribal elements point to a process of holding together disparate religious beliefs to consolidate and perpetuate caste dominance. The most significant feature of this process was a condition where contradictory elements co-exist, similar to the many developments related to Hindu reforms, especially demands related to the temple within colonial Kerala, particularly during the second half of the 19th century and early part of the 20th century A.D. For example, in the case of Kerala, the Temple ecological complex had historically perpetuated Namboothiri Brahmin dominance within Kerala (Gurukkal 2010:290-297). In terms of the land it controlled and being the seat of Brahmin authority, Temple tends to be the point of reference around which the social life was structured. Temple perpetuated the hierarchical caste structure providing material and ideological background. Hence, any change in the status of the Temple, i.e., any reform-related Temple, could alter the course of social life. The 19th-century reforms within colonial Kerala witnessed the emergence of the temple as a contentious space where an inter-section of contradictory feelings emerged, i.e., the desire to challenge the caste hierarchy by threatening the status of the temple while simultaneously appropriating the temple to achieve social mobility.

A revealing case would be the development of the Ezhyavas. The SNDP movement co-opted and reworked Vedantic Hinduism, inventing a reformed monotheism, which, while appropriating and interpreting traditional resources, displaced old gods as 'inferior' (Mohan 2005:37-38). This condition where traditional resources such as a temple or Vedantic teachings are reinterpreted to match one's religious demands proves the contradictory nature of subaltern protests. The temple's continuing value for subaltern groups such as Ezhyavas, Pulayas, etc., even while challenging the caste hierarchies sanctioned by the temple.

This pursuit for a reformed Hinduism via reinterpretation of traditional resources such as temples and Sanskritised deities while simultaneously challenging the various Brahminical features points to the contradictory nature of transformation experienced by Ezhyavas, Pulayas, and other similar lower castes. The demands raised by Ezhyavas and other castes for entry into the temple, claiming

rights over a temple or deity, existed alongside continuous challenges to Brahminical symbols and customs. This contradictory existence of deference and defiance simultaneously to the same structure, i.e., the temple, reveal the prominence accorded and continuing hold of the temple over the subaltern social groups despite being the target of subaltern resistance for being the sanctioning seat of caste authority.[32] Nevertheless, more significantly, they point to how contradictory tendencies shaped the demands of organizations such as SNDP, SJPS, and later KPMS. Traditional icons and structures such as temples, which were contentious spaces because being sources of upper caste authority, were re-interpreted as part of a reformed Hinduism. The lower caste increasingly appropriated them even while demanding the dismantling of Brahminical dominance. Additionally, the princely state of Travancore adopted several measures such as the Temple entry declaration, nomination of various caste groups to the princely state legislative assembly, and preferential treatment for lower castes, particularly Pulayas, to ensure that the Hindu majority was maintained.

The overall impact of these measures was the emergence of a reformed Hinduism, which offered mobility via measures such as temple entry while restricted mobility within the temple structure, preventing any larger political designs and actions on the part of organizations such as SNDP or in this case KPMS. Thus the experience of reformed Hinduism, similar to conversion, emerged as a contradictory model. Like conversion, while it provided mobility, it also created new constraints for lower castes such as Ezhyavas, Pulayas, etc. reformed Hinduism was characterized by restrictions imposed on the lower caste, particularly access to temples and priesthood being watered down increasingly attracted subaltern groups. Additionally, encouragement by the princely state of Travancore, particularly measures such as Temple entry aimed to appease Ezhyavas, Pulayas, etc., continuing discrimination despite conversion made the temple-centered religion a viable option for claim-

32 This contradiction is similar to the contradictory feature outlined within Ranajit Guha's argument regarding insurgents attacking places of worship. Temple established by a Thakur (landlord) symbolized their wealth and authority, and hence naturally entering or desecrating the temple automatically undermined his authority. Guha states that performing a ritual or appropriation of temple space was also an essential strategy alongside desecration. However, notably, all these actions revolved around the structure of the Temple. Thus Temple was a contradictory space that allowed the intersection of contradictory feelings- a challenge to the landlord's authority alongside continuing hold of the landlord's religious beliefs over the insurgent and failure to provide an alternative. Even though Guha stressed how the insurgent appropriated and inverted the religious symbols of the landlord, the co-existence of desecration and Sanskritisation reveals the contradictory nature of subaltern resistance and how this contradictory orientation influences subaltern actions (Guha 1982:72-75).

ing social mobility. Thus, despite the opposition to traditional upper-caste rituals, customs, and structures such as temples, they were never wholly abandoned due to their attachment to upper-caste dominance. Instead, they were appropriated and re-interpreted by subaltern castes such as Ezhyavas, Pulayas, etc., as they guaranteed social mobility. Thus, the same structures, rituals, or deities became subjects of defiance and deference, revealing the contradictory legacy of reformed Hinduism.

This contradiction generated by a reformed Hinduism continued in later periods and has influenced the agenda and activities of later organizations such as KPMS. Responses from respondents such as Janaki provided insights into the contradictory conditions of the Hindu Pulaya. The contradictory condition of Hindu Pulayas is characterized by a simultaneous embracement of a reformed Hinduism, which includes the Temple as its key feature, which has historically been the source of Pulaya domination.

Janaki qualifies her statement by arguing that Temple was not a structure whose meaning was fixed despite being a site of exploitation. As per Janaki, "there was a time when we were not even allowed to enter the adjacent land lying around the temple. Caste rules imposed restrictions on our movement and access to temples, public roads, and other amenities. However, several changes were brought due to the initiatives led by Narayana Guru and other reformers. A Navodhanam, by which we mean change, was initiated, which inaugurated a socio-religious change.

Pulayas had their Gods. Many of the current temples had their origin in the discovery made by a Pulaya individual. For instance, the idols at many prominent temples, such as the Padmanabha Swamy temple, were recovered by a Pulaya older woman. These temples owing to Brahmin ascendance were kept away from the Pulayas. However, there are several other temples administered by KPMS which were maintained with the support and association with the upper caste. There are cases where people from all castes co-operated. Narayana Guru and Ayyankali all received support from progressive sections of the upper caste to pursue reforms within Hinduism. Hence, religious meaning

need not be fixed. It is subject to change. The Pulayas have abandoned practices such as bloody sacrifices, etc., considered socially unacceptable, even though ceremonial performances persist. However, these do not disturb the consensus to embrace reformed Hinduism. Similarly, the temple and other customary practices have also undergone several transformations, mainly due to the reforms initiated under Ayyankali, Narayana Guru, and others leading to a broadly reformed Hinduism".[33]

As per Suresh, even though caste-based discriminations persist, various measures such as the Temple entry led to the constitution of a Hindu collective, where a motley of castes who broadly subscribe to a wide variety of gods and customs but have some common denominators such as temple, idol worship, common deities, etc. KPMS has followed this lead line of argument to connect itself with the idea of a reformed Hinduism under the new leadership of Punnala Sreekumar since 2006. [34]

The Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha has increasingly interpreted itself as an organization that follows the footsteps of Ayyankali, Narayana Guru, who demanded the eradication of discriminatory practices such as untouchability, allowing access to religious spaces such as temples, right to worship, and accept the claim of Pulayas and other lower caste had in historically constituting the temple based Hinduism, etc.[35] The attempt to locate itself within the tradition of Narayana Guru and Ayyankali points to an earnest effort to place KPMS broadly within a mainstream Hindu identity while subscribing to a reformist religious standpoint. This involved abandoning old Gods and bloody customs while simultaneously subscribing to a certain degree of Sanskritisation (establishing temples or restructuring traditional sites of worship like temples, worshipping Sanskritised gods, and performing tantric practices).

These attempts also put the Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha in a contradictory position when defining its relation to temple-based Hinduism. This position is particularly notable as it reflects a contradictory standpoint where two opposing tendencies intersect- the desire to project a mainstream Hindu

33 Interview with Janaki on 28-10-2018.

34 Interview with Suresh on 28-10-2018.

35 Interview with Suresh on 28-10-2018.

identity by appropriating and re-producing Sanskritised rituals and customs alongside strong feelings of dislike for Sanskritised systems and Brahminical authority.

This approach of subscribing to a reformed Hindu identity while simultaneously criticizing it has informed the formulation of KPMS's reform agenda, which has twin objectives. One is internal reform, and the second is external reform. While external reform aims to strengthen KPMS to become a pressure group similar to organizations such as SNDP and broadly determines KPMS's orientation towards other social groups and organizations, the internal reforms are significant as these relate KPMS to the idea of reformed Hinduism.

The internal reforms agenda adopted by KPMS involve strengthening the community via intervention by KPMS, encouraging the standardization of various customary rituals of Pulayas related to occasions such as birth, death, marriage, etc.[36]Besides standardizing rituals, KPMS also aims to establish its Tantric school to train priests (from all castes) to maintain nearly 350 Temples directly administered by various KPMS branches. Most of these temples have sanskritised features even though non-Sanskritic local deities worshiped in both sanskritised and non-sanskritised modes. Many of these temples have Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic deities residing side by side. For example, there are temples where Brahmin priests perform rituals where non-Sanskritic deities reside and Sanskritic deities. Rituals such as offering toddy, tobacco, and nutmeg exist alongside offering milk and fruits, symbolizing two distinct modes of worship. Additionally, ceremonies such as the ceremonial offering of cock or performing Kuruthi (ceremonial sacrifice done using a red paste to commemorate age-old sacrifices where animal blood was used) persist.[37]

This non-Brahminical custom within a predominantly visible Brahminical temple structure indicates a trend of Sanskritisation among the members of KPMS and, in general, within Hindu Pulayas who belong to other organizations. This phenomenon is not surprising and has not gone unnoticed. One

36 KPMS also aims to create institutions to address economic hardships faced by the community. Panchami, a self-help group initiative to foster savings habits among female members to support self-employment initiatives such as small industrial units or catering units, etc., was started in 2007. Information gathered from an interview with Suresh on 28-10-2018.

37 Interview with Ayyan on 27-10-2018.

of the respondents, Ayyan, responded that the temples and deities under various Pulaya initiatives later brought under KPMS had practices such as sacrificing hen/animals, which was inconsistent with modern sensibilities and needed to be reformed.[38] While non-Sanskritic practices persist, they are increasingly regarded as customs that need to be reformed. Moreover, KPMS and non KPMS Hindu Pulayas worshipped Sanskritised deities such as Shiva, Vishnu, etc. Thus, the growing urge to sanitize customs and deities or at least neutralize them by transforming many of these customs into more proper forms for performance points to Temple-based Hinduism's increased influence.

Thus there is an increased acceptance of Brahminical deities, ritualism, and Temple culture. Similarly, there is a demand among community members to initiate a new culture of sanitized worship, one which is bereft of sacrifices or bloody rituals. All these demands figure prominently among the internal reform agenda of KPMS. Thus in terms of priests, rituals, and customary practices, there is increased inclination among Pulayas to adopt a strand of reformed Hinduism similar to a reformed monotheism invented by Narayana Guru (Mohan 2005:38). Many of the steps and objectives adopted by KPMS as part of their internal reform agenda matches trends within the Ezhyava community in the 1920s, where they aimed for a reformed Hinduism and, with that objective, established temples officiated by Ezhyava priests and a Tantric school to train these priests (Manmathan 2013:64-65).

The growing Hinduising tendencies (attaching more to Temple-based culture, rituals, adopting or training in Brahminical priesthood) is evident in the demands made by KPMS for reforms in Temple administration, where the admittance of Dalit priests achieved some success in Temples under state Devaswam Temples (Roopesh 2017:13-14). These steps are interpreted as part of the democratization of Temple power (though not sufficient). The control over Temple is no longer exclusive and is increasingly distributed among different castes previously kept outside the Hindu fold.

Overall the acts of adopting rituals and customs, the establishment of Temple, etc. to be part of a reformed Hinduism has placed KPMS in a middle position similar (though not identical) to

38 Interview with Ayyan on 27-10-2018.

Ayyankali, as KPMS has been successfully pushed the adoption of standardized rituals and customary practices forwards to become part of a reformed Hinduism. These various shifting positions of Pulayas-from being owners of the land to agrestic enslaved people, to being agents of social renaissance, and finally being part of an emergent united Hindu category is never a non-contentious unanimous change but one marked with contradictions owing to a tenuous balance between divisive opinions.

The above developments involve an act of appropriation and inversion, offering a degree of mobility as Pulayas enter and claim the rituals, customs, and spaces which were exclusively reserved for upper castes. However, the continuous emphasis on Temple has led to the replacement of traditional deities and customs by Brahminical practices imposing new limits on Pulayas via integration into a sanskritised Hinduism. This process has prevented the formation of larger political solidarities, particularly between Hindu Pulayas and converted Pulayas.

5.2. KPMS and the subaltern solidarity

The various trends such as renovation and establishment of temples, demanding reservation within state-funded temple administration boards and temples, adopting Brahminical priesthood and ritualism, embracing Sanskritic deities, demanding the abolition of age-old discriminatory customs such as the ban on lower caste and woman entry in certain temples, etc. underlines the growing Hinduising trend expressed within KPMS which has been increasingly influencing the general agenda of KPMS, particularly the hardening of KPMS's position towards converted Pulayas, the second subtheme mentioned at the beginning of the chapter.

The growing attachment to a reformed Hinduism within KPMS has, in general, impacted its agenda and activities, particularly engagement with converted Pulayas and other subaltern social groups. Most respondents agreed with Janaki that even though there were similarities between Christian Pulayas and Hindu Pulayas, the former abandoned Hindu Pulayas for temporary benefits. Hence, affir-

mative action policies were unacceptable for any demand for sharing benefits of socio-economic mobility between Hindu and Christian Pulayas.[39]

This position of KPMS on converted Pulayas reflects the influence of a very long schism that had emerged in the 1940s, which was responsible for the weakening of Ayyankali and SJPS within Travancore. As discussed in the third chapter, the appeasement politics of Travancore princely state, redistribution of resources, particularly land and government jobs, encouraging and favoring Hindu Pulayas against converted Pulayas consolidated Hindu Pulayas under the leadership of Ayyankali. The predominance of Hindu Pulayas encouraged fissiparous tendencies, which splintered SJPS, leading to the formation of separate organizations such as Ayanavar Sabha Cheramar Sangham, etc.

Alongside these tendencies, concerted effort by missionaries to form separate organizations for converted Pulayas and Parayas, such as the Christiya Sadhu Jana Sangham, effectively contained the brewing discontent within the church among the converted Pulayas preventing any kind of splintering leading to a possible autonomous subaltern initiative (Mohan 1999:9-10). The division among the Pulayas along the religious lines reveals the contradictory legacy of religions. Notably, despite offering mobility, Christianity and reformed Hinduism led to the imposition of new forms of constraints and divisions, preventing the possibility of any unity among Pulayas that could eventually lead to larger political alliances and produce more comprehensive social transformation.

Similar to the period of Ayyankali and SJPS, conversion and reformed Hinduism have led to a contradictory condition in the case of the Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha. Particularly with the growing interest among KPMS members in temple-related activities and subsequently the gradual but consistent efforts by BJP to spread its influence via focusing on the temple as a nerve center to disseminate their political ideas. The fault lines created during the colonial phase led to the weakening of unity among the Pulayas, dividing them into Hindu and Christian Pulayas, which was the most significant reason for the weakening of the Ayyankali-led Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham. These fault lines further hardened in a later period, particularly in post-1990's which witnessed an increased in-

39 Interview with Janaki on 28-10-2018.

terest in temple-centered activities by members of KPMS, which interestingly coincided with the interest of the BJP in Kerala.

The hardening of KPMS's position is attributed to the growing influence of the BJP within the ranks of KPMS. Most Temple-related activities have led to a sharing of social space and more interaction between different caste groups, particularly regarding the management of Temples, organizing Temple festivals, etc. This space, as per Sabu, is where BJP has been actively intervening and mobilizing.[40] The activities of the BJP have focused on deepening the already existing nascent division between Hindu Pulayas and converted Pulayas.

Though the support for BJP is absent at the electoral level, BJP has lent support to issues such as supporting demand for Temple reforms, notably appointing priests from the Dalit background, encouraging the involvement of Pulayas and other lower caste within temple administration. However, the most crucial issue for BJP concerning Pulayas has been the highlighting differences between Hindu Pulayas and converted Pulayas about reservation.

Among the above-discussed issues, the most crucial issue is the difference between Hindu and converted Pulayas. The BJP has tended to promote the argument that the converted Pulayas have benefitted from conversion and hence should not be allowed the benefits of reservation enjoyed by Hindu Pulayas. The Hindu Pulayas and converted Pulayas are not similar in their status and must be treated differently. Though aimed at driving religious animosity between two groups, the argument has attracted the attention of members within KPMS who, despite being sympathetic to converted Pulayas, tend to see them as competitors who could reduce the Hindu Pulayas claim the reservation in education and employment.

The fault lines among the Hindu and Christian Pulayas have been interestingly encouraged by the BJP at the local level to achieve political success. As mentioned earlier, despite achieving no concrete political success (in terms of winning a critical number of seats at the state, parliament, or lo-

40 Interview with Sabu on 28-10-2018.

cal self-government level), the continuous emphasis of the BJP on this theme has only added to deepen the already existent divisions within the Pulayas.

Additionally, BJP has, in general, been working towards attracting lower castes, particularly Pulayas (for they form the largest SC Hindu caste), into the BJP fold through locating issues that are of common interest for both BJP and Pulayas. There are two levels at which BJP has attempted to formulate the issue. One is by actively intervening at the local level, particularly in small temples at village and town levels, focusing on capturing the temple administration committees. These committees often include members from lower castes, particularly Pulayas.

Though many Pulaya nominees often recognize mere tokenism, they tend to view these acts as recognition of the changing ways or new Hindu social life emerging under the leadership of BJP or RSS.[41] Most of the temple-centered activities tend to accommodate Pulayas and members from OBC or SC sections as part of the broad strategy to broaden the political base of the BJP. Besides, BJP and RSS have been, as per Sabu, attempting to emphasize a renewed spirit of Hindu brotherhood to match the challenge posed by the influence wielded by minorities within Kerala state politics.

Another important topic of concern has been the Temple administration. This includes reforms (Devaswam reforms), where KPMS, more than the BJP, has been exerting pressure regarding the implementation of the reservation to all administrative posts within Devaswam to ensure proportionate representation of Hindu lower castes, which are currently dominated by the upper castes. The state temple administration (Dewaswam boards) predominantly comprises upper castes.

As per Suresh, for a very long period, there has been a consistent demand among members belonging to Ezhyavas, Pulayas, and other lower castes to ensure proper representation for all castes designated as Hindus in temple administration. Even though Dewaswam boards have witnessed nominal representation over periods with nominees from SNDP being nominated, most ritual-associated va-

41 Interview with Sabu on 28-10-2018.

cancies, particularly posts of Priests, have primarily been drawn from the traditional Namboothiri Brahmin caste.[42]However, there has been an increase in the number of members interested to learn and performing tantric rituals.

Most of these youths have enrolled themselves as part of regular priesthood training programs conducted by Tantric schools across Kerala. The growing interest among the Pulayas to engage in learning and performing puja as per Sanskritised traditions is evident from the decision of the Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha to start its Tantric training center.[43]Pulayas and Ezhyavas interest in learning and training in proper Sanskritic rituals to become qualified priests has brought forth new issues. KPMS has successfully lobbied successive governments to appoint Dalit priests to Hindu Temples. Despite the success and appointment of Dalit priests, caste discrimination persists. Many lower caste priests have faced boycott and non-cooperation the demand for such appointments persist (Roopesh 2017:13-14).

Interestingly on issues such as the appointment of non-Brahmin priests or implementing reservations in temple administration, BJP has been caught in a web. BJP has predominantly remained confined to the upper caste quarters which has prevented it from effectively lobbying for non-upper caste Hindu caste groups,.

As per Sabu, who also happens to be an office-bearer of the BJP, the BJP's biggest drawback has been its upper caste image, which it has been unable to shed despite its best effort.[44] There has been active posturing on BJP and RSS to attract members from within other communities, especially Ezhyavas and Pulayas, the two largest Hindu caste groups. However, owing to its upper-caste orientation, it has been unable to push an agenda that can accommodate demands raised by KPMS, especially concerning temple administration reforms or implementation of reservations.

42 Interview with Suresh on 28-10-2018.

43 Interview with Suresh on 28-10-2018.

44 Interview with Sabu on 28-10-2018.

Despite this drawback, the success of the BJP and the rise of Narendra Modi are viewed as a reflection of the rise of plebian, one among themselves. In Suresh's opinion, there is strong support for the BJP brand among the youth within the ranks of KPMS, for many views this as the rise of backward caste groups. The BJP has been cashing on it as an entry point into the Pulaya constituency. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, BJP deliberately adopted techniques of co-option by nominating Pulayas into the local Temple administration to integrate them into the Hindutva fold, even though it has not yielded any electoral benefits (Roopesh 2020:12).

The above two themes show growing sanskritising tendencies within KPMS even though these tend to be dubbed as part of reformed Hinduism. Alignment and integration into a reformed Hinduism by entering Temples, owning and operating them, occupying various Temple administrative positions, and the priesthood are acts that qualify as appropriation and inversion. However, these inversions are predicated on the elite structures such as Temple rather than on an alternative non-Sanskritic structure.

Reformed Hinduism, while offering access to Temple and status mobility, limits the KPMS's reform agenda within the boundaries of the Temple, eliminating the possibility for any other more extensive alternative approach by involving other social groups, mainly converted Pulayas. Besides, the resistance and mobility acquired through appropriating Temple structure are lost by limiting oneself to Temple. Despite being significant, the political intervention of the BJP has not had any electoral fruits even though it has accentuated the rift between KPMS and converted Pulayas preventing scope for any more significant lower-caste political formation.

Thus, the appropriation and the implementation of reforms connected with temple-based Hinduism have gathered momentum within KPMS and even yielded results. It has also prevented the possibility of KPMS’s potential to develop into an umbrella organization to unite different Pulaya segments, mainly Hindu and converted Pulayas. The reform agenda adopted by KPMS involving internal reforms have, in actuality, resulted in standardization and consolidation of KPMS members and

even Pulayas outside to get increasingly integrated into the mainstream Hindu fold despite the strong reformist streak.

This internal reform has resulted in the external posturing of KPMS as a Hindu Pulaya organization. Despite its best intentions, it has prevented the association of KPMS with other Pulaya organizations, particularly organizations associated with converted Pulayas. Notably, KPMS, despite its adoption of a reformed Hinduised orientation, has been actively demanding the implementation of reservation in institutions that were wholly dominated by upper castes, such as the temple administration, for a very long period. However, the mobility and reform potential of KPMS's internal and external reform agenda has existed alongside a more restricted constrained programme preventing alliances between KPMS-led Hindu Pulayas and converted Pulayas. Thus KPMS's engagement with reformed Hinduism and subsequent outcomes present a contradictory condition. Despite achieving a certain degree of mobility, KPMS has been constrained by its Hinduised orientations and sanskritising streaks to enter larger subaltern alliances, particularly with converted Pulayas.

5.3. KPMS and the question of religion – a case of contradictory consciousness

The Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha helps us understand the contradictory nature of subaltern consciousness concerning religion. Both dominance and resistance are expressed simultaneously in this condition, most notably within religion. Religion, one of the main components of the subalternity, exhibits its contradictory nature. Hence, examining religious movements/choices among subaltern social groups helps understand how dominance and resistance engage and attempt to transform each other. Religious upheavals, reformist tendencies, conversions, and new religious denominations are signs of continuous struggle between the dominant and the subordinate.

In the case of KPMS, there are two visible religious scenarios of contradictory consciousness available for consideration. One is conversion, and the other is reformed Hinduism. The social disabilities imposed by caste made conversion a natural choice for Pulayas as it offered social, material, and spiritual liberation. However, there was caste discrimination alongside liberation, which led to discontent among Pulayas. Instead of addressing the issue effectively, the Church formed associa-

tions such as the Christiya Sadhu Jana Sangham to divert discontent into a more disciplined spiritual inquiry whereby the converted Pulayas were exhorted to dedicate themselves to being more devoted Christians.

Thus conversion emerged as a sign of resistance and provided mobility. It also restricted transforming discontent into an independent, autonomous initiative by converted Pulayas. Thus resistance existed alongside the new form of restrictions. This contradictory nature of conversion had significant implications. It led to the perpetuation of divisions between converted and non-converted Pulayas preventing any future possibility of a broader Pulaya consolidation. Similar tendencies existed among the Hindu Pulayas.

The members of KPMS, predominantly Hindu Pulayas, tend to treat converted Pulayas differently from themselves despite both sharing the same socio-economic conditions. The response from the field collectively voices two points. The converted Pulayas are assessed as a section that deserted the core flock at a particular juncture, meaning the non-converted Hindu Pulayas for achieving socio-economic benefits. They tend to identify themselves under different categories, such as converted Christians or Cheramars, but tend not to declare themselves as Pulaya. This disinterest in associating with one's caste and past is a point of contention for KPMS. Even after conversion, the converted Pulayas have faced caste-based discrimination, proving the limitation of the acts of conversion.

The KPMS members tend to believe the act of conversion created a distance between Christian and Hindu Pulayas preventing any joint political initiative. Despite having organizations such as CSDS where Pulayas are admitted without religious affiliations, religion-based divisions tend to divide the Pulayas, negatively affecting the prospects of a common political project. Thus conversion, while offering mobility, also produced new controls. While the liberatory tendencies of conversion tend to provide mobility, internal organizational arrangements sponsored by various churches prevented the development of an autonomous movement.

The second point is related to KPMS's association with Hinduism. The socio-religious upheavals within colonial Kerala in the second half of 19th century A.D put pressure on the state of Travancore to adopt measures mainly to neutralize the pressure built by reform movements from within lower castes which challenged caste dominance and demanded more reforms and rights. The fear of losing the Hindu majority due to lower castes' mass conversion also accentuated the intervention. With these objectives in mind, the princely state of Travancore adopted several measures which formed an integral part of the general reformatory tendencies which were inaugurated in the 19th century A.D by social reformers such as Narayana Guru.

Like conversion, reformed Hinduism (which included abolishing discriminatory religious practices and violent customs such as sacrifices) had contradictory influence over leaders such as Ayyankali and SJPS. The princely state of Travancore's various measures, such as Temple entry, state patronage in terms of political representation within the princely state assembly, financial assistance in various grants, land, preferential treatment in government employment, etc., created a contradictory condition.

Ayyankali and SJPSs entered a phase where they supported a Hindu state which actively promoted upper-caste dominance in return for patronage while simultaneously mounting pressure on the same to correct its caste-based bias. These assertions and pressure culminated in the Temple entry move, which diffused the option for social mobility via conversion while simultaneously neutralizing lower caste radicalism to project a Hindu majority. The patronage offered by the state (which in turn was a guarantee against conversion) and reformed Hinduism offered an alternate route to mobility even though it imposed a contradictory strain upon Ayyankali and the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham. This historical legacy of Ayyankali and SJPS later influenced KPMS.

KPMS as a successor to Ayyankali and SJPS inherited this contradictory legacy. This contradiction has expressed itself primarily in the form of the continuing fidelity of KPMS towards a Temple-based Hinduism and how this attachment has distanced itself from forming alliances with converted

Pulayas. The activities of KPMS have significantly concentrated on emphasizing and encouraging internal reforms. These reforms include Sanskritisation and mainstreaming as part of the Hindu fold, including appropriating Sanskritised practices, establishing and renovating Temples, demanding implementation of temple reforms, particularly reservation in appointing priests and other temple officials, etc. This consolidation as part of mainstream Sanskritised Hinduism while simultaneously contesting Brahminical authority and influence reiterates KPMS's contradictory position.

Thus even while achieving mobility via appropriating mobility offered by a temple-based Hinduism, the same process has deepened their divisions with converted Pulayas, despite KPMS‘s members agreeing that the converted Pulayas continue to lag. reformed Hinduism in post-Kerala formation under KPMS has witnessed a trend similar to the Ayyankali period. Continuing fidelity to Hinduism has increasingly separated the Hindu Pulayas and KPMS from forging larger alliances with converted Pulayas. KPMS reflects a contradictory politics characterized by appropriation of mobility offered by Hinduising tendencies such as Temple entry and participation in Templeisation processes even when they tend to limit the prospects for any more extensive subaltern solidarity via joining hands with the converted Pulayas.

Thus, while offering moments of mobility, both conversion and reformed Hinduism were also laced with new forms of dominance. There exists an inherent contradiction within each of these choices because even when they witness the assertion by Pulayas, Pulayas are also constrained by the limits set by their choices and cannot move beyond choices other than Temple or Church. Thus, Temple or Church, while offering mobility, also put riders producing new contradictions. In the case of KPMS, this contradiction appears in two ways. Hindu Pulayas subscribe to Sanskritisation and Temple even when they contest the prevalence of caste-based discrimination. Conversion while offering a new faith prevents any creative mode of resisting continuing intra-church discriminations. Both tendencies undercut the possibility of any autonomous subaltern movement. Thus, a Temple or Church, despite being a source of reverence and mobility, also becomes a source of contestation

and discord. This co-existence of dominance and resistance encouraged by the same belief is the key to understanding the contradiction within which KPMS exists and operates.

CHAPTER 6
Conclusion

Scholars have been preoccupied with why subaltern movements (lower caste, labor, Adivasi's movements, etc.) tend to accommodate the interests of ruling groups that sanction their conditions of subordination even while resisting them? Inquiries have zeroed on the nature of subaltern consciousness, or subalternity as the key to understand this question. Nevertheless, the nature of subalternity has been a point of debate.

It has been translated as a state of subordination, drawing from the meaning of the term subaltern, which means subordinate. However, this meaning of subalternity received renewed attention in the 1980s, particularly since the inception of works by James C Scott and Subaltern studies. These studies shifted the meaning of subalternity from subordination to an autonomous resistant consciousness existing outside the influence of the elite. However, these definitions provided extreme standpoints, i.e., subordination or autonomous resistance with no possibility for any in-between space.

The current work defines subalternity as a state of contradictory consciousness. In this condition, subalterns may have a double consciousness state wherein subalterns (including any subordinate group) may simultaneously exhibit resistance and subordination to the same structures of authority. Subalternity, or to use Gramscian equivalent term common sense, represents the original thought of the subalterns based on immediate observation of the world reality, which is composed of diverse experiences such as domination, negotiation, accommodation, and contestation. Since everyday experiences are not reducible to any specific condition of either dominance or resistance, subalternity emerges as a state of contradictory consciousness composed of moments of dominance and resistance. There are different fields where subalternity as contradictory consciousness is visible such as folklore, language, myths, hearsays, etc. Nevertheless religion is the most crucial component where the marks of the contradictory nature of subalternity can be discerned.

The most evident form in which this contradiction is expressed within the religious domain is in moments of religious upheavals, conversion, the rise of prophetic figures, demand for religious reforms, and puritan movements. In these forms, the dominant group attempts to promote a standard order by imposing a dominant common religion, aiming to overlook contestations and differences raised by subaltern groups as non-antagonistic. In contrast, the autonomous aspirations of subalterns may challenge this dominant religious order revealing the inherent contradictions and exposing how a tenuous unity is fabricated and projected by dominant structures by promoting a common religion.

The subaltern responses (conversion, deviant sects, and religious reform movements) would propose an alternative order against the dominant. This alternative proposed by subaltern groups, even while rejecting the dominant faith, may simultaneously affiliate and locate itself broadly within the boundaries of any mainstream religion through borrowing scriptural or ritual resources from the dominant faith.

This tendency is universal across the world. For example, in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, there was an official version of Christianity endorsed and propagated by the church. However, there were always popular religious movements among the masses, which were often opposed to the structured, intellectual, and rigidly ritualistic Catholicism and instead promoted a popular Catholicism based on devotion, poverty, and cooperation. The history of religions, especially dominant religions, has struggled to maintain doctrinal unity and institutional cohesiveness by co-opting, dominating, or hegemonising the popular/subaltern trends by establishing monastic orders and popular evangelical movements (Gramsci 1971:327-332). The dominant thread would re-establish its link to the subaltern through these activities and renew its universal status. In contrast, parallel to these attempts, the subalterns may attempt to appropriate and invert the dominant religion even while simultaneously subscribing to the same. Thus, religion reflects the more extensive nature of subalternity as a contradictory condition and reflects the same as it is composed of these two opposing but interacting religions, i.e., dominant (universal) and subaltern (subordinate).

Following the above argument, the work explores the relation between subalternity and religion, focusing mainly on how religion reflects the contradictory nature of subalternity. This aspect is understood by examining the activities of the Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha, one of the largest organizations of Pulayas (the largest SC caste within Kerala). The study is divided into six chapters, including the introduction and conclusion. The problem of inquiry is the nature of the relation between subalternity and religion and how the interrelation between subalternity and religion is being conceived within organizations like KPMS. The study intends to explore how KPMS's response concerning various religious issues such as conversion and reformed Hinduism reproduces a contradictory consciousness by simultaneously embracing mobility and restriction.

The inquiry starts from the different meanings of subalternity. The most common meaning attributed to subalternity is subordination, deriving meaning from the word subaltern, which means subordinate. Subaltern studies shifted the meaning of subalternity from subordination to resistance as subordination erased any sign of initiative expressed by the subaltern independent of elite intervention. Subaltern studies established negation as the critical feature of subalternity, equating subalternity to opposition or resistance to power structures. Subaltern studies, principally the works of Ranajit Guha, brought out the specificity of the Indian context, which made such a meaningful formulation possible. Guha argued that the Indian experience of colonialism presented a specific case where two scenarios emerged. First that Indian colonialism was a case of dominance without hegemony, where the coercive form of colonial power dominated instead of the persuasive form of power (Guha 1997:13-20). The second was a structural dichotomy that divided Indian politics into two opposing domains, i.e., elite and subaltern (Guha 1982:3-4).

Guha contended that due to the absence of hegemony, control of the elites- colonial or nationalists- was external and solely coercive. In Guha's words, subaltern politics was characterized by an absence of hegemony indicative of the elite's weakness and the existence of an autonomous domain of subaltern politics shaped by its ideology, organizational forms, and strategies. There was hardly any common ground between the elite and the subaltern domains of politics. The core feature distin-

guishing subaltern consciousness or subalternity was the negation of the elite domain (Guha 1983:1-16).

Negation for Guha was a condition of opposition or resistance exercised in two phases. The first phase was discrimination, where the symbols of an enemy power were segregated and separated from the numerous targets. This act was assessed as a sign of subaltern awareness regarding the nature of the enemies. For example, in the case of identifying subalternity to religion within peasant insurgency, peasants identified the local Temple as the symbol of authority of the landlord and made it a target.

The second phase of negation was inversion which was realized through two strategies- appropriation and desecration. Any religious symbol (extendable to other elite symbols) was valued owing to its exclusive ownership. Appropriation inverted the elite control over religious symbols such as Temples by claiming the religious symbols for themselves. The second strategy of inversion was desecration, wherein the symbol such as Temple itself was defiled to humiliate the authority. In totality, subalterns discriminated against and located targets of authority such as Temple, which were later subject to acts of inversion- appropriation and desecration, which eventually diminished the standing of the ruling authority within a territory.

Negation as a form of subaltern consciousness was fragmented, inchoate, and disjointed compared to the ruling class consciousness. However, the most obvious limitation of negation was that it was predicated on the same structures against which negation was directed. Negation continued to be expressed by borrowing dominant symbols such as Temples. For example, acts of discrimination moved around separating and identifying dominant religious symbols such as Temples. Inversion- either as appropriation or desecration involved expressing disrespect for authority not on their terms but in terms of their enemies, which in religious terms meant defiling Temples or performing rituals reserved for ruling classes.

The contradictory nature of subalternity was evident in the case of religion owing to the absence of alternative modes and continuing relevance of the Temple or performance of an upper-caste ritual to establish one's dominion. With the continuing hold of dominant symbols and consciousness over subaltern resistance, a visible contradiction was overlooked by Guha and other subalternists as they limited the meaning of subalternity to negation and autonomous existence. The present work follows from this last thread of subalternity, i.e., subalternity as a contradictory condition, a meaning drawn from Gramsci's perspective of subalternity as a contradictory consciousness where dominant and subordinate elements co-exist within the same consciousness. Thus, a unique condition emerges where there are two theoretical consciousnesses: an explicit consciousness bordering the dominant interests and an implicit consciousness that contradicts dominant interests even while being embryonic. This condition of contradictory consciousness could subsequently influence subaltern action whereby subalterns may simultaneously appropriate and contest the dominant interest.

This notion of subalternity as a state of contradictory consciousness is not an isolated theme but relatable to a much broader question of the nature of the relation between power and resistance. The relation between power and resistance has been broadly treated as a condition in which resistance emerges and rejects power wherever power exerts itself. Thus the relationship was characterized by negation (rejection) as power and resistance are mutually exclusive. Instead, power and resistance are increasingly conceived in a state of entanglement, whereby no act of power or resistance is absolute or exclusive. However, they are influenced and limited by each other’s interference.

The imposition of power leads to acts of resistance, and as resistance gathers momentum, new forms of power emerge to counter-resistance. Power and resistance are no longer mutually exclusive but mutually constitutive, shaping the other. Similarities exist between 'mutuality and co-constitutive condition of power and resistance' and the co-existence of dominant and subordinate mentalities leading to contradictory consciousness.

Like the argument that power and resistance shape each other, in the case of subaltern movements, dominant and subordinate mentalities inter-penetrate and shape each other. The most evident domain where it is demonstrated is religion. For example emergence of a new faith or sect, an act of conversion or appropriation of dominant rituals, etc., is related to a continuing struggle between the dominant and the subordinate groups. While the dominant group attempts to impose a religious order to satisfy its interests–justifying existing social divisions as non-antagonistic and attempting to impose a tenuous unity, the subordinate group attempts to disrupt the momentary unity by challenging the false justification imposed by the dominant group via a new sect or a deviant faith. However, even when asserting their uniqueness, the subaltern faiths express distinctiveness by drawing upon symbols or categories provided by the dominant faith.

The continuing hold of dominant elements alongside the presence of autonomous desire of subalterns points to the contradictory condition existing within the subaltern faith or any other subaltern movement. Thus, the simultaneity of two kinds of consciousness or a single contradictory consciousness where dominant and resistant mentalities wrestle simultaneously becomes the key to the workings of subaltern movements or organizations.

The thesis intends to extend and explore the potential of this argument, i.e., the contradictory nature of subalternity and its relation to religion in the context of the Pulaya community within Kerala, by taking the case of the Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha. The thesis pursues this argument in two phases. The first phase provides historical precedence to the contradictory politics of KPMS set by Ayyankali and SJPS. Ayyankali and SJPS faced a unique context within Kerala involving two different religious modes of social mobility-conversion of reformed Hinduism.

Each of these religious modes offered mobility and control over Pulayas producing a condition where the Pulayas subscribed to each of these religions, appropriating the mobility it offered while being subjected to new kinds of subordination and hence exhibiting a case of contradictory consciousness. However, prior to understanding the Ayyankali episode, it is necessary to grasp the ori-

gin and development of the Pulayas. The Pulayas were the earliest inhabitants of Kerala, who later lost their privileges and ownership over the land and were pushed to the margins. This process began with the decline and political fragmentation of the Kulashekhara Chera Dynasty of Maohodayapuram, leading to the rise of local feudatories. Later, the migration of Namboothiri and their alliance with feudal chieftains led to the institution of a temple ecological complex as a model to reconstitute the entire society into a hierarchy of water-tight caste compartments, eventually led to the subjugation of Pulayas.

This subjugation was naturalized through the elaborate theories of karma, dharmashastras, and practices such as untouchability. However, the caste hierarchies were not absolute. In the late 19th and 20th century A.D., they were challenged at regular intervals by figures such as Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, and organizations such as SNDP, SJPS, etc. Ayyankali and his initiative SJPS were located within a unique context composed of three factors. One, an enthusiastic Hindu Travancore state eager to accommodate lower caste discontent alongside a reformed Hinduism to maintain figment of Hindu majority aimed at neutralizing any Christian challenge. Two, an active Christian missionary mission that provided conversion as a model for social emancipation, and three, an interventionist colonial state.

These three factors shaped the actions of Ayyankali and SJPS, particularly concerning religion. Ayyankali adopted an open approach to religion, one where the possibilities of social mobility were acknowledged while simultaneously comprehending the new hierarchies created by religion. For example, the Travancore state adopted an interventionist position by offering preferential treatment for Hindu Pulayas accommodating their various demands such as land, government jobs, representation within the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha, and reformatory moves such as Temple entry movements, all aimed at neutralizing the discontent among lower caste and accommodate them to project a Hindu majority to neutralize any Christian challenge. Through these moves, the princely state restricted lower caste mobility within the boundaries of the Temple religion, blunting the possibility of any radical social upheaval. Ayyankali and SJPS's experience proves that through organized mo-

bilization and continuous agitation, they were able to attract the attention of the Travancore state and increase pressure upon them, which yielded results in terms of land, jobs, and representation.

However, such interactions between Travancore and Ayyankali also produced their fair share of contradictions. The mode of confrontational politics followed by Ayyankali and SJPS was replaced by a mode of negotiation and accommodation in later periods as they increasingly started to co-operate with the Travancore state even though they increasingly started to co-operate. But the contention was not wholly abandoned. However, in close observation, the interventionist approach of the Travancore state and the reformed Hinduism influenced the decisions of Ayyankali and SJPS in post-1910 (a period marked by the entry of Ayyankali and many other similar subaltern caste leaders as members of Sree Moolam Praja assembly).

Thus two interests, i.e., the dominant interest represented by the Travancore state and the subaltern interest represented by Ayyankali and SJPS for a more egalitarian social order, contested and negotiated with each other shaping the direction of Pulaya politics within Travancore. Ayyankali and SJPS increasingly co-operated with the Travancore state in return for the state's patronage and mobility. Thus both the dominant interest and subaltern autonomous interest shaped the objectives of the Ayyankali movement. This contradictory existence of two opposed forms of consciousness forms the heart of the Ayyankali movement. It is the reason for Ayyankali and SJPS's reason to support and contest the Travancore state simultaneously.

A similar argument is possible in the case of conversion. Conversion offered mobility to Pulayas-spiritual and material. However, converted Christians became Pulaya Christians and were subject to new kinds of domination. Even while immediate and material requirements were met, caste discrimination and new forms of control were promoted within church congregations. Thus contradictions marred the post-conversion condition of Pulayas. Both conversion and reformed Hinduism offer a key to understanding social change within Pulayas. Even while embracing mobility offered by

the conversion and reformed Hinduism, these models imposed restrictions, which constrained subaltern initiatives.

One of Ayyankali's primary concerns in his period, which in many manners continued in the case of KPMS also, was that religion and state patronage led to fissiparous tendencies and divisions among the Pulayas. These divisions were rooted within a unique condition marked by a newfound awareness and organization which gradually realized mobility acquired via converting or being part of a reformed Hinduism (which was patronized by the Travancore state). However, these divisions also encouraged a strong sense of identity based on religion, preventing the formation of any more extensive subaltern solidarity which could decisively create an autonomous movement.

While Pulayas successfully achieved a certain degree of mobility via (the Travancore state, missionary activity, or reformed Hinduism), it also generated new constraints. Religious affiliations divided Pulaya into different organizations, which in the course, hardened their collective identity preventing any consolidated political action under a common banner. Thus while autonomous aspirations encouraged mobilization and translated into pressure politics yielding results, the dominant interventions structured the objective of these struggles around specific targets such as state patronage, temples, conversion, etc. The constraints imposed by ruling classes and the desire for autonomy initiated by Ayyankali and similar leaders from below shaped the organizations such as SJPS and even later its successor KPMS to simultaneously accommodate and contest the structures of authority, producing a contradictory politics. These contradictions survived in the post-Kerala formation phase and influenced KPMS's position leading to contradictory politics.

There are two crucial issues around which the contradictory position of KPMS has become more evident. One is conversion, and the second is continuing fidelity to a reformed Temple-based Hinduism. Each presents a unique challenge to KPMS. Regarding reformed Hinduism, KPMS has been continuing its efforts to demand more democratization by demanding the appointment of Dalit priests within Temples governed by the Kerala state, ensuring Dalit representation within various

governing bodies related to Temples, etc. Besides, KPMS has also managed to retain and reinvigorate the activities around 350 temples controlled by its various local units.

There is a sanskritising tendency among Pulaya members with increased interest to participate in governing activities of temples while also attempting to establish their temples and institute standard religious practices based on Brahminical-Tantric injunctions. These tendencies have not dislodged the upper caste control over Temples but have not in any way diminished lower caste efforts. Thus even while the discriminatory nature of the Brahminical Temple religion continues, the same resources are utilized to overturn the dominance of the upper caste by appropriating various privileges such as the right to worship, demand for the priesthood, and access to Temple administration.

The creative appropriation and inversion of religion by KPMS has helped to overturn, if not dislodge, the dominant religious imaginary but with contradictory outcomes. One, it has helped KPMS access symbols that offer mobility via the structure of the Temple. However, this embracement of the Temple has also tended to integrate into the larger Hindu fold neutralizing possibilities for a larger Dalit politics, particularly any collaboration with converted Pulayas. The increasing influence of the BJP, mainly working around Temples, is also a reason for the hardening of KPMS's position against converted Christians. Thus the temple-based struggle for representation and sanskritising tendencies has yielded success for KPMS. However, the continuing influence of Sanskritised Temple-based reform model tends to prevent any broader autonomous movement by KPMS bringing together Hindu and Christian Pulayas. The contradictory nature of KPMS's politics is revealed as it continues to be directed by dominant religious symbols such as Temples. Even while being marginally successful such tendencies tend to neutralize more extensive Dalit solidarity.

The second issue of concern for KPMS is conversion. Conversion, while offering mobility, never resolved the caste problem. Despite movements such as PRDS, which challenged caste discrimination within Christianity, converted Christians were treated differently within the church. This differ-

ential treatment has been the point of concern for KPMS members. Most respondents viewed the faith-based conversion never erased caste. Additionally divisions exist between converted and Hindu Pulayas. Despite being sympathetic, the Hindu Pulayas (KPMS and non-KPMS) do not want to share the benefits of affirmative action with converted Pulayas. The growing influence of the BJP also is one reason for turning them against their Christian counterpart. Besides, the influence of Christian congregations has also prevented any joint alliance between Hindu and Christian Pulayas. Thus conversion and hinduising tendencies, even though they granted people a certain degree of social mobility, produced a condition that has restricted the development of any autonomous Pulaya movement.

There is a continuation between the struggles of Ayyankali and the activities of KPMS. Both reflect the simultaneous influence of dominating interests of ruling groups and autonomous aspirations of Pulayas. Struggles of Ayyankali and later KPMS have emerged at an intersection between actions to subjugate and the subaltern desire for autonomy. The interaction between these opposing conditions has determined the contradictory nature of subaltern consciousness. Inverting and utilizing the same dominant Hindu religious symbols such as Temples instead of displacing them is a classical expression of this contradiction. Any exploration into the relationship between religion and subalternity should focus on this contradictory nature as its key to understand the actions by organizations such as the Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha in contemporary Kerala.

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